

THE POLITICS OF ATLANTA'S PUBLIC HOUSING: RACE, PLANNING, AND INCLUSION, 1936-1975

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The purpose of this research is threefold: to theorize the political viability of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure; to understand the creation, marginalization, and demolition of this political opportunity structure in Atlanta; and to explicate the movements from within the public housing development that translated to a more empowered residential base, and more livable communities in Atlanta, GA between the 1936 and 1975. The literature on the positive productive functions of public housing is interspersed within the literature on the politics of public housing policies (at the national level), the politics of public housing developments (at the local level), the production of a racial geography in the City of Atlanta, and the productive functions of welfare institutions (including, but not limited to, public housing developments). Further, this project attempts to understand empirical benefits of political opportunity structures, particularly as it relates to low-income and minority housing movements in the city of Atlanta. Theoretically, political opportunity structures provide a neutral platform for low-income city dwellers that have historically been denied the legal means to challenge neighborhood change, and participate in formal urban political processes

and institutions. In fact, low-income groups have routinely been uprooted from their neighborhoods, contained to specific areas of the city, while those of greater means invoke a litany of legal obstructions (from restrictive covenants to lot size requirements) to prevent the free movement of low-income residents. Thus, political opportunity structures that are permanently housed in low-income and minority neighborhoods are the theoretical response to the disparities in political opportunity and collective efficacy between socioeconomic groups in the city. Using the case study examples of University Homes, Perry Homes, and Grady Homes, this dissertation examines the uses of public housing developments in Atlanta as political opportunity structures for low-income and working-class African-Americans from 1936 to 1975. The research uses a historical methodology of data collection to create a grounded theory of racial politics in the city, as well as to analyze the production of equitable outcomes and processes in the urban planning process through public housing developments.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On September 29, 1934, Secretary Howard Ickes of the United States Department of the Interior, spoke in front of hundreds at Atlanta's Spelman College campus for the inauguration of the nation's first federally-sponsored slum clearance and public housing program. The event prompted great regalia and fanfare for the perfunctory demolition of a lone shack in the Techwood Flats neighborhood (Atlanta Daily World, 1934). This demolition, nonetheless, signaled the start of government designed, built, and managed low-income housing in the United States, a policy that exists in a variety of forms into the present day. However, Atlanta, the first US city to acquire land for public housing and amongst the first to create a local housing authority under the 1937 Wagner Act, also became the first US city to demolish all of its family-style public housing developments in 2011. What could have transpired over seventy-seven years within these housing developments that resulted in equal celebrations of both its construction and demolition? Further, what events have occurred around these housing developments that resulted in the marginalization of its residents who were earlier hailed as a "more valuable and patriotic citizen" (New York Times, 1940)? Both of these questions fall under the larger question regarding public housing developments: in what ways were public housing developments functioning as political spaces in postwar Atlanta?

To answer this question, this project examines the politics of public housing in Atlanta, with particular attention to the years 1936-1975. The politics of public housing includes not only the political action of residents living in these

developments, but also the political action of those in control of the design, building, and management of public housing. This research explores the history of political movements in Atlanta's public housing developments using the theoretical frameworks of racial construction in the South, urban politics and planning in the postwar South, spatial justice and achieving spatially just outcomes, as well as political participation and democratic inclusion. My historical analysis of public housing in Atlanta includes discussion on the peculiar institution of race in the New South, the effects this institution had on public policy and urban planning, and the political movements produced from these marginalizing policies. This project explicates how the race and welfare politics *of* Atlanta's public housing policies created the identity and citizenship politics *in* Atlanta's public housing developments.

I begin this project with a discussion on the existing literature about public housing as a political space. Vale laid the groundwork in his work *From the Puritans to the Poorhouse: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (2000), where he posits public housing as a public space. Borrowing from LeFebvre, public space in the urban landscape is "a terrain suitable for defense or attack, for struggle" (LeFebvre, 2003, 89). Using this epistemology of space, LeFebvre further defines political space as "the site and object of various [political] strategies" (2003, 44). This project theorizes public housing as a political space using examples of Atlanta's public housing tenant associations. Given the particular history, structure, and capabilities, I suggest that these public housing developments are actually political



opportunity structures for poor black residents both within and around the public housing communities (Castells, 1983). These tenant associations struggled against the City's power structure to improve and control their public spaces (public housing developments), while resisting the changes in national welfare and urban policy and local racial politics. Soss makes the claim that "the welfare system is where the poor make their most pressing claims, negotiate the policy decisions that affect them most directly, and come face to face with the state's capacity to punish or protect" (Soss, 2000, 2). Using the aforementioned as a theoretical foundation, and the case studies that follow as empirical examples, I put forth a theory of public housing developments as political opportunity structures for poor black residents in Atlanta. This theory is first explored in Chapter 2.

Race in the postwar South was not an absolute concept that could easily compare to the concept of race in the North, or even race in the post-Reconstruction South. The conceptual fluidity of race in the southern United States was permissible through the economic restructuring following the end of World War II, and the migration of African Americans prior to and during the war from rural areas in the South to urban areas across the country. The legacy of slavery in the South created a different set of social dynamics between the races that were codified and institutionalized throughout the region (Wilson, 2007). Following the end of slavery, this codification took the form of the sharecropping system, Jim Crow, poll taxes, white primaries, and a wealth of other policies to produce and sustain a two-tier system of citizenship between whites and blacks in the South. The postwar

period in Atlanta marks a new era in the fluidity of race with the end of the white primary in 1946. As black registration increased, the misleadingly monolithic “black vote” is formed in urban areas across the South (Key, Jr., 1984). The new ability to leverage the state created a new politics of race in Atlanta. As such, an examination of the politics of Atlanta’s public housing is incomplete without first addressing the nuances of postwar racial construction in the South and the politics of this race construction in Atlanta. Chapter 2 also focuses on an examination of the politics of race in Atlanta.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will discuss specific cases of public housing developments acting as political opportunity structures, and the transformation of these structures over time as a result of changes in the politics of race, planning, and inclusion. These cases focus on the University/John Hope Homes (the University Homes were the first African-American public housing constructed in Atlanta in 1936), Perry Homes (located in the northwestern section of the City, also for African-Americans), and Grady Homes (an African-American development located to the southeast of the central business district). I have selected all African-American developments due to the particular type of political action these developments faced and produced during their existence in the City. Perry Homes’ tenant association was a major force in the organization for increased public goods and services for underserved residents of the Northwestern section of Atlanta. Grady Homes, an early African-American development, was a bit of an outlier in the Southeastern section of Atlanta, as most African-American developments were

relegated to the western portion of the city. However, the construction of Grady Homes in one of Atlanta's few middle-class African American neighborhoods during the 1940s created interesting tensions between the existing community and new public housing tenants. University Homes, the first African-American development in the city, faced its own battles as the first manifestation of African American citizenship in the city, via the formal recognition of a black housing project as a legitimate community. The purpose of this multi-site examination is to not compare the political outcomes across public housing developments, but to better understand the different contexts and outcomes of public housing development as a political opportunity structure. Public housing was accepted in Atlanta as a means to produce a new racial geography in the city, through segregated developments. City officials located white developments primarily on the eastern portion of the City, with full community services, centers, schools, and activities (Ferguson, 2002). Black developments were provided with significantly less amenities, creating a compounded effect on communities that were simultaneously displaced and disinvested from the 1950s to the 1970s (the most voluminous years of public housing construction in the City). Within the framework of spatial justice theory, the relegation of African Americans to these underdeveloped areas of the city that produced such racial and socioeconomic disparities is considered to be injustice through space. That is, the outcomes were not the result of de facto segregation, but were explicitly produced to marginalize Atlanta's most vulnerable (e.g., poorest) African Americans soon after they were provided with full enfranchisement in 1946. Thus, even as black communities

acquired token citizenship through their inclusion into mainstream Atlanta policymaking, they were still in need of more schools, public services, community facilities, and other civil rights in the city. Public housing developments, and the tenant associations within these political opportunity structures, provided a forum for low-income and working-class blacks to voice their political needs to the State in a manner that was not provided to this socioeconomic group prior to public housing construction. Chapters 3 through 5 provide specific examples of the political action that emerged from Atlanta's public housing, as residents attempted to control the terms of their citizenship and their communities in Atlanta.

Chapter 6 concludes the project with a national examination of the shifts in public housing policy that threaten its viability as a political opportunity structure. As local policies and institutions turn to neoliberalist strategies to stabilize the urban political economy, affordable housing policy is also making this turn towards neoliberalism. The turn first began with the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, which created the Section 8 (now Housing Choice Voucher) program (Smith, 2006). This public-private partnership provided subsidies for low-income residents to enter into the private rental housing market, wherein residents pay a portion of their income to the landlord, and the Federal government pays the balance. Similarly, the project-based Section 8 program creates contracts with landlords in the private rental market to receive subsidies for housing low-income tenants. The passage of the HOPE VI program in 1993 continued the turn towards neoliberalism in public housing policy, by replacing

severely distressed public housing units with mixed-income housing, using public funds for private development and ownership (Fraser et al, 2011). The turn toward a neoliberal public housing policy continues as the State moves to privatize public housing, essentially changing the function of public housing agencies from social welfare providers to real estate developers (Fraser et al, 2011). This turn would essentially privatize the remaining public housing stock, which I posit depoliticizes the public housing development. That is, the increasing privatization of a formerly public asset decreases the size of the public sphere, and limits the avenues the public (specifically, public housing residents) has to engage and mobilize against the State. The particular success of the “Atlanta Model” of public housing is being reproduced across the country in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Oakland, cities with high number of low-income African Americans residing in their public housing developments. To reduce the political space of the poor in these cities could have significant effects on the political action of the demographic, and severely alter the political landscape of urban areas in the post-industrial City.

### *Research Questions*

To better understand the external and internal politics of Atlanta’s public housing and its use as a political opportunity structure, I ask the following questions: 1) in what ways were the spaces of Atlanta’s public housing developments used to create and sustain political movements that address grievances between the residents and the State?; 2) what were the politics of race and social welfare in Atlanta from 1936-1975?; 3) what were the tangible outcomes of public housing developments

as political spaces?; and 4) what were the spillover effects of these political movements on the surrounding community?

Question 1) uses the historical evidence of the tenant associations to position the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. Political movements in this context means specific organizing within tenant associations, or the tenant demands against the State that produce either a restructuring of the surrounding urban space (i.e., changes in the available public goods or amenities of the neighborhood) or a restructuring of the urban governance process (i.e., new modes of political expression for public housing residents, or other low-income residents of the surrounding community). When mentioning “the State” in this project, I refer to public entities including, but not limited to: the Federal Government, the State of Georgia, the City of Atlanta, Fulton County (and the surrounding DeKalb, Cobb, Clayton counties that comprised the Atlanta metropolitan area), the Atlanta Housing Authority, the Atlanta Regional Commission (and other pseudo-government agencies), the Bureau of Planning, the Metropolitan Planning Committee, and any other affiliated committees and commissions. This question is addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, with the use of existing theory and empirical evidence from Atlanta to support the claims.

Question 2) is historical in nature and examines the politics of race and social welfare in Atlanta between 1936 and 1975. I’ve selected this time period in order to cover a number of racial and welfare policies that create varying effects on the

public housing development as a political opportunity structure. As mentioned earlier, the end of the white primary in 1946 created a new form of political power for African Americans, providing a political space outside of the public housing development. Similarly, the decision to desegregate Atlanta's public housing developments in 1968 created a racial politics within urban planning processes in the City, that were exacerbated by the recent Supreme Court decision on *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954. In 1974, the moratorium from the Nixon administration on public housing construction reduced public housing funding and produced greater tensions between African-American residents and the State, in the midst of a national political economic restructuring that had tangible effects on the ability of black Atlantans to politically leverage the State for much needed resources in urban areas. This question, primarily addressed in Chapter 2, discusses the external politics of Atlanta's public housing policies that create an internal politics in the individual developments.

Questions 3) and 4) are also historical in nature and are addressed using the case studies in Chapters 3 through 5. The tangible outcomes of political organizing for the purposes of this project include, but are not limited to: new public goods and amenities (e.g., sanitation, police, fire, and education services), improved public areas (e.g., green spaces and security), and greater access to and increased legitimacy to the State via less State scrutiny or greater tenant autonomy within the public housing program. In examining these tangible outcomes, I ask sub-questions, specifically: 1) What are the changes in tenant association demands over

time?; 2) How and when are these demands addressed by the State?; and 3) How did the tenant association demands shift in response to the State's action or inaction? These case studies are an attempt to document the evolution of public housing developments as political opportunity structures through careful examination of different racial and planning contexts that produce varying political movements within the individual developments. Further, the differing organizational capacity of the communities surrounding the public housing developments and the similarity of socioeconomic characteristics across public housing developments will allow for comparison of the tangible outcomes of political movements across developments. This comparison can produce interesting nuances to the theory of public housing developments as political opportunity structures, by examining the importance and limitations of community resources and in the efficacy of the development as a political opportunity structure.

This project investigates the production of positive social space in public housing developments, which are typically thought to produce (and reproduce) negative social space. I posit that this production of positive social space is possible through the tenant associations of public housing developments. The literature on the positive productive functions of public housing is interspersed within the literature on the politics of public housing policies (at the national level), the politics of public housing developments (at the local level), the production of a racial geography in the City of Atlanta, and the productive functions of welfare institutions (including,



but not limited to, public housing developments). The following sections summarize the literature on these topics, and inform my theory on the political functions of public housing developments and tenant associations.

### *The Political Origins of Public Housing Developments*

Prior to the passage of the 1937 Housing Act, which gave jurisdictions the ability to create local housing authorities to build, design, and manage federally-funded housing, the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA) constructed the bulk of public housing in the wake of the Great Depression (Radford, 2004). The PWA's direct construction developments emphasized communal living and association, green space, open floor plans to maximize sunlight, and high-quality construction. These programmatic goals, however, explicated new aspects to the housing problem with the intervention of the State. The purpose of the PWA's Housing Division was not only to provide decent housing for the majority of Americans, but also to supply a great number of jobs for the increasing numbers of unemployed workers. Thus, there emerges a tension between high quality construction for better homes and high volume construction for more jobs. Further, the heavy subsidies required to provide decent housing at low rents brought the question of "for whom will these subsidies benefit?" This question materializes the tension between the role of the government in redistributing resources, as well as exploring age-old tensions between the deserving poor, and individual versus collective social programs (O'Connor, 2001). In addition, the introduction of high-quality, low-cost housing provided by the

Federal government produced new competition for private developers in the middle-and-upper income markets. These tensions within the public provision of housing in the United States began with the PWA and continue with today's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While the politicization of these tensions through Federal policymaking attempt to resolve the housing problem, at the core of these debates are significantly larger structural problems surrounding class, the redistributive aspects of the political economy, race, and the exploitation of labor. Thus, the politics of public housing policy is actually a politics of class, race, the political economy, and labor.

These politics are explicated at the local level in Atlanta through its role in the creation of the 1937 Wagner Act. The political regime for Atlanta until the end of the white primary in 1946 was unequivocally white and upper class men, mainly comprised of real estate and business interests. Prior to the war, whites had dominated the north side of the city, while blacks populated the southern portion – and to the great dismay of the landed interests – the areas surrounding the fledgling Central Business District (CBD). While the problem of the African-American population residing near CBDs was apparent in most industrial cities, very few reacted in the manner of the Atlanta political regime. Leading member and prominent realtor Charles Palmer began taking up the cause of slum housing as early as 1934, financing his own trips to Europe to investigate their social housing techniques to relay to the Roosevelt Administration for what would eventually become the 1937 Housing Act (Stuntz, 1934). The promotion of slum clearance by

the real estate industry in Atlanta provided a particular politics of public housing developments in the city: public housing was explicitly created to not compete with the private rental market in Atlanta, and thus was located in less desirable areas, constructed with less durable materials, and - at least for African-American developments - provided with less than adequate social services and public amenities (Ferguson, 2002).

The Atlanta story is further complicated with the intersection of race, class, and public housing. The divide between middle- and upper class African Americans and working-class and poor African Americans was great in the city – both spatially and socially. The two groups lived on separate sides of Atlanta - the former in the southeast of the city, with the latter in the southwest and central parts of the city - and socialized in these respective areas. While the introduction of public housing and slum clearance in low-income African-American neighborhoods promised to displace a significant amount of the community with little promise to re-house the entire population, the “outer wheel” of the African-American community began an extensive public relations campaign to promote public housing to the “inner wheel” of the community (Ferguson, 2002). While the upper classes recognized the harm of lower-class displacement, this cost was mitigated with the benefits of African American inclusion into City and Federal policies and planning – that is – the official recognition of African-American communities as part of the larger (white) Atlanta community. This inclusion, in the perspective of the outer wheel, was

necessary to achieve the social and political equality of all African Americans in the city.

Both middle and upper-class blacks and upper-class white businessmen felt the introduction of public housing – and the clearance of slums that would precede this construction – provided a solution to a number of social and political issues in Atlanta. Under the auspice of a “housing problem” (Engels, 1995), this bi-racial, ad-hoc political coalition exerted pressure on State and local officials, as well as on slum dwellers, to promote the solution of public housing. In framing the public discussion regarding CBD-adjacent slums, political leaders ascribed societal ills to the slums’ environmental and social conditions. The spread of tuberculosis, the lack of industry in the city, the decrease in tax revenue – all of these explicitly political-economic issues were absorbed into the public housing debate. The politics of producing public housing in Atlanta is a politics that positions housing as the solution to poverty, discrimination, and redistribution.

Across the nation, the passage of the 1937 Housing Act failed to immediately produce results at the local level, with housing authorities meeting significant resistance from local branches of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB). In Atlanta, eight developments were built between 1936 and 1942 (Atlanta, 1983). The entry of the United States into World War II, however, provided an opportunity to kick-start the construction of public housing, as defense workers demanded viable living spaces adjacent to new employment

opportunities. Spurred largely by labor union mobilization, these defense public housing developments were economically mixed spaces with strong tenant associations that actively worked with housing management to produce more livable environments (Parson, 2005). In a sense, these developments mimicked those constructed by the PWA, which sought to address affordable housing solutions through an empowered residential base. However, the defense housing was not able to fully address the racial problem, with white neighborhoods resisting the integration of black defense workers into white developments. The repeated failures to integrate public housing developments (to address structural issues of American racism through material issues of housing shortages) in the 1940s created a major internal political issue within housing developments that were constructed for and remain heavily dominated by African-American residents.

The end of the war marked a dramatic shift in the demographics of urban areas, leading to a destabilized housing market where demand greatly exceeded supply. The return of soldiers from WWII coincided with the Great Migration of six million African-American sharecroppers from the rural South to the more populated cities throughout the United States. Housing construction had slowed significantly during the war due to the diminishing supply of labor, and cities were forced to revisit the housing problem and all its tensions. The solution of the 1949 Housing Act solidified the two-tier housing policy: it increased power and funding for the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to issue low-interest, guaranteed home

mortgages (generally in areas approved for mortgage financing with low minority populations and restrictive covenants) under Title II, while creating 800,000 public housing units (Title III). Title III separated slum clearance and the equivalent elimination provision of public housing construction, allowing for local authorities to construct public housing in outlying areas with little consideration for community integration. Slum clearance continued with Title I of the Housing Act, yet the removal of housing for many minority residents frequently resulted in less housing as the land was used for public works (e.g., convention centers) and other economic development projects.

The literature suggests the Housing Act of 1949 showed the weakening popular support for public housing construction, as the inclusion of Title III was only possible with the inclusion of Title I, by officially “divorced public housing construction from slum clearance” (Radford, 2006). Over the next two decades, the 1949 Housing Act produced effects later known as the urban crisis (Sugrue, 1996): FHA mortgages provided the expansion of the housing supply into the land cheap suburbs – prompting urban depopulation, and slum clearance for inefficient public works projects contributed to urban disinvestment. The processes of deindustrialization in urban areas began prior to WWII, and were immediately heightened as high-skill and working-class residents moved into the suburbs. What remained in the cities were poor, often minority residents, with diminishing employment opportunities and severely underfunded public services. When concentrated in public housing, this group became a political interest group, as the

space of the public housing development provided a tangible link between the failure of the welfare state's redistributive policies to improve low-income and African-American citizens' standard of living and the impoverished state of African-American communities in urban areas relative to white communities in suburban areas (Massey and Denton, 1993). Williams' states, "[P]ublic housing created a bridge between the private sphere of daily living and the political sphere of government. It linked individual rights with social rights and...familial duties with community participation and political activism" (Williams, 2004, 7). Thus, the problems of decreasing employment opportunities, underfunded public services, and substandard housing were embodied in the construction of public housing developments. The failure of the progressive (liberal) politics *of* public housing led to the emergence of a grassroots (radical) politics *in* public housing.

*Atlanta: The City Too Segregated to Hate*

Quite often, Atlanta is considered an exception to the norm of postwar South race-relations: instead of fiery images of Southern white resistance to African-American claims to citizenship (the integration of public spaces, private establishments, and public schools), the images of Atlanta during the postwar period are ones of acceptance and peaceful integration. The Atlanta postwar coalition of upper-class whites and (primarily) middle- and upper class African Americans created an early Rainbow Coalition of progressive interests that equated racial integration with economic success (Rutheiser, 1996; Kruse, 2005; Keating, 2001). However, the lack of confrontation between the growing black population and the existing white

population within the city limits stemmed more from the careful planning of the interracial coalition, and less from the lack of racial prejudice and native white Atlantan anger (Kruse, 2005). While this careful planning did little to erase or ameliorate the “hidden violence” of postwar Atlanta (Hirsch, 1998; Kruse, 2005), it did maintain the image of Atlanta as a city capable of handling the social transformation of implementing civil rights legislation. As such, the coalition succeeded in its goal of positioning Atlanta as “the City too busy to hate,” distancing itself from the tumultuous racial conflicts characteristic of Southern postwar cities while creating a racial geography in the city that belied the predominant images of interracial harmony. Using critical race theory, I position this construction of a racial geography in the context of structural changes in the political economy. That is, examining how the State carefully utilizes the construct of race in its stabilization of political-economic crises. The racial geography of postwar Atlanta’s public spaces, and the policies that prompted this geography, are discussed in this section.

*The Plan of Improvement: Atlanta’s New Racial Geography*

In the midst of a burgeoning black political divide, declining tax base, and decreasing and depoliticized white population, Atlanta’s Mayor William Hartsfield proposed a Plan of Improvement that would annex an additional 81 square miles into the city limits. Hartsfield’s close ties to the white upper-class business community to the north of the City (e.g., the Buckhead neighborhood), coupled with the end of the white primary in 1946, warranted adjustments to the political



geography of the City. At the time of the plan's enactment, Atlanta's population was 41% African-American. Following the annexation, this proportion decreased to 31%. In exchange for a weakened political base, African-Americans accepted the increase in available residential land, with the annexation including several unincorporated African-American communities in West Fulton County (Bayor, 1996).

The plan coalesced with other changes in Atlanta's geography, primarily funded through Federal subsidies, to cement the existing racial divide in the city. A decade after the plan was implemented, federal highway funding supported construction of Interstate-20, an east-west highway that bisects the city just south of the CBD. Almost simultaneously, urban renewal projects that focused exclusively on economic development projects in the postwar years (e.g., commercial real estate and civic centers), to the detriment of sub-standard housing created massive displacements of black communities near the Central Business District. The ability to manipulate both the topological and human geography of a city allowed for Atlanta's political regime to create spaces of purpose throughout the postwar City. For the displaced and disenfranchised populations, replacement housing was located in discriminatory and exclusionary spaces in the form of postwar public housing developments. These spaces, and the political franchise they afford, are discussed in the next section.

*Racializing Public Spaces and Planning Processes*

Traditional notions and theories of public space in the city revolve around ideas of multiple interests interacting as a process of socialization in the city. Public space, within the planning field, is viewed as a microcosm of the city. In the context of Park's race-relations model and ecological theory of urbanization, public space is a space for all four stages of Park's model (contact-conflict-accommodation-assimilation). In the community modernism stage of urban redevelopment (1930s-1949), public spaces were created as a means for accommodating ethnic immigrants, stimulating interaction in an attempt to plan a city culture (Parson, 2005). However, following the perceived failure of Reconstruction in the South, public spaces were constructed specifically for whites and blacks. In the 1940s, when blacks were nearly 30 percent of Atlanta's population, there were only three parks designated for blacks and over a hundred designated for whites (Kruse, 2005). Similarly, public transit utilized Jim Crow to separate the races, with whites allowed to enter from the front and sit, while blacks were relegated to the back of the bus. Even on the fairly democratic space of public sidewalks, blacks were forced to step off the sidewalk to let whites pass, and risked severe penalty by the State if they entered white public space. The transformation of public space following urban renewal challenged the inclusive nature of public space – depoliticizing it through isolation and racial/economic segregation.

The precursor to the Urban Renewal program of the 1954 Housing Act, Title I of the 1949 Housing Act (the Urban Redevelopment program) was the first official policy

separating slum clearance from residential replacement (Radford, 2004). The creation of public space in the 1950s through Federal policy shows the influence of racial and economic tension in declining urban centers. African Americans, the target of this particular variety of slum clearance, were warehoused or contained (Hirsch, 1998; Sugrue, 1996; Manning Thomas, 1997) in high-rise public housing developments on isolated tracts of land with superblocks of open, concrete space – a visible reminder of unfunded green spaces, parks, and recreational spaces for African-American residents (Hirsch, 1998). The slums, their former home – where few public housing developments were built given the liberties of the slum clearance clause of Title I via its separation from public housing construction (Title III) – were demolished and used to create a safe (non-Black) and consumptive space for cities' central business districts. The emphasis on urban redevelopment in the first housing act is the last attempt to keep cities as the production sites of the national economy. However, the overwhelming success of the suburbanization process (via the strengthened FHA guaranteeing home mortgages) created different outcomes for blacks and whites (Sugrue, 1996). These separate, and unequal, planning processes of creation and outcomes of space produced the racialization of public space in American cities. "Raced" space occurs when the normative definition of public space uses is exclusive to white, middle-class residents (Slocum, et al, 2011). The differences in spaces were maintained through systemic and institutionalized residential segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). This difference in space, specifically, Atlanta's production and maintenance of discriminatory spaces (spaces specifically for discrimination) produces a distinct,

political space – one that invokes a LeFebvrian right to the city position for the space’s inhabitants (LeFebvre, 1991). The creation, and effects, of this marginalized, yet political space, is discussed in the next section.

The visible otherness of African Americans was a threat to both the economic stability and ideological concepts of whiteness and citizenship for the low-wage white Atlantan. Sharing public space (particularly swimming pools, parks, and schools) with the African Americans challenged working-class whites’ notions of the legacy of mastery paradigm, which suggests race “‘came to correspond to the distinction between free wage labor and unfree semi-feudal labor, and between those who had access to political power and those who did not’” (Ignatiev, as quoted by Wilder, 2001, 109). African Americans’ use of public space, a place of inclusive interaction formed through political power struggles, sparked a number of communal riots (Hirsch, 1998) in early twentieth century cities. Working class whites, typically the aggressor in these riots (Hirsch, 1998) were greatly threatened by the perceived increase of political and economic liberties for “unfree, semi-feudal” (Wilder, 2001, 109) African Americans in the post Reconstruction South. The perceived equality of African-Americans within the urban political economy, in spite of their lower wages, inability to vote in Democratic primaries, and substandard housing, threatened the white American identity of working-class white Atlantans. Although many of the communal riots were centered on the protection of residential areas, public spaces, and neighborhood amenities, what

they really explicated were the underlying fears of working-class whites losing their claims on American citizenship.

A manifestation of Park's model's contact-conflict stages occurred during the nationwide race riots in the early 1940s. These riots, communal in nature, were the result of housing and labor market pressures from returning soldiers and migrating African Americans (Hirsch, 1998). Housing shortages occurred due to the depleted labor supply during the war. The Great Depression preceding the war tightened residential financing to repair aging housing stock. Thus, not only were low housing starts contributing to an undersupplied housing market, but also the existing housing supply was substandard and further tightened the housing market. These issues were aggregated in African-American communities (Sugrue, 1996). Residential covenants, homeownership and renter discrimination, and violence against new black residents were all strategies used to contain blacks to outlying, older areas of cities. Racial tensions in cities peaked immediately following the war, as battles over neighborhoods, public amenities, and public space spilled into multi-day riots (Hirsch, 1998 and Sugrue, 1996).

### *Critical Race and Urban Politics*

The ontology of race in this project is understood through a critical race framework that is grounded in how racial politics are deployed at the local level. The dynamics of individual prejudice and discrimination and the systemic discrimination of

African Americans are known as small and large racial projects, respectively (Omi and Winant, 1994). The rolling out of these small and large racial projects are necessary to sustain the racist-capitalist State which is dependent on marginalized Black labor to sustain itself. Under this theory, the racial inequalities of urbanization are a strategic necessity in the sustenance of the urbanization of capital, and the deployment of this strategy occurs at both the individual and the collective level (Omi and Winant, 1994). Residential segregation, the exclusion of African American-occupations from New Deal relief and Social Security in the 1930s, "Separate but Equal" Jim Crow facilities, and racial disparities in public goods and services are all examples of the rolling out of large and small racial projects to sustain the racist-capitalist State.

The above discussion of racial projects is relevant to understanding the forms and grievances of the African-American resistance to the inequalities of urbanization, and how that translates to the struggles of tenant associations in public housing developments. Castells' states:

"At the same time, the inner cities' revolts sang again an old chant of the urban condition: the transformation of the space of exclusion into the space of freedom. The ghetto territory became a significant space for the black community as the material basis of social organization, cultural identity, and political power" (Castells, 1983, 67).

That ghettos were "both spaces of exclusion...[and]...spaces of freedom" (Castells, 1983, 67) suggests a dialectical relationship of urbanization and race: urbanization could not exist without marginalizing minority interests (politically, economically,

socially, and spatially) and minority interests cannot exist without a normative framework exploiting the accumulation and circulation of capital in the city. The necessity of a marginalized race for the production of capitalist urbanization was explicated in the liberal/radical divide of the 1960s urban social movements. Radical black movements (e.g., The Black Panthers) understood racism as a necessity in the political economy, and sought to make claims on the State through the establishment of 10 Points that would both liberate African-Americans from the effects of the racist-capitalist state and also reshape the distributive processes of the State to account for past inequities (Marable, 1988). Liberal civil rights advocates, however, focused on gaining greater political access and legitimacy within the existing State apparatus, from where they could advance the interests of the African-American community to promote individual opportunity (Fusfeld and Bates, 1987; Countryman, 2007). The division within the black urban social movement (which would eventually lead to its stagnation and depoliticization) explicates divisions in the ontology of race. These divisions in Atlanta fall largely along class lines – middle-and upper-class blacks aligning with the liberal civil rights movements, and lower-class blacks largely aligning with the radical movement - with the exception of religious affiliation and age.

The grievances of the liberal civil rights movement embodied a lack of opportunity for African-Americans, and the passive role of the State in mitigating the effects of disenfranchisement and capitalism on the African-American community. The calls for technocratic solutions, such as those embodied in the Great Society programs

and equal opportunity (e.g., Equal Opportunity Act of 1964) were rooted in the black middle class/white liberal ideology of the classist ontology of race and politics. Black elites were provided with token political positions in bi-racial coalitions or within the community power structure to pacify demands for inclusion while maintaining white supremacy within urban political institutions and processes (Reed, Jr., 1986). While the liberal movement did not think blacks were inferior per se, they did believe that racism and discrimination were the result of inferior values and misinformation regarding diversity (Countryman, 2007). This approach to race led to the externalization of race from planning and policymaking processes, thus leading to a natural exclusion and marginalization of blacks from the urbanization process.

The grievances of the radical civil rights movement – specifically, the Black Power Movement – revolved around the lack of community control, citizen participation, and racial self-determination (Countryman, 2007). These grievances focus not so much on the marginalizing effects of urbanization on racial minorities, but rather on the processes that sustain this marginalization. The BPM viewed race as a necessity in the processes of urbanization and, as such, wanted only more control of the State mechanisms that controlled this process. The case studies in this research will document examples of both radical and liberal politics in and around public housing.

*Spaces of Exclusion and Spaces of Freedom: Public Housing as Political Space*



Public housing developments were deployed as tools of the State; utilized as an illusory solution to an artificial housing problem, a problem which masked the true underlying issues of: tensions in capitalism, racial dynamics in the racist-capitalist city, and fiscal redistribution in the suburbanizing metropolis. This next section will discuss how public housing developments, through its tenant associations, visualize these fundamental issues, through a politics *in* public housing. This politics in public housing, in both its articulation of and organization around previously masked issues, suggests the production of both a Sojian positive social space, and a LeFebvrian political space, while acting as a political opportunity structure. The transformation of space from discriminatory to political (or from one of exclusion to one of freedom) requires a specific set of conditions which I posit are unique to public housing developments. Specifically, the actions of the tenant association and the subsequent effects on the surrounding space of the public housing developments suggests these developments play a critical role in the production of space in the city.

The history of tenant organizing is rooted in the processes of urbanization in the industrial city (Engels, 1995). The need for tenants to organize against private landlords (and to an extent, real estate developers, banking interests, and the local State) emerges during the inherent crisis tendencies of the capitalist economy (Marcuse, 1971). The incoherency of US housing policy - with its contradictions, its privileging of homeownership as the ideal for housing tenure, and failure to

address the housing question (Engels, 1995) of providing affordable, safe housing choices for the working class - provides radical spaces of resilience for low-income and working-class residents (Dreier, 1982). While other housing interests (real estate, banking, development, construction, private homeowners) had inserted themselves into the growth machine of US industrial cities (Logan and Molotch, 1987), private tenant organizing was episodic, appearing in moments where the crisis of the State was at its peak (Marcuse, 1971).

As deindustrialization, depopulation, and disinvestment solidified the crisis of urban centers in the 1960s, urban politics took on a new form as the battle for scarce urban capital demanded political movements to allocate resources. These new forms were the result of the lack of political opportunities that existed for marginalized residents in underserved areas in the city – areas that were underserved following decades of exclusionary urbanization and political processes. Manuel Castells states “[u]rban issues are thus at the forefront of contemporary political conflicts, and politics have become the core of the urban process” (Castells, 1983, xv). The political conflicts or social movements appear to coalesce around three themes: “[d]emand focused on collective consumption, that is, goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state...[d]efense of cultural identity associated with and organized around a specific territory...[and] [p]olitical mobilization in relationship to the state, particularly emphasizing the role of the local government” (Castells, 1983, xviii). One can draw a parallel between what constitutes an urban political conflict, and how public housing

grievances with the State become politicized. The existence of the public housing development, a good directly provided by the State, constitutes an issue worth politicizing – by its very nature of being a public good, funded and maintained through public monies, explicitly makes public housing a political issue. Grievances towards the State as landlord constitute political issues related to the provision of this good. Grievances pushed by tenant associations (particularly in the 1960s) reflected political mobilization against the State, in particular against the role of the local government. During the 1960s, tenant associations in public housing began organizing against housing management (the local housing authority) in regards to declining maintenance and increasing rents. Public housing tenant associations are unique tenant movements as a result of their positioning in the political economy of housing. Marcuse writes:

“While technically the 2,800,000 tenants of public housing projects throughout the country pay their rents to more than 1,900 local autonomous housing authorities, their projects are built with federal funds, controlled by federal regulations, subsidized under federal formulas, and administered subject to federal standards. The resources, the political sensitivity, the number of tenants, the visibility were all there” (Marcuse, 1971, 51).

These parallels between what defines an urban social movement and the structural relations of public housing developments create an opportunity to position the public housing development as a site of an urban social movement, more specifically, a political opportunity structure.

In exploring the public housing development as a site of Castells' concept of an urban social movement, however, newer interpretations of the movement allow for greater flexibility in its definition and application. Lake's description of social movements as "particular modalities of action whose characteristics produce spaces that we know as urban...[s]uch dependence on the urban on constitutive action affirms that all action is ephemeral and partial, perpetually requiring re-enactment and repetition but also, thereby, ceaselessly providing openings and opportunities for insurgency and transgression" (Lake, 2006, 196). The first half of this statement indicates the social movement (within the public housing development) is a *necessity* in the production of urban space. The second half of this statement suggests that while neither the actions of the movement, nor the movement itself are permanent, the opportunities for insurgency and transgression emerge from the actions of this movement: these space producing actions are *politically legitimate* as they produce additional opportunities for mobilization. My research hopes to explore empirical analysis that verifies the function of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure via its role as a site of a social movement (using the tenant association to mobilize resources against the local government to effect the outcomes of the marginalizing planning and policymaking process), while examining the political legitimacy of the development in producing opportunities for insurgency and transgression (by examining the effects of the development on the planning and policymaking process).

Soja's analysis of spatial justice in the city utilizes a LeFebvrian perspective of the right to the city – that is, those in the greatest need in the city (as evidenced by their current control over their residential and social space) must take control of the production of their own space in the city. Specifically, taking control of the democratic process from those who had previously used the process against the discriminated group (Soja, 2010). Public housing developments, while discriminately positioned, had tenant associations as a platform to reclaim the production of their own space. In the process of producing their residential space – through a variety of tenant association demands to improve developments and surrounding communities – tenant associations were also producing a new type of citizenship for public housing residents; that is, producing positive social space.

In Atlanta, the efficacy of public housing developments and their tenant associations as political opportunity structures and producers of urban space, respectively, are exemplified in the cases of University Homes, Perry Homes and Grady Homes (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Per the previous section, African American-designated public housing developments were relegated to the less desirable areas of the city. These communities were underserved by public services (transit, hospitals, police, fire, sanitation, and schools) and had significantly fewer public amenities (in terms of parks, civic and social centers, and other public spaces). These problems were compounded given the unequal distribution of services and amenities between whites and blacks in Atlanta, and the severe overcrowding in African-American neighborhoods expedited the

disinvestment of existing public goods. In spite of the discriminatory and excluding characteristics of these spaces, Perry Homes' residents successfully organized in the 1950s around the construction of the fourth public high school for African Americans in the city. These cases illuminate a number of issues: working-class and low-income African Americans were relegated to marginalized and exclusionary spaces in postwar Atlanta – as evidenced by the substandard housing, public goods and services in their communities; tenant associations in public housing developments were in a unique position within this marginalized space to produce positive social space through its collective demands on the State as landlord; and, this unique position allowed tenant associations to use public housing developments as a political opportunity structure – actively transforming urban space to reflect a more fair and just city. Residents were able to utilize the political opportunities that emerged from a changing political system in Atlanta to help produce a more inclusive urban political system using the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. However, the structural drawbacks of the public housing development and the tenant association – the narrow representation, the longstanding interests, and the limited spatial impact – made the development as a political opportunity structure unsustainable during the 1970s. The development was able to create these opportunities for political inclusion and justice through space, while also constraining the interests and outcomes of its residents. These constraints contributed to the evolution of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure: from a top-down, elitist approach to political activism (see Chapter 3), to a grassroots, bottom-up

approach to citizen participation (see Chapter 4), to a professionalized, citywide approach to restructuring Atlanta's political regime to be more inclusive of public housing tenants and their interests (see Chapter 5).

### *Data and Methods*

To answer my primary research question: "in what ways were the spaces of Atlanta's public housing developments used to create and sustain political movements that address grievances between the residents and the State?," I use document analysis of archival documents along with analysis of secondary sources on social welfare movements, urban political theory, urban social movements, housing movements, political mobilization of the poor, and contentious politics. I use the secondary source literature review to construct a theory of public housing developments as *permanent* political opportunity structures (McAdam, 1999) in the city, a permanency achieved through the efficacy of their tenant associations. The empirical evidence provided by archival research will allow for concrete examples of the ways in which these political opportunity structures were created and sustained over time. Specifically, I seek to better understand how tenants and neighborhood community development organizations used the political opportunity structures to advance their causes, and similarly, how the public housing political opportunity structures were a barrier to advancing these same political interests. This research does not use the structural determinist logic of the political opportunity structures, preferring to examine the developments as neutral ground that have dueling effects on its residents and on the community. That is, I

examine the outcomes of the tenant associations and public housing developments and note the restrictions the structure has on interest formation and political action.

I also examine the evolutionary nature of tenant associations across different case sites (locations) and periods (1936-1975). Particularly, I view the evolution of tenant associations as organizing forms in public housing political opportunity structures through the context of the evolving race and welfare politics of Atlanta. This evolution of tenant associations is best articulated using careful analysis of tenant association grievances (to the Atlanta Housing Authority), political action (with the City of Atlanta and all affiliated agencies, departments, and committees), and political mobilization (for improved social welfare policy at the local, State and Federal level).

To address the research question “what were the politics of race and social welfare in Atlanta from 1936-1975?,” I use a multi-case site methodology inclusive of archival research to formulate grounded critical theories of race and planning politics in postwar Atlanta. The purpose of the archival research at the Atlanta Housing Authority and nearby research institutional archives (including the Special Collections at the Georgia State University Library, the Robert Woodruff library at the Atlanta University Center Consortium, the Atlanta History Center, and the African American Research Library) is to provide a spatio-temporal context for the race and social welfare politics in the City. Specifically, to understand how the



social construct of race was created, sustained, and invoked across the different public housing developments from 1936 to 1975. The evolving nature of race in post Reconstruction Atlanta is best understood through careful document analysis of tenant association meeting minutes, newspaper articles relating to public housing grievances, community development organization records, internal AHA documentation relating to tenant associations, and changes to Federal and State social welfare policies, at a minimum.

My analysis of race includes a careful examination of the ways in which African Americans are limited and included in mainstream political life in Atlanta – how their citizenship in relation to white Atlantans is constructed and practiced via the politics of civic life. I look specifically to see how race is used to unite and divide interests over time and space. As an example, the first major event in this study would be the voter registration drive in support of the elimination of the white primary in Georgia. Here, race is used as a unifying interest at the local level for this particular political action against the City of Atlanta and the State of Georgia to repeal the all-white democratic primary. African Americans of all socioeconomic classes rallied around this cause to advance political equality for the race as a whole. However, race also masks the schisms between classes, particularly failing to illuminate the effect of African American suffrage in local elections on the different classes. This empirical examination of race in postwar Atlanta will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the politics of race during a particular place and time. Thus, I am building a critical race theory of political mobility and

legitimacy of African Americans in Atlanta using empirical evidence grounded in my archival analysis. The purpose of this critical race theory will be to understand how race renders some issues visible, while obscuring - or make "invisible" - others (Duncan, 2002, 86). In the aforementioned example of the voter registration drive, race made visible the disparities in citizenship between blacks and whites in Atlanta, while rendering invisible the disparities between African Americans that would appear once all were given the right to vote. In particular, the rapid inclusion of upper class African Americans into the Atlanta urban regime indicates only certain groups (and the interests they represent) benefitted from the removal of the all-white primary. I seek to understand this reconstruction and deconstruction of race in Atlanta political and civic life.

To answer the questions: "what were the tangible outcomes of public housing developments as political spaces? and "what were the spillover effects of these political movements on the surrounding community?," I again rely on the archival data at the aforementioned research libraries and city institutions to document the outcomes of grievances, political action, and political mobility at the local, State, and Federal levels. The outcomes of these three levels of action against the State will contribute to understanding the efficacy of public housing developments as political opportunity structures. "Tangible outcomes" are classified as direct responses to grievances to the Atlanta Housing Authority, and changes at the local, State, and Federal levels that increase the legitimacy (and/or capacity) of public housing developments as political opportunity structures. "Spillover effects" in this

project refers to positive neighborhood effects (Cox, 1973) – this question documents the effect of political opportunity structures within the neighborhood of the public housing development. These neighborhood effects include both individual and institutional development as a result of the action from the tenant associations.

Theoretically, political opportunity structures provide a platform for low-income city dwellers that have historically been denied the legal or formal means to challenge neighborhood change. In fact, low-income groups have routinely been uprooted from their neighborhoods, contained to specific areas of Atlanta, while those of greater means invoke a litany of legal obstructions (from restrictive covenants to lot size requirements) to prevent the free movement of low-income residential areas. Thus, political opportunity structures that are permanently housed in low-income and minority neighborhoods are the theoretical response to the disparities in political opportunity and collective efficacy between socioeconomic groups in the City. My research provides empirical evidence of this phenomenon in Atlanta between 1936 and 1975.

### *Expected Findings and Conclusions*

The purpose of this research is threefold: to theorize the political viability of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure; to understand the creation, marginalization, and demolition of this political opportunity structure in Atlanta; and to explicate the movements from within the public housing

development that translated to a more empowered residential base, and more livable communities in Atlanta, GA between the 1936 and 1975. This research theorizes on the alternate functions of public housing developments beyond its current function as an affordable housing option for low-income residents. This research will explain the creation, sustenance, and shifting form of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure, and how this structure emerged as a result of the politics of race, planning, and inclusion in Atlanta.

The literature suggests the creation of public housing policy, since its origins in the 1930s, have spurred political battles with consequences creating political issues for the residents of both the public housing developments and the surrounding communities. However, the existing literature has yet to fully explore the political necessity of the public housing development as a producer of urban space (benefitting surrounding communities) and as a site for political empowerment and mobility for its' residents. Further, the literature on public housing demolitions has yet to explore the political implications of this policy turn, and how the production of urban space and residential political empowerment and mobility is effected by demolition.

The moratorium on public housing construction in 1973 was the suburban-dominated reflection of the perceived failure of public housing as a public good. The economy was in shambles, leading urban unemployment rates to rise, and crime became a significant problem as public safety funds in cities were reduced

from the lowered tax bases. Public housing residents, at this point, included only the most marginalized of populations: female-headed households, households well below the Federal Poverty Line, and an overwhelmingly African-American population. No longer the bastion of defense workers and union members, the “populist” alliance for public housing during the 1937 Housing Act had abandoned the cause, leaving public housing political struggles at the local level. Instead, the provision of affordable housing for low-income residents began falling under the paradigm of neoliberalism, which advocated for the removal of the public sector in favor of the efficiency of the private sector.

The 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, the Tax Reform Act of 1986, the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program of 1993, and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 are all neoliberalist public housing policies (Smith, 2006) that I posit have had significant effects on the public housing as a political opportunity structure. The guiding ideology of these public housing policies (private sector construction, management, and design, deconcentrating poverty, reducing the presence of dilapidated housing stock) diminish the ability to position the public housing development as a political opportunity structure, particularly as the privatization of public housing stock has created new forms of political organizing, where the “local governments...have vanished as direct antagonists for the urban movement” (Mayer, 2006, 205). Tenant associations are unable to function as the organizing capacity within political opportunity structures because their antagonists – the State, or the housing

authority – has fractured into so many forms (e.g., non profit, government contractor, service provider) that the tenant association is no longer able to effectively mobilize resources towards political action. Housing authorities themselves have so completely removed themselves from their social welfare missions – Atlanta Housing Authority currently functions almost as a real estate developer – that any mobilization to address grievances of spatial marginalization or social injustices would remain largely ineffective due to the State’s more blatant priorities.

This research comes at a time when public housing developments are under siege by the pressures of economic restructuring and the urbanization of capital (Goetz, 2011; Fraser et al, 2011). The demolition of public housing is occurring across cities in an attempt to make cities more attractive to the influx of high-wage service employees of the new economy (Hutton, 2010; Goetz, 2011). The “Atlanta Model” of public housing revitalization is currently being exported to Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. These sites of actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) are engaging in growth tactics that minimize the ability for low-income residents to fully use the space of the city. The removal of the poor from these sites of actually existing neoliberalism reinforces the structural inequalities across class and race lines in the postindustrial city. The demolition of public housing developments in the postindustrial city remove low-income residents from the mechanisms and actions that reproduce space in the city – that is it removes them (physically and spatially) from the public spaces of public

housing developments that were crucial to the formation of the industrial city (Vale, 2000). This research will hopefully illuminate some of these structural inequalities that emerge from the demolition of public housing developments, and the ways in which residents and communities resist these inequalities in new spaces of the postindustrial city.

## **Chapter 2: Black Political Forums in Postwar Atlanta: Public Housing Developments as Political Opportunity Structures**

### *Introduction*

The search for political action, mobilization, and legitimacy within the public housing developments of postwar Atlanta should begin with an exploration of why such a search is even necessary. Why were public housing developments acting as political opportunity structures for low-income African Americans during this period? And in what ways? This chapter constructs a theory of public housing developments as political opportunity structures using black political theory, urban political theory, and social movement theory. The chapter attempts to build a framework for analyses of both the processes and outcomes of black political action in postwar Atlanta public housing. Rooted in critical theories of politics and urbanity, this framework will provide the tools to analyze and critique public housing developments as political opportunity structures in the city. Specifically, this framework will analyze how deficiencies in black political spaces in the City left few public arenas for black political dialogue and critique (Reed, Jr., 1999).

As a result of a century-long reign of white supremacist institutionalization and ideology in the City's political structure, African-Americans were limited to token political participation, elite-led political representation, and constrained political action that remained accommodationist and within the realm of uplift ideology (Reed, Jr., 1999; Ferguson, 2002). Prior to the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision,



African-Americans were not allowed to participate in the Democratic primary elections, which were legally restricted to white voters in Georgia (Bernd, 1982). In spite of over fifty years of suffrage at the national level following the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, most African-American residents in the South were disenfranchised by poll taxes, literacy tests, property ownership requirements, and in the case of Georgia, Texas, Mississippi and a few other Democratic-majority states, white-only Democratic primaries (Key, Jr., 1984). These primaries remained legal well into the twentieth century as primary elections were considered private affairs, governed by a state's Democratic party. While the few (privileged) African-Americans who were registered to vote were effective in general and special elections (particularly for bond issuances, election recalls, and referendums), these opportunities to exert political power in Atlanta were limited as voter registration remained low (3,000 African-American voters were registered in Atlanta in 1944) due to the existence of the whites-only primary.

The inability to vote severely curtailed the availability of political space for African-Americans in Atlanta, particularly for low-income African-Americans in the city. Consequently, conservative black and liberal white elites firmly controlled the public spaces for black political debate and critique, as their social and economic status provided them with the best position to access these spaces. The most popular – or highly utilized - spaces for black political debate were publications (*The Atlanta Daily World*, or *ADW*, was the leading black publication) and community/political organizations (ranging from black churches to the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Reed states, “Disenfranchisement raised the cost of popular participation by eliminating the most accessible forms of political speech – voting and other aspects of electoral action.” (Reed, Jr., 1999, 19). The legal disenfranchisement of blacks from Atlanta’s influential Democratic primary removed an accessible political space for non-elite (working class and low-income) blacks. Further, until 1946, the conservative and accommodating black elite restricted African-American political discourse in the city to spaces under their ownership and control. The black political spaces under black elite control included the black church, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), black women’s organizations, the black media (the aforementioned *ADW*), and national black community organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The 1946 decision, along with other political economic changes, created a political opportunity in Atlanta that African Americans of all socioeconomic classes exploited. This chapter discusses how in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Movement, black Atlantans were able to mobilize resources of both human and economic capital to make impressive gains in the political arena. Notwithstanding these political achievements, the changing political environment constrained African-American political action, mobilization, and spaces.

Despite the constraints of black political forums in postwar Atlanta, historically, non-accommodationist interests were able to participate and mobilize at the local level, albeit with varying effects (Rutheiser, 1996). Following the Great Depression,

the growth of interracial labor organizations and organizations committed to communist efforts presented opportunities for black political participation at the local, national, and global level. Interracial, class-based organizing remained a popular venue for black political participation, even if the organizing principle was not specifically oriented toward the improvement of the race's social, economic, or political standing (Reed, Jr., 1999; Kelley, 1994). However, the domination of white supremacist interests in Atlanta's prewar governing coalition (in both elected positions and positions of enforcement, i.e., the police) suppressed pro-labor political expression and legitimacy. While interracial labor organizations were attacked with equal aplomb, white supremacist organizations (with the support of the Ku Klux Klan-dominated Atlanta police force) targeted organized African-American laborers. As white unemployment rose following the September 1929 stock market crash, white Atlantans organized to suppress black employment in the city. The Order of the Black Shirts, a white supremacist group formed to intimidate black employees and the firms that employed them, freely terrorized black laborers as the police department and local government turned a blind eye (Stone, 1989; Rutheiser, 1996). The Black Shirts', in alliance with local government and police, violence against black union members and pro-Communist activists increased the cost of working-class black political participation in interracial labor unions. As such, this regime of white domination and black oppression in prewar Atlanta produced few productive spaces for black political action. This chapter examines the history of social movements in the city in concordance with black

political thought, and how the occasionally radical expression of the former informs the latter, and vice versa.

Finally, this chapter focuses on building a theory of public housing developments as political opportunity structures in postwar Atlanta. Specifically, this chapter examines how the reduced spaces for non-elite (or non-accommodating) black political thought in postwar Atlanta, coupled with the political vulnerability triggered by changes in the city's political economy, created political opportunity structures from the public housing developments in the city. Reducing the spaces for dialogue in the black community eliminated both the diversity of interests and the processes for accountability. Without representation of any non-elite or non-accommodation interests, black elites were able to enter into an informal coalition with liberal white elites under the compromising interest of suppressing the (black) working-class vote. Without any voting recourse, or any space to discuss countering views and interests, working class blacks were beholden to the representation of the elite blacks, even as this representation countered their own interests. While these dynamics in elite representation and working class interests are not absolute (that is, elite interests did not always counter working-class interests), the disparity in power between the two groups necessitated more political spaces for working class and non-accommodationist blacks. This chapter will explore these power dynamics between and within races and classes in postwar Atlanta.

*Urban Politics in Postwar Atlanta*

This project's critical approach to urban politics relies on the extensive research of Floyd Hunter's analysis of decision-making and power in postwar Atlanta (Hunter, 1953) and Clarence Stone's analysis of Atlanta's urban regime in the postwar era (Stone, 1989). Hunter's study of power produced a hierarchical arrangement amongst Atlanta's business elite, comprised of large decision-makers at the top, supported by professionals who were, in turn, supported by a select (elite) African-American community (Hunter, 1953). This "community power structure" effectively concentrated the power of decision-making at the top of the hierarchy, placing the major decisions of Atlanta's planning and policy making in the hands of forty or so (white) privileged businessmen (Hunter, 1953). While interests amongst decision-makers may have differed, the ability to influence was limited based on one's position within the hierarchy. Further, while the industries in which these forty men endeavored varied (as did the actual men themselves), the race, class, and cultural status (lineage – particularly the number of generations that were born and raised in Atlanta, GA) remained the same: white, upper class, and long-time Southerner. The community power structure theory remains an important framework for urban political analysis in postwar Atlanta as it captures the imbalance of political power from racial and economic differences.

Hunter's power structure hierarchy also contained an important spatial aspect to the decision-making dynamic. All meetings between the decision-makers at the top

of the power structure were held in either their own homes, in private clubs, or in the segregated banquet halls of established hotels (Hunter, 1953). Even the meetings for those in the professional sub-structure were held in segregated YMCAs, while African-American leaders held their meetings in local churches and community centers. Unlike the congenial image of the public town hall that democratic decision-making often evokes, this study of power in postwar Atlanta was markedly segregated. The spaces of power and decision-making in postwar Atlanta reflect the spaces of privilege and race in the City – planning and policy leaders were concentrated in the wealthy, white northern neighborhood of Buckhead. The professional understructure resided (and congregated) to the northeast of the city, in all-white enclaves that were less exclusive than Buckhead, but nonetheless more exclusive than any address within the city limits. The leaders in the African-American under-structure resided east of the CBD, along Auburn Avenue. The spatial dynamic to the power structure suggests the act of decision-making in postwar remained concentrated in white, privileged spaces under the purview of white, privileged men. The fact that low-income, black neighborhoods were so far removed (both spatially and ideologically) from these spaces of power suggests a lack of political opportunities for this group.

Comparatively, Stone's regime – that is, the coalition that governed Atlanta – was comprised of formal and informal relationships between groups that did not have a single unifying interest. The disparity in interests, and the dynamics in power relations this disparity produced, creates a context-dependent alliance between

interests that are reliant on one another for progress, while also constrained by this dependence. However, the disparity in interests acts as a checks and balances for the governing coalition – preventing the complete domination of one group over the actions of the regime. The regime exists to protect privilege as an institution: who or what is privileged at the expense of greater redistribution of city resources is the result of intense struggle within the coalition (Stone, 1989). This struggle occurs both within and around the regime, as interests attempt to get into the regime and, once in, maintain an influential position. The inability for these coalition members to exert influence without the resources of others in the coalition suggests the struggle in power dynamics constrained the actions of the regime. Further, this inability to exert change without the coalition's resources suggests how interdependent the members are on one another, unable to exert change in city policy without coalition membership (Stone, 1989).

The different outcomes from the two similar studies are a result of a changing national story. At the time of Stone's publication (1989), the glow of the Civil Rights Movement had faded and political scientists were taking a more critical approach to the role of African-Americans in urban political affairs. Comparatively, the Civil Rights Movement was an incoherent series of protests, marches, and legal campaigns at the time of Hunter's publication (1953), and barely noticeable when he was conducting the study in the years prior, particularly in Atlanta. While Hunter interpreted the role of African-Americans in Atlanta's political economy as subservient and supportive, Stone had the foresight of the gains of the Civil Rights

Movement to properly contextualize the African-American power structure in the years following the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision. Stone's study covered the time of Maynard Jackson's (Atlanta's first African-American mayor) mayoral reign, while during Hunter's study blacks were, en masse, just entering the voting booths of Atlanta for the first time since Reconstruction. It was likely inconceivable for Hunter to imagine the token-enfranchised group usurping power from the dominant and long-ruling class of white, wealthy businessmen.

In postwar Atlanta, a biracial coalition of white business leaders from downtown Atlanta and black elites headquartered in the east side Sweet Auburn neighborhood shaped urban policy under Mayors William B. Hartsfield (who served from 1937-1941, and again from 1942-1962), Ivan Allan, Jr. (1962-1970), and Maynard Jackson (1974-1982; 1990-1994) (Rutheiser, 1996; Stone, 1989). White business leaders had the financial and institutional resources, but lacked the popular support of Atlanta's newly enfranchised black population. Following the 1946 Supreme Court decision declaring the whites-only Democratic primary unconstitutional in Georgia, African-American voters comprised 27% of Atlanta's voting population (Harmon, 1996). Thus, black elites entered into the Atlanta governing coalition to provide this popular support (thereby forming the majority of the city's electoral coalition) in exchange for "selective incentives" (Stone, 1989, p. 15). The business elite provided financial resources and opportunities to institutionalize and sustain African-American progress in social and economic areas. African-American members of Atlanta's regime – with their domination over



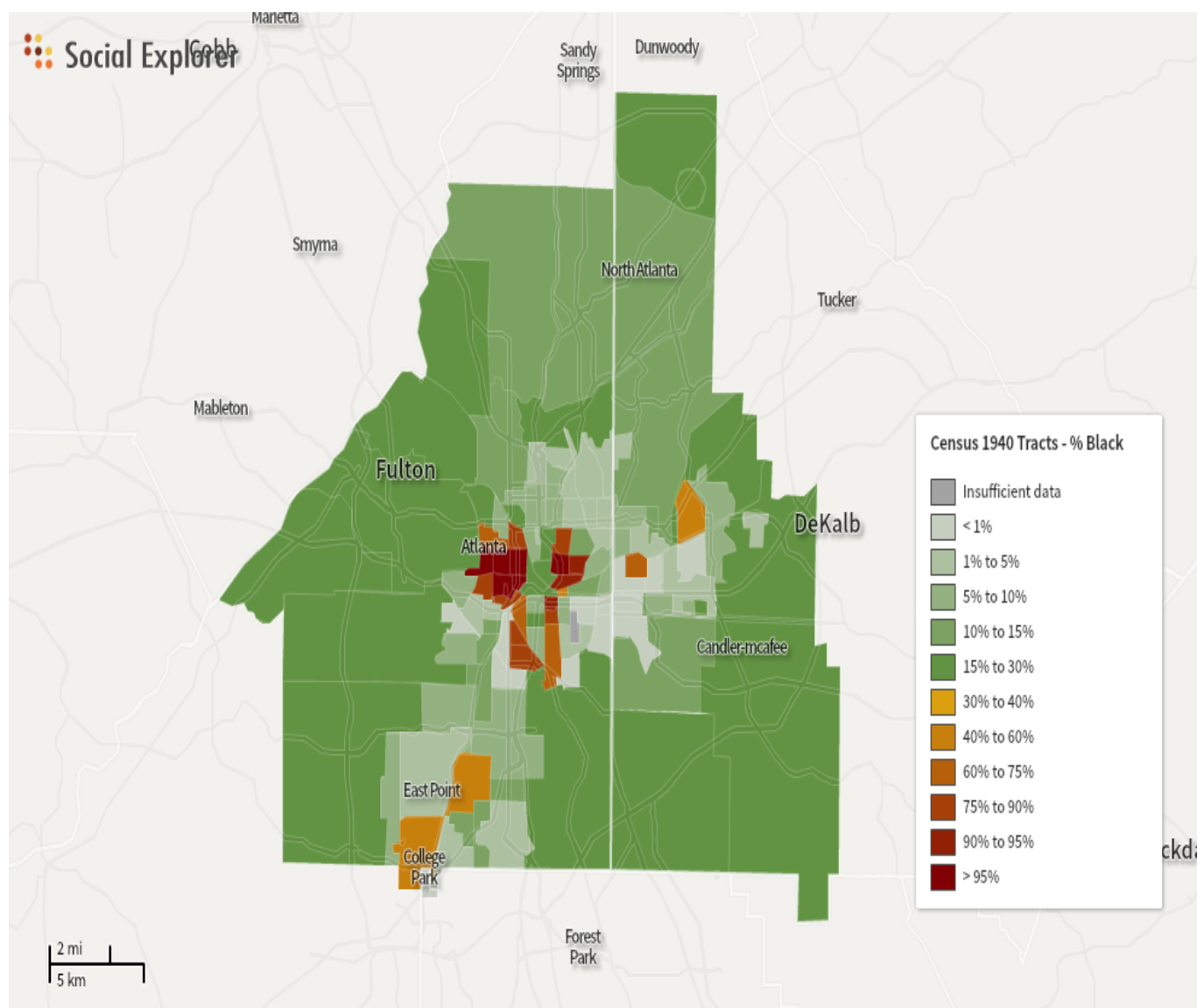
black political spaces in the city discussed in the previous section – exchanged the electoral necessity of “the black vote” in postwar Atlanta for the business elites’ institutional connections and financial support. In spite of this widespread electoral support from Atlanta’s black community, the selective incentives from the business elites of Atlanta’s regime were narrowly distributed in certain areas of the black community. In spite of the (concentrated) benefits to the black Atlanta community, these concessions from the regime’s white Atlanta elites did little to address the unequal geographies and disparity of resources in the city. The next section addresses the processes that produced these unequal geographies, eliciting the need for spatial justice in postwar Atlanta.

### *Producing Unjust Geographies in Atlanta*

Following the 1917 U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring segregation ordinances unconstitutional, Atlanta began racially zoning the city following the 1922 passage of a comprehensive municipal planning ordinance (Bayor, 1996). The city segregated black and white residential areas throughout the city, using race as a land use attribute. Black residential land use was separated from white residential land use with industrial and vacant land use categories (Bayor, 1996). Blacks had less residential lands than whites, and white areas were only re-zoned for black use if they were contiguous to other black areas or industrial land. Atlanta’s Streets Department physically separated the two communities by restricting entrance to white communities from black communities with highways and roads. Major

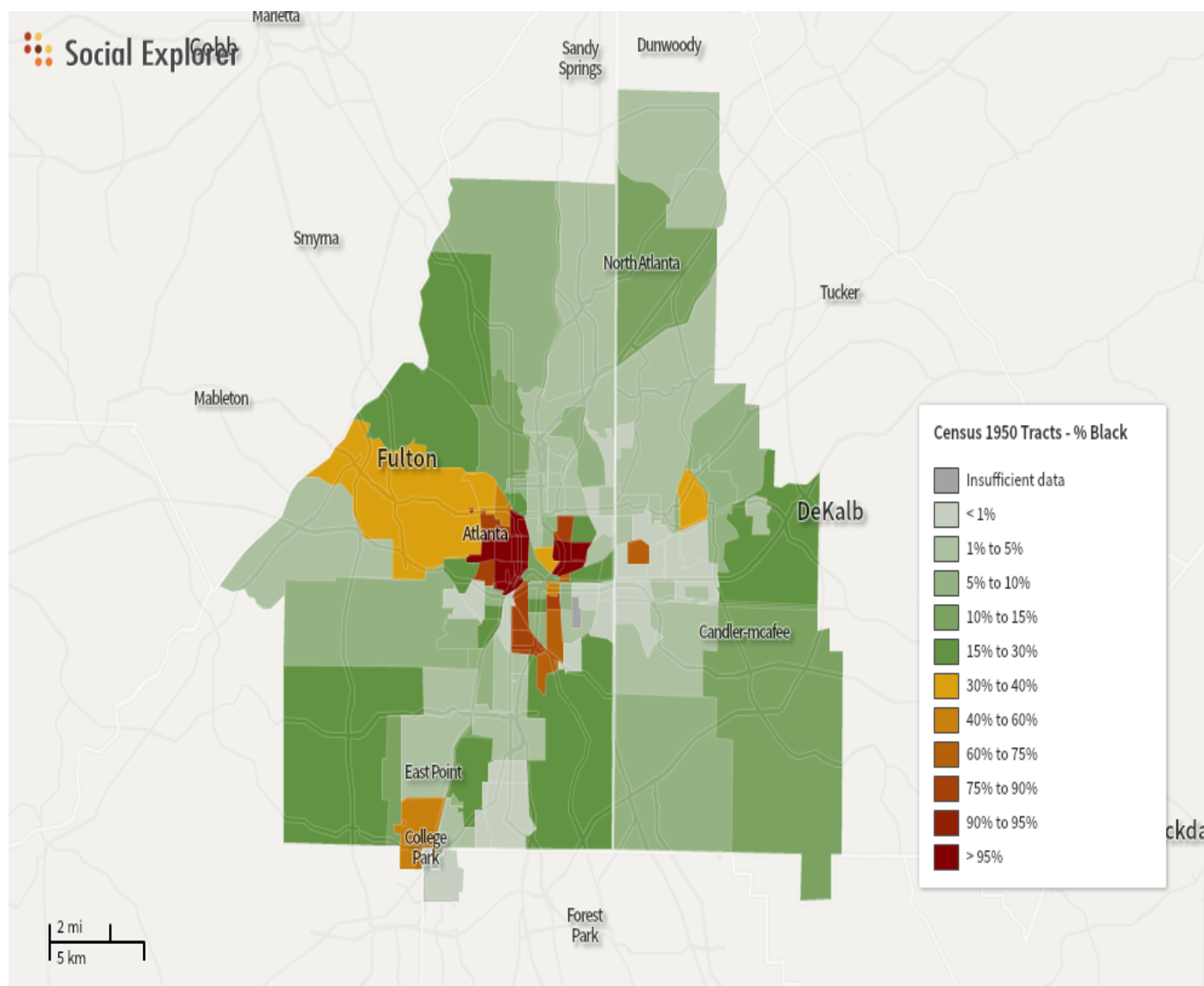
highways and rail tracks often acted as barriers, while streets tended to dead-end to restrict blacks from even passing through white areas. As a result of the local manipulation of black residential mobility, the residential segregation between races intensified after black voter registration increased in 1946 (see Maps 2.1-2.4).

**Map 2.1: Percentage of African Americans by Census Tract in Atlanta, 1940**



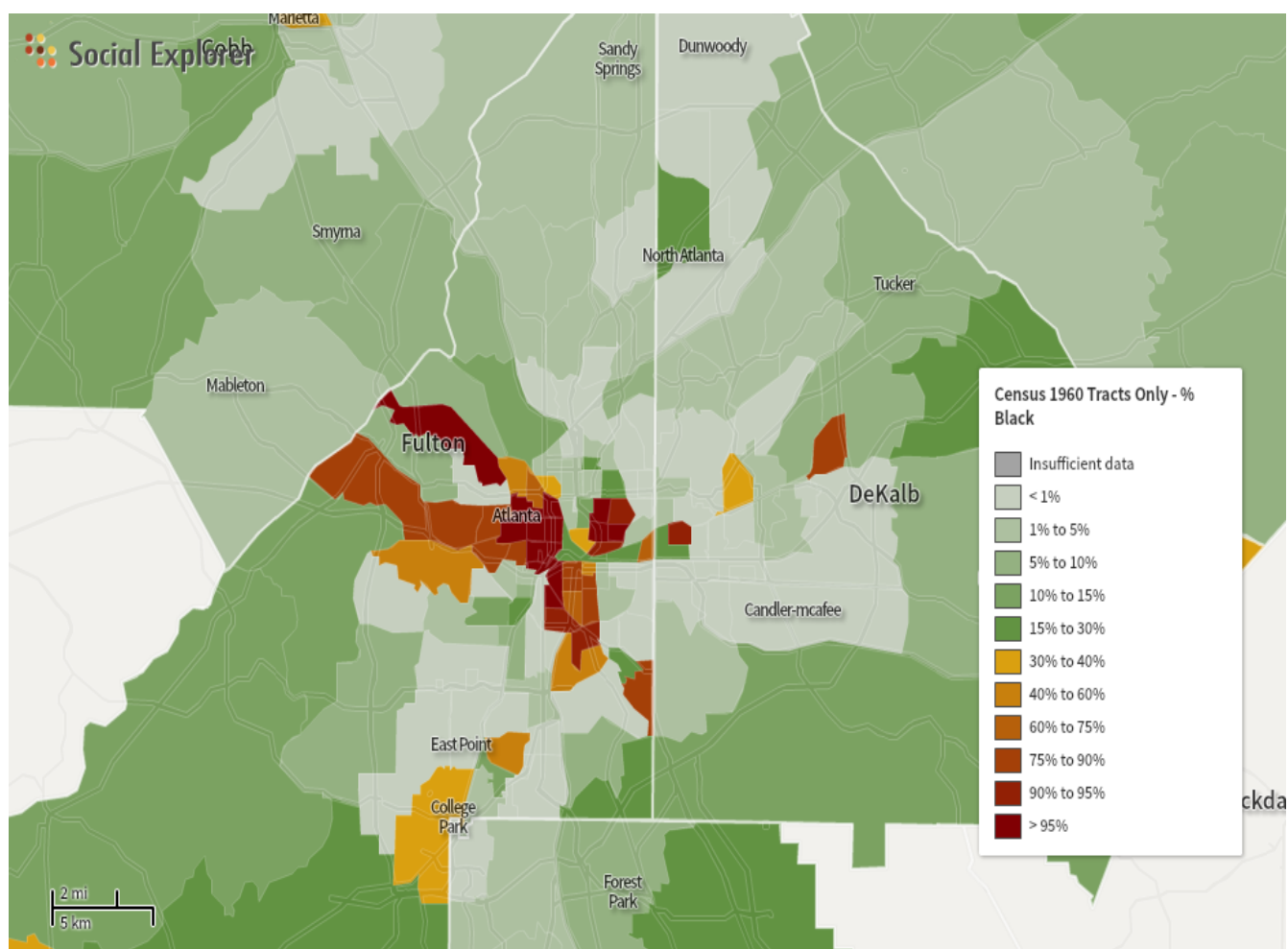
*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

**Map 2.2: Percentage of African Americans by Census Tract in Atlanta, 1950**



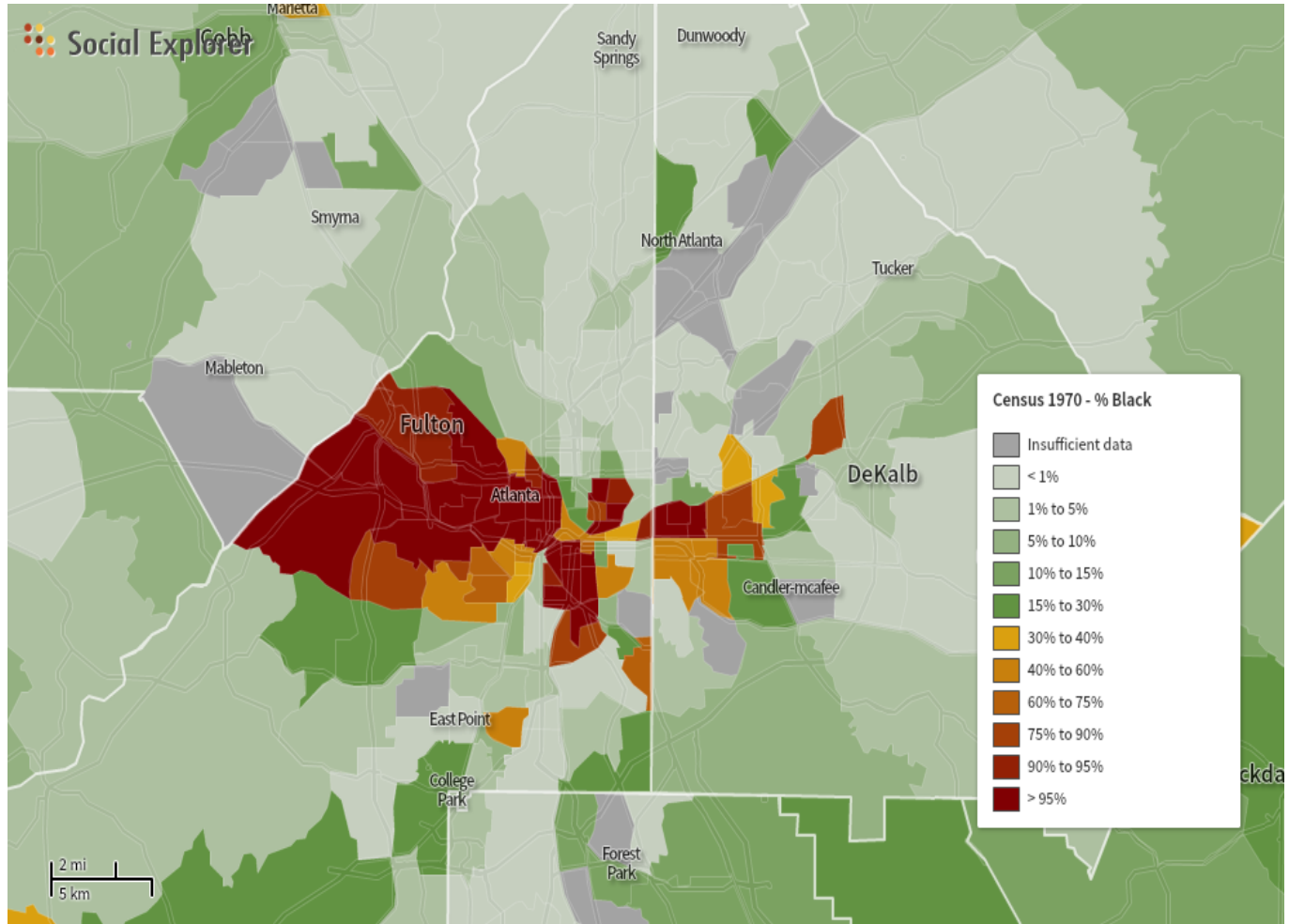
*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

**Map 2.3: Percentage of African Americans by Census Tract in Atlanta, 1960**



*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

**Map 2.4: Percentage of African Americans by Census Tract in Atlanta, 1970**



*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

Prior to the start of public housing construction in Atlanta, the city's governing coalition has actively produced, sustained, and replicated uneven geographies throughout the city (and later, the metropolitan area). When Charles F. Palmer realized the benefits of clearing the poor from the downtown periphery in order to construct public housing developments in the early 1930s, he induced a conceptual

shift in the ideology guiding Atlanta's political economy. Surprisingly, the former Confederate city developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Federal government. Techwood and University Homes acted as models for a controversial New Deal program, and the Federal government provided generous subsidies for the development of downtown Atlanta (Bayor, 1996). Yet the Federal government merely subsidized a long-standing pattern in Atlanta's urban planning that sought to segregate African-Americans to marginalized areas in the City. Atlanta's ruling class carefully planned the city's land use to minimize interactions between black and white residential and commercial areas, creating separate areas for the two races, whereby the physical environment reflected the disparate power relations. Similarly, Federal subsidies for public housing would construct segregated facilities, with inferior construction and programming for the African-American developments relative to the white developments (Bayor, 1996).

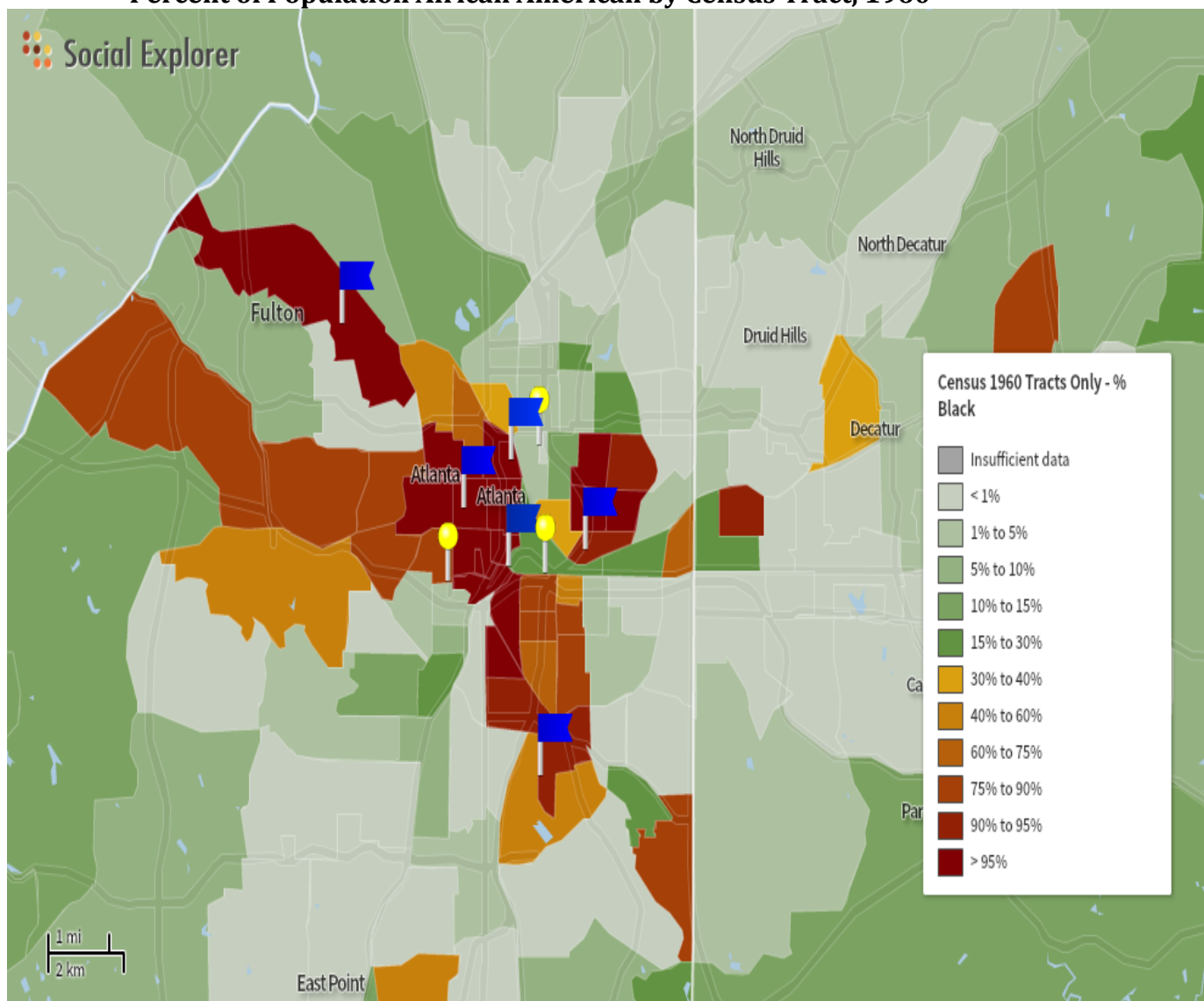
In 1938, Atlanta's Board of Aldermen created the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) under the State Housing Authorities Law (Georgia Code 99-11). Under this statute, the AHA was a legally independent body that planned, built, owned, and managed Atlanta's public housing. The AHA also was legally responsible for decisions as to the locations of public housing projects. In spite of this independence, the AHA maintained informal connections to Atlanta's urban regime, both prior to and during the reign of the bi-racial coalition. Per a 1972 report from the independent group Research Atlanta:

“The AHA was incorporated as a legally independent body but its operations have been greatly influenced through the indirect actions and political decisions of the Mayor, Board of Alderman, and City Departments....they are not held accountable for AHA decisions and therefore are able to manipulate the public housing process without suffering political consequences” (Atlanta, 1972, pp iv-v).

These indirect connections produced disparate and uneven geographies within the city as slum clearance and public housing construction perpetuated the oppression of the poor and minority residents of Atlanta. During its most active era of construction (1936-1957), the AHA planning committee focused slum clearance efforts on neighborhoods surrounding the downtown area, particularly African-American communities to the east and south of the CBD (see Map 2.5). During this period, nearly 60% of all family-style public housing developments were constructed in Atlanta, with the majority of units reserved for African-American occupancy constructed in the northwestern section of the City (Atlanta, 1983). Black disenfranchisement prevented any substantial citizen resistance, while slumlords organized unsuccessfully to block construction efforts.



**Map 2.5: Locations of Atlanta's Public Housing Constructed 1936-1957 Over Percent of Population African American by Census Tract, 1960**



*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

*Note: Blue flags indicate black public housing developments, and yellow pushpins indicate white public housing developments*

Shortly following the end of the war, city populations greatly exceeded the available housing stock, and Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949. Title II and III of the Act had a significant impact on residential segregation and urban-suburban dynamics for the duration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As African-American populations grew in urban areas, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) subsidized housing development for white homeowners in the suburbs. Title III, along with Title I, had the unintentional effect of displacing and containing the poor, African-American populations of urban areas in underfunded public housing developments (Hirsch, 1998). Atlanta's postwar governing coalition channeled resources, in the form of mortgage capital, to the suburbs while reducing the dispersion of low-income housing stock in the city, in the form of slum clearance and public housing construction (Bayor, 1996; Keating, 2001). The regime protected their governing privilege by holding the necessary black electorate hostage in government-subsidized housing, and rewarding the white electorate with government-subsidized capital. This subsidized capital provided white Atlantans with a mobility that defined political autonomy, while poor black Atlantans, confined to bounded discriminatory spaces in Atlanta, had limited political power. The regime's active role in creating and sustaining these disparate geographies in the City necessitated a spatially just solution.

The governing coalition in Atlanta was not solely comprised of informal connections between local government and downtown businessmen. In 1938, Mayor Hartsfield appointed Mr. Charles F. Palmer, a successful white real estate

developer in Atlanta's central business district, as Chairman of the Atlanta Housing Authority Board of Commissioners (BOC). The BOC was the primary authority for the creation of the Atlanta Housing Authority's policy (Kaczowska, 2012).

Further, the members of the Board from 1938 to 1970 were a rotation of the downtown elite. Palmer retained his position for two years until he was appointed in Washington, D.C. as the U.S. Coordinator of Defense Housing (Martin, 1987). Hartsfield appointed Palmer's successor, Mr. Marion Smith, son of a former Georgia Governor, US Senator, and Secretary of the Interior (Hoke Smith), and himself an established leader of Atlanta's business and political elite. Smith's father Hoke, during his tenure as Governor of Georgia (1907-1909, 1911), established some of Georgia's more prominent Jim Crow legislation, such as literacy and property ownership voting requirements. Following Smith's 1947 resignation was the appointment of one of the BOC's longest-serving Chairman, Mr. John O. Chiles (Atlanta, 1972). During his 20-year leadership, Chiles was also the owner of one of the largest real estate firms in the South (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1959). The ideological and physical domination of business interests within the AHA BOC suggests the institutionalization (or formalization) of the Atlanta regime's informal networks.

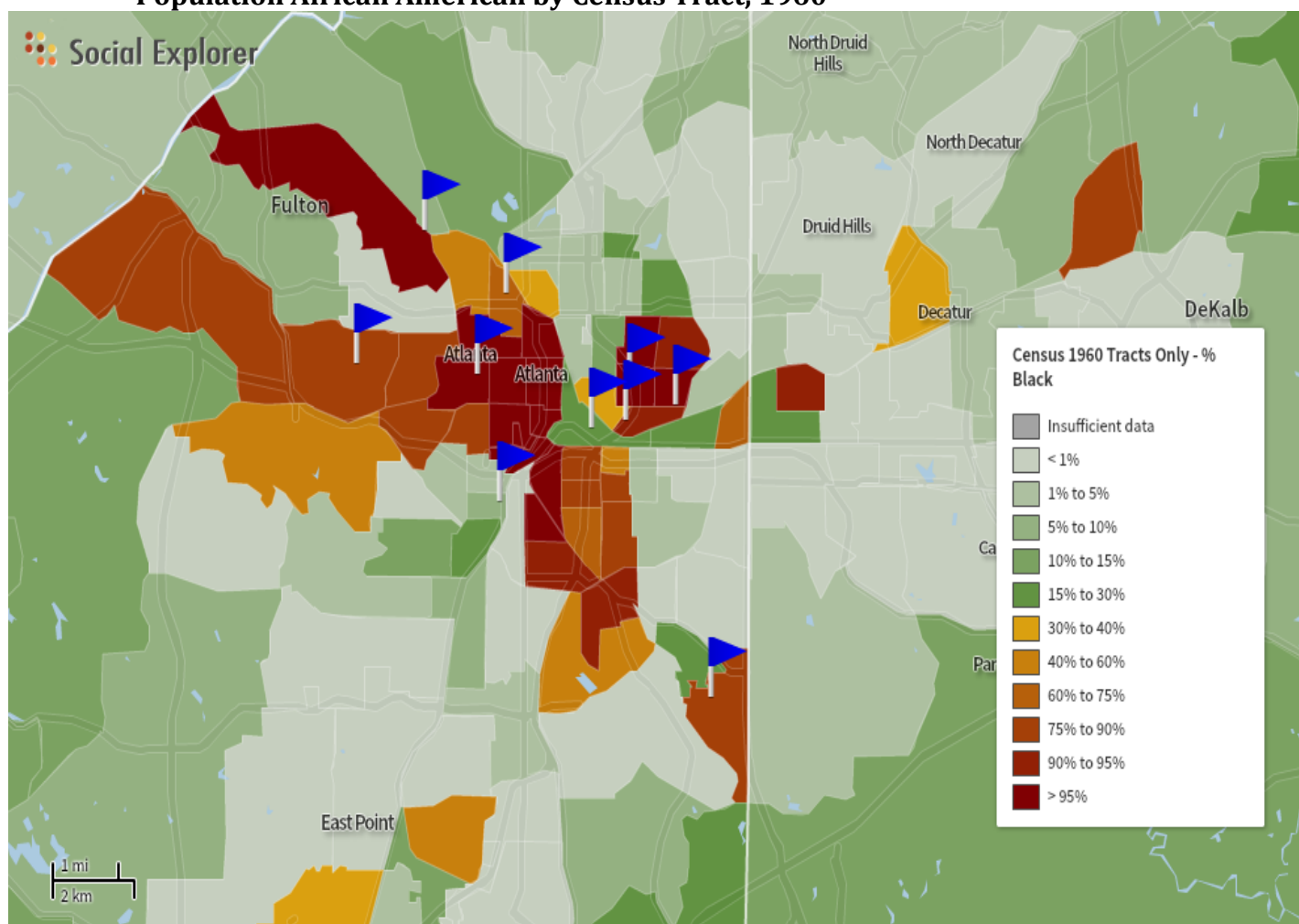
The regime exacerbated residential segregation in Atlanta after the Atlanta Housing Authority was appointed as planner and administrator of Urban Renewal federal funding. The Urban Renewal program was simply a rewording of Title I of the 1949 Housing Act; the 1954 Housing Act accounted for the new realities in

urban planning – that cities were renewing blighted (or potentially blighted) areas for commercial or residential development. The AHA Board of Commissioners (of which a number were real estate developers with significant property holdings in the city) subverted the purpose of the Urban Renewal program in order to shape Atlanta’s residential patterns and maximize the property values for the expanding Central Business District. The privileging of private business interests within the regime are reflected in this description of Atlanta’s Urban Renewal Program:

“The goal of the Atlanta Urban Renewal Program was to eliminate slums and blighted conditions in designated areas of the City of Atlanta. AHA acquired and cleared the blighted areas, and then sold the land to private enterprises for new development. The authority also helped the owners to upgrade, improve or rehabilitate their properties by providing financial and technical assistance. AHA provided for new schools and parks, roads, streets, sidewalks and sewers in the revitalized areas, as well as developed new low rent housing units. Private investors developed new residential and office buildings, hotels and commercial centers. Homeowners made necessary repairs and cleaned up their properties” (Kaczkowska, 2012).

The following table and map (see Map 2.6 and Table 2.1) show the spatial distribution of Atlanta’s Urban Renewal projects. Although 20% of the program’s projects were solely beneficial to African-American residents (University Center and West End projects), virtually all of the projects were detrimental to low-income African-Americans in the city. Of the total number of residents the Urban Renewal program displaced during clearance of blighted areas, 95% were poor African-Americans. Often, the AHA did not provide displaced residents with replacement housing, and displacees were forced to reside in the overcrowded western sections of the city (Bayor, 1996).

**Map 2.6: Location of Atlanta's Urban Renewal Projects and Percent of Population African American by Census Tract, 1960**



*Source: Social Explorer, 2014*

Since 1946, changes in both Federal legislation and local adjustments to Atlanta's physical and political spaces produced disparate and unequal geographies in the city. The production and reproduction of unequal geographies are spatialized evidence of the oppressive power dynamics between races and classes in the city. While African-Americans were legally enfranchised in the city, the bi-racial coalition in Atlanta's urban regime appears to only benefit middle-and-upper income blacks. Low-income blacks had disparate political power in the city, compared to both upper-class blacks and low-income whites (Bayer, 1996). As residential segregation increased, Atlanta developed racialized and classed spaces where the built environment reflected the disparate power dynamics between the city's races and classes. This racialized/classed space was not produced informally or indirectly – the racially-based zoning law of the City perpetuated the hierarchical arrangement of raced spaces, and an elite governing coalition sought to exclude the poor of all races from political inclusion. Black areas in the city, excluding the Sweet Auburn neighborhood that housed the black contingent of the bi-racial coalition, were ignored during redistributive city planning. The regime consistently ignored the sanitation, transportation, recreation, and residential needs of low-income black residents, while providing for these same needs for their white counterparts. The spatial injustice in the city warranted a spatially just solution for low-income black Atlantans.

**Table 2.1: Description of Atlanta Urban Renewal Program Projects, by Year**

<b>Urban Renewal Project</b>	<b>Years of Construction</b>	<b>Description</b>
Butler Street	1959-1971	Development of Landmark Apartments, Holiday Inn, Marriott Hotel, Wheat Street Garden Apartments, Ford automotive sales and service building, and Antoine Graves public housing for seniors  Rehabilitation of some 200 housing units
Thomasville	1959	Development of Thomasville Heights public housing project
Rawson-Washington	1959-1973	Development of Atlanta Stadium and elementary school
University Center	1960-1972	Expansion of Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Morris Brown College
Rockdale	1960	Clearance of the entire area and construction of low and moderate income multi-family housing, and new elementary school
Georgia State	1962-1971	Expansion of Georgia State University
Howard High School	1964-1966	Expansion of Howard High School
Georgia Tech	1965	Expansion of Georgia Tech campus Construction of the Tech Parkway
West End	1966	Development of Dean Rusk School and West End Mall Rehabilitation of more than 2,000 houses
Bedford-Pine	1968	Development of Georgia

		Power Company corporate headquarters, Atlanta Civic Center, and C. W. Hill Elementary School
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*Source: Atlanta Housing Authority Administrative History, 2012*

The regime's manipulation of resource distribution in the city was not just the result of Federal legislation. Following the *King v. Chapman* decision of 1946 declaring Georgia's whites-only Democratic primary unconstitutional, the substantial increase in black political power in the city prompted a countering increase in the white population. Following several failed attempts in the 1940s, in 1951, Atlanta's Board of Alderman passed the Plan of Improvement, expanding Atlanta's physical area from 37 square miles to 118 square miles (Atlanta, 1950). The expansion annexed dozens of predominantly white suburbs to the north and east of the city limits, but also included semi-populated lands to the south and west for African-American residences. The population increased from about 330,000 residents to 430,000; the proportion of blacks decreased from 41% to 33%, with white residents thus reclaiming their majority status (Atlanta, 1972).

The production of unjust geographies in Atlanta reflects the physical inscription of power in the built environment, particularly the dominant forces of the city's regime on marginalized communities in the city. LeFebvre describes this oppressive force as violent: "[i]n the dominated sphere, constraints and violence are encountered at every turn: they are everywhere. As for power, it too is



omnipresent,” (LeFebvre, 1991, p. 358). Yet these marginalized spaces – these unjust geographies – are not entirely detrimental to the affected community. LeFebvre and Castells understand the dialectic relationship between oppression and freedom in the City via spatial and social change, respectively. Both scholars understand the oppressive social structures (Castells, 1983) and spatial structures (LeFebvre, 1991) as the primary contributors towards social change movements and re-appropriated, or “divergent” space (LeFebvre, 1991, p. 167). The regime’s spatial marginalization and social oppression on low-income African-American communities provide a unique opportunity for a spatially and socially just response.

Soja’s understanding of spatial justice combines critical theories of justice with critical theories of space. Both the processes and outcomes that define a spatially just solution must account for the historical, social, and spatial context where these solutions unfold. Specifically, it was not enough to provide for equal rights and outcomes that promoted the greater good in Rawlsian sense, as these outcomes replicated processes that sustain socio-spatial domination. Further, demands for social justice must unfold across multiple spaces (or scales) – theoretically, space unites the diffused politics (interests) of difference across the City and maximizes political action (Soja, 2010). Existing social processes had not only created segregated, racialized spaces in postwar Atlanta; but also spaces delegated for public and private use. Consider the land use categories of zoning codes that segregate residential land use from commercial or industrial land use.

The spatial distance between work and home life created a separate political demand for each space. In Atlanta, the relocation of businesses from the CBD to the northern suburbs aggregated this separation (Rutheiser, 1996). The spatial and gendered difference between work and residential political organizing replicated this oppressive organization of spaces. Thus, the spatial consciousness in social justice connects these disparate interests, within their respective historical contexts, to achieve a spatially just outcome.

This research posits that tenant organizing in Atlanta were successful given the unique socio-spatial position of public housing developments as political opportunities structures (POS) in the city. The POS provided a spatial consciousness for social movements, enabling spatially just outcomes across different social demands. The next sections discuss the literature on urban social movements and political opportunity structures, and contextualize this literature for postwar Atlanta.

### *Urban Social Movements: From Labor to Identity Politics*

The inability of non-elite urban residents to participate in city decision-making and politics outside of the “token participation” (Arnstein, 1969) is not exclusive to postwar Atlanta. Castells considers urban social movements (USM) to be the most effective and the most rare form of citizen action for non-elites (Castells, 1977). The evolution of the USM – from collective demands about work

conditions as a labor movement to collective demands about community conditions as an identity politics movement – reflects the evolution in the State’s response to the USM. An effective USM not only changes the built environment or political process of the City, but also prevents such a change from occurring in the future. Specifically, urban social movements allow non-elites to make claims on different rights in the City, yet in response; the City creates processes to prevent future groups from making claims on these rights. In short, the USM allows groups to access the protective privilege of the urban apparatus, while prohibiting others from accessing this privilege. The State frequently prohibits future USMs through the institutionalization of the movement into the State apparatus (Manning Thomas, 1997). USMs are thus persistently reconstructed in order to address this prohibition. This section will address the Marxist origins of the urban social movement as a fight of labor versus capital, its evolution to the 1960s politically conscious social movement of identity politics of race and gender, and finally, its recent transformation into the spatially conscious right to the city movement for marginalized non-elites.

This critical, historical analysis of urban social movements is not solely characterized by the presence of civil disturbances or “riots” – instead, one can scale the scope of urban social movements down to minor transgressions, what Kelley refers to as the “politics down below” (Kelley, 1994, p. 4). Given the virtually nonexistent political spaces for low-income blacks in postwar Atlanta, one must examine the daily activities – what LeFebvre terms “spatial practices”

(LeFebvre, 1991) – to find examples of black resistance to the State within its representational spaces of public housing and racialized spaces in the city.

Methodologically, this empirical categorization provides a more robust analysis of urban social movements in the city, and the scope and scale of these USMs on the urban (changes in the built environment) and the political (changes in power dynamics). Scaling USMs down to spatial practices further allows for examination of the effect changes on the urban and the political have on USMs, via the observed change in spatial practices.

Analysis of urban social movements begins with analysis of the construction of the urban, particularly the construction of difference in the city (Young, 1999). From this analysis of difference emerges a normative understanding of urban citizenship. To synchronize this with the earlier LeFebvrian discussion of the production of space, the spatial practices (human behavior) of marginalized groups reflect resistance to the normative definition of urban citizenship, which is represented in the abstract as public spaces in the city. Normative conceptions of urban citizenship reflect the privileged, or dominant, group identity in the city. It inherently includes the power dynamics of the urban political apparatus. The State's racialization of public spaces in the industrial city support claims of a differential urban citizenship emerging from *de jure* residential segregation (Young, 1999). Generally speaking, citizenship does not appear until a group creates an identity with relation to the construction of the urban; specifically, black citizenship is not possible until black residents (as a group) are incorporated

into the city's representational (abstract) and practiced (concrete) spaces. In Atlanta, the State did not consider claims to black citizenship until acceptance of PWA Housing Division funds required slum clearance and housing construction in African-American communities (thus marking a concerted effort to represent black communities on city planning maps), and the enfranchisement of blacks in Georgia necessitated a shift in Atlanta's urban regime (Stone, 1989; Reed, Jr., 1999). Black claims on urban citizenship in Atlanta were not legitimized until blacks had an effect on both representational and practiced spaces in the city.

The labor movement in the industrial city provides an example of an USM that left a marked effect on the urban and the political, while preventing future effects by institutionalizing the movement into the State apparatus. As mentioned earlier, black (elite) leaders discouraged black laborers and tradesmen from organizing in order to concentrate the limited black political power within the Republican Party. While Black involvement in the labor movement was miniscule, it still provides context for postwar black insurgency. The labor movement has its origins in the marginalized spaces of insurgent organizations, and created a political space for labor interests in the urban regime. Materially, the construction of union buildings as spaces of organizing outside of the residential community depoliticizes the association between labor and community interests.

The industrial city reached a point of crisis in the late 1920s, as the increasing costs of production reduced labor demand and further degraded industrial work

conditions. The purely *laissez-faire* approach to the economy restricted government regulation and labor organization (Piven and Cloward, 1977). The domination of capital in urban spaces was reflected in the disproportionate amount of negative externalities produced from industrial and commercial land uses. Consequently, capital interests politically dominated labor interests within the State apparatus. Until the formal recognition of labor unions in the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), labor interests organized within the marginalized Communist Party. The Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) formed as a political party in 1919, and gained popularity by infiltrating the ethnic community organizations of industrializing cities. As unemployment grew amongst the low-skill, ethnic laborer, CPUSA pushed claims of citizenship on the State through Unemployment Councils – linking labor interests to community interests (e.g., welfare relief for the unemployed). This association – more specifically, this association’s effects on national and urban labor policy – suggest this labor movement was an urban social movement.

CPUSA created a new ideological shift in neighborhood organizing, shifting away from social and “patriotic” activities, and moving towards more political analysis and empowerment of working class communities. The success of CPUSA, particularly its longevity in neighborhood organizing, stems from its political analysis of social problems in communities, in addition to its focus on translocal issues, which effectively liberated community organizing from the boundaries of a local neighborhood (Fisher, 1984). CPUSA’s Unemployment Councils’

programmatic strategy of social welfare, race (ethnic) relations, housing, and translocal mobilization was largely successful due to the party's ability to link workplace and community goals. This link between economic and social welfare was supported by the State following the passage of the Wagner Act (NLRA) that encouraged workplace organizing. Yet workplace organizing was encouraged in the work "spaces" – disembedding the labor movement from the community movement. Further, the formation of the State's welfare apparatus (the Second New Deal) and the bureaucratization of community organization had the unintended consequence of depoliticizing the link between economic and community problems. The movement's exclusion of African-American interests translated to minimal political gains for this group. The State's exclusion of African-Americans from the bureaucratized union interests in urban political regimes further reduced the spaces for black political interests.

At a national level, Blacks reconstructed the urban social movement in the 1960s using identity politics in order to address the racial disparities in urban economic, social, and political capital (power). The rise in student activism at the time (spurred by anti-war protests against conscription for nonstudents) "intellectualized" community organizing, fostering a political consciousness in community organizing about the restructuring changes in the political economy. The rapid outflow of capital from inner cities into suburbs, growing unemployment rates, substandard housing and public health issues, and great disparities in the redistribution of the "affluent" economy created a political

backlash across the nation. The civil disturbances of the 1960s urban social movement had urban and political effects that spurred a minor reformation of the national welfare state. The appropriation of public space (city streets, commercial districts) for black insurgency challenged normative ideals of urban citizenship. Blacks were claiming political space in the city via the usurpation of (white-owned) private space. In addition to politicizing the link of social welfare and economic growth, this USM inadvertently formed a new link between race and poverty, thereby racializing the social ills of the nation (Fisher, 1984). In a response similar to the 1930s, the national and urban state apparatuses responded through bureaucratizing and depoliticizing these movements. The racialization of poverty during the 1960s spawned Federal policies that sought to institutionalize anti-discrimination issues (Fair Housing Act), professionalize grassroots community organizing (Maximum Feasible Participation of the Community Action Program), and reestablish the national welfare state (amendment to Social Security and creation of Food Stamp Acts). The State's turn to racializing poverty, again, severed the link between the national economic system and social problems in communities. Noticeably absent from Federal policies during the 1960s was the implementation of job programs which addressed the restructuring economy. The Second New Deal provided production jobs through the PWA that reflected the industrial economy of urban areas. However, Great Society job programs (VISTA, Job Corps) were reflective of the old economy, training black urban residents in low-skill tasks that failed to capture the national shift towards high-skill and high-wage service employment. Thus,



inner city blacks remained marginalized in their racialized spaces of poverty, as capital continued to flow towards the suburbs and unemployment remained high in urbanized areas.

Postwar Atlanta's urban social movement was not just characterized by civil disturbances. In fact, civil disturbances were minimal in Atlanta, at a time when most cities were in visible upheaval (Stone, 1989). Atlanta's bi-racial coalition carefully brokered and negotiated land deals within the city to minimize racial integration. Outside of the city's legacy of racial zoning and buffering, the regime relegated blacks to marginalized urban spaces via extensive Federal subsidy. Atlanta's regime produced not only unjust geographies of political marginalization, but also shaped the political opportunity structures within these marginalized spaces. These political opportunity structures take the form of public housing developments in postwar Atlanta, one of the few spaces for low-income blacks to transform daily activities (spatial practices, or grievances) into claims on the State for political access and urban citizenship. Consequently, these public housing development political opportunity structures shaped grievances from its tenants (constructing an urban social movement) while this urban social movement resulted in urban and political effects that shaped the developments. This dialectic is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Recent right to the city urban social movements emphasize the spatial turn in claims of urban citizenship. This project's final chapter illustrates the effects of

changes in public housing policy on the black insurgent urban social movement, and the shifting organizational forms of this USM following the neoliberalization of public housing policy.

*Public Housing Developments as Political Opportunity Structures*

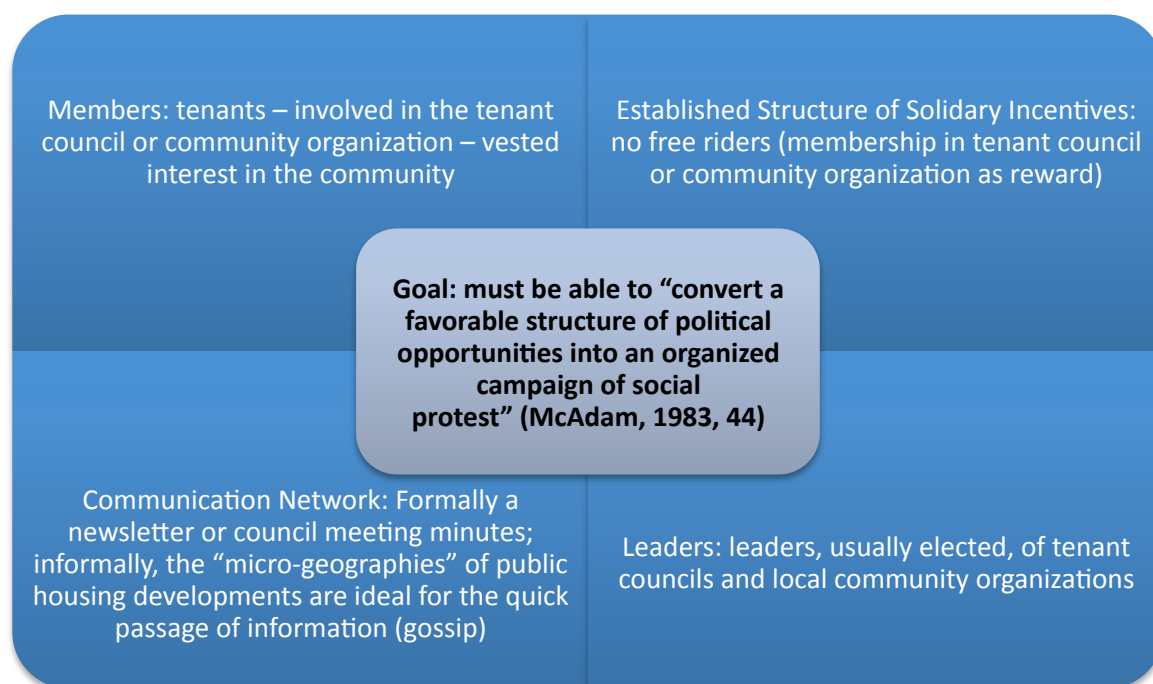
As the political environment in Atlanta shifted in response to changes in the electorate (1946 *King v Chapman* decision, 1951 Plan of Improvement), the African-American community was able to achieve political power and legitimacy in postwar Atlanta through various political opportunity structures. Stone's regime theory covered the gains of the black elite through the bi-racial coalition, and the ability for some working-class and low-income blacks to make small gains through patronage rewards and other selective incentives. Yet the concentration of power within the black community amongst the black elite – as evidenced by the domination of the Auburn Avenue crowd over the city's few black political spaces – minimized the political opportunities for low income and working class African Americans. Enfranchisement was a major victory for the black community. However, in the three decades following the *King v Chapman* decision, Atlanta's housing market grew more segregated and the labor market shifted into a bifurcated model of high-skill professionals and low-skill, low-wage workers (Keating, 2001). Atlanta's poor black residents had only token political participation with the vote, yet the black vote was a powerful resource in the city that this group could mobilize and leverage to gain political legitimacy and

visibility (McAdam, 1999). Atlanta's poor black residents required their own political spaces, a political opportunity structure that would leverage their resources in exchange for alterations to the urban and political. I posit these poor black residents used the capacity of their own marginalized spaces, the public housing developments, as political opportunity structures in postwar Atlanta. These political opportunity structures provided the visibility and legitimacy for poor black residents to advance their own political interests. However, the nature of these political opportunity structures is their dependency on the vulnerable, or instable political environment. Changes, particularly stabilizations (or institutionalization/formalization) in the political environment could preclude the developments from functioning as political opportunity structures.

Public housing developments functioned as political opportunity structures in postwar Atlanta using the organizational capacity of its tenant councils. The tenant associations allowed the public housing residents to effectively mobilize their resources (people/voters, funds, ideas, interests) for political leverage and visibility within the changing political structure. The organizational infrastructure of tenant associations provided access to a large member base (tenants), an established structure of solidary incentives (organizational membership), a communication network (formally, a newsletter or tenant association board meeting minutes; informally, gossip), and residential leadership (see Figure 2.1). Stronger tenant associations often reflect the earlier iterations of the associations from the PWA Housing Division developments, which emphasized leadership

qualities to Americanize ethnic, working-class residents with middle-class values (Marcuse, 1971; Radford, 2004). Thus, one would expect the older developments to have stronger memberships, solidary incentives, communication networks, and leadership. The organizational capacity of tenant associations is a key component of the public housing development functioning as a political opportunity structure for poor blacks in postwar Atlanta.

**Figure 2.1: Organizational Capacity of Tenant Associations**



The ability for public housing developments to function as political opportunity structures is also the result of the external organizational capacity of people and place-based community development organizations. Public housing developments tend to rely on a wide network of social service organizations to provide social

welfare programming for residents. These organizations range from local economic development organizations to nationwide tenant/housing groups. The organizational capacity of these groups is the same as that ascribed to tenant associations in Figure 2.1. Tenant association members often had memberships with both local and national organizations – ranging from the local black church to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP). Shared membership had the benefit of expanding the scope and magnitude of group demands, while also lessening effectiveness of these demands from inter-group fighting and “turf wars” – battles concerning which group has the right to which claims on the State. The synergistic effects of shared membership allowed for these groups to mobilize resources both outside and within the developments, enhancing opportunities while also reducing opportunities from the group organizational dynamics that produced the turf wars. The external organizing groups both benefit from and contributed to the public housing development as a political opportunity structure.

*The Evolution of Political Opportunity Structures in Atlanta’s Public Housing Developments*

The next three chapters will discuss the evolution of public housing developments as political opportunity structures in Atlanta. The first chapter, covering University and John Hope Homes (constructed in 1938 and 1940, respectively), will discuss the origins of public housing developments as political opportunity

structures in Atlanta. This chapter will document how the Federally-built-and-managed University Homes (financed and constructed prior to the 1937 Housing Act, through the Public Works Administration's Housing Division during the New Deal) was a decidedly top-down tenant association controlled by the professional (and accommodating) African-American management. During the early days of public housing, tenant associations were used both as a means of monitoring the activities of the less fortunate (providing supervised and limited access to communal meeting rooms, for example, to limit labor organizing activities) and as a means of controlling the activities of the less fortunate to mimic those of the middle and upper classes (providing classes in good housekeeping for women and etiquette for teenage girls). Public housing functioned as a State intervention to support working class employment and develop a middle class through the encouragement of savings and home purchases (Hays, 1994; Parsons, 2005). Tenant associations promoted the tools for lower and working class assimilation into middle class norms and values. White ethnic tenant associations promoted "Americanization" via citizenship and language courses (Marcuse, 1971; Parsons, 2005). African-American tenant associations promoted accommodationist tactics, determined to preserve the patronage benefits of African-American New Deal funding (Pritchett, 2008). African-American housing managers promoted high standards of cleanliness, work ethic, education, religion, and civic participation both amongst their tenants and staff. They carefully selected tenant association members and organized tenant association activities (Archives, 1942). Nonetheless, public housing developments began as top-down political

opportunity structures, gaining much of its political opportunity from the Federal level, with trickle-down effects emerging following changes at the local level.

Chapter 4 documents the transformation of the public housing development into a more bottom-up political opportunity structure following the implementation of the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision and the 1951 Plan of Improvement. As African-Americans gained political power in Atlanta, public housing developments were able to increase the political opportunities generated from local and State resources. The 1955 construction of the 1,000 unit Perry Homes in northwest Atlanta was one of the early decisions of a tenuous bi-racial coalition, forged between the white business elite of downtown interests led by Mayor William B. Hartsfield, and an enterprising group of African-American real estate developers with land interests in the undeveloped western areas of the newly-expanded Atlanta. Downtown interests appreciated the movement of poor African-Americans from the CBD and surrounding areas, and African-American landholders appreciated the prospects of private development for African-American homeowners, since the construction of the large African-American public housing development essentially created a new black neighborhood in the city. Over the next two decades, northwest Atlanta quickly became one of the largest black ghettos in the City, forming census tract after census tract of predominantly poor and African-American residents (Atlanta, 1983). In the years leading up to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Perry Homes proved to be a formidable political opportunity structure for its residents and its surrounding community.

The final data chapter will examine the brief but politically active period in Grady Homes following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Buoyed by gains at the national level, public housing developments utilized new political opportunities from external organizations supported with Community Action Agency (CAA) resources. The 1965 desegregation of Atlanta's public housing developments and the passage of the 1969 Brooke Amendments accelerated the transformation of tenant membership from white and black, working-class, married men and women to black, low-income single women. The changing membership shifted the claims of tenant associations and marked a new phase in the evolution of public housing developments as political opportunity structures in Atlanta. The external organizational capacity of the public housing developments shifted as well, creating and removing political opportunities with this shift. As federal dollars decreased and local jurisdictions faced bankruptcies in the early 1970s, the power of public housing developments as political opportunity structures weakened just as its most disenfranchised residents gained control of the tenant associations. The final chapter describes the long-term gains of the public housing residents during this time, in spite of the challenges, and the impact these changes had on both the physical and political form of the city.



### **Chapter 3: University Homes: Creating a Political Opportunity Structure from the Top-Down**

This chapter will examine how African Americans utilized public housing developments in Atlanta as a space to reconstruct (or redefine) race, specifically, African-American citizenship in the post-Reconstruction southern urban political economy. On a larger scale, this chapter studies the African-American social welfare and relief organizations that were active prior to the New Deal, the racial politics of the New Deal's policymaking and implementation, and the scalar political effects of the New Deal Public Works Administration's Housing Division program. The second half of this chapter uses the example of the University Homes, its tenant association, and the surrounding community to contextualize these national changes in racial politics on a local level. In the University Homes case, the political opportunity structure is decidedly top-down, and shaped significantly by the "outer wheel," of elite, professional, African-American interests in Atlanta (Ferguson, 2002). The political opportunity structure of public housing developments used tenant associations hand-picked by an elite (professional class) African-American managerial staff – associations that had significant influence from not only the local Atlanta elite, but also that of the recently-hired African-Americans in the expanding Federal Government. This small, yet powerful group pushed the uplift ideology within New Deal program implementation – a strategy aiming to improve the political, economic, and social standing of all African-Americans by focusing on lifting the masses out of poverty (Ferguson, 2002; Bacote, 1955; Bayor, 1996).

Following the severe rollback of African-American civil liberties in the decades following Reconstruction, the “Black Cabinet” (Pritchett, 2008, 67) laid vital groundwork to create political opportunity structures in African-American urban communities across the country, in spaces including, but not limited to, public housing developments.

This chapter also hopes to serve as a starting off point for an evolutionary examination of the political opportunity structures of public housing developments in Atlanta. The heavy influence of elite interests on the political mobilization and action of the first public housing tenant associations were phased out over time as the population of the developments (and the communities which surrounded them) – and consequently, the political interests – changed to a predominantly poor and female-headed household. The early tenant associations had a male political influence – men served in visible positions of political power and led the action for these political opportunity structures (University Homes Tenant Association Minutes, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). As such, the evolution of the political opportunity structures of public housing developments in Atlanta is contextualized with the intersection of race, class, and gender politics.

#### *African-American Elites in Atlanta: Private Philanthropy Provides Public Relief*

The policies that produced the first large-scale Federal government construction of public housing for low-income citizens during the Roosevelt Administration were monumental in the twentieth century, primarily as there was no precedent of a

national relief program in the United States (Vale, 2000). Prior to the New Deal, poverty relief was a privately funded and managed operation, with philanthropic and religious organizations providing relief for the poor and indigent (Vale, 2000) under local poor laws. The privately funded relief was rooted in Puritan theology, with poverty viewed as a symptom of immoral behavior, as opposed to a byproduct of a structural tension between labor and capital (O'Connor, 2002). The ideology of poverty relief changed when the Progressive reform at the turn of the twentieth century applied social science methods to the "problem" of poverty, attempting to quantify the scale and causes of the issue, while removing the moral mischaracterizations of the poor. Even as these reforms shaped the social welfare policy currently administered in the United States (means-testing, pilot programs, cost-benefit analysis), it also contributed to the still predominant stratification of the poor (widows and orphans at the top, able-bodied men at the bottom). Progressive reform introduced corporate philanthropy (the precursor to the non-profit organization) and the ideology that employers and industrialists have an obligation to provide relief for the negative externalities of industrialization on a larger scale. However, these general-purpose organizations were only successful when their supporting corporations were profitable (O'Connor, 2002, 39). Therefore, the ability for these organizations to effectively target and provide welfare during economic recessions was weakened; similarly, religious organizations that relied on community funding were limited in their relief work during economic downturns. Hence, the scale and severity of the Great Depression necessitated a nationally funded relief program with local administration.

With varying degrees of citizenship across the country, African-Americans operated under a separate system of poverty relief from that described above. Racial segregation separated blacks and whites in the city and country, in both the north and south, such that few private or religious organizations would have to grapple with “the race issue” when determining community relief allotments. Early twentieth century African-American neighborhoods were often comprised of different socioeconomic classes (with the exception of the upper class, who were able to purchase land and homes in areas outside of black slums), with a church - and in larger communities, a commercial strip - acting as an anchor for the community. Blacks were excluded (both legally and spatially) from interacting with whites in social, political, and residential environments, creating widespread social issues for the race following the rolling back of Reconstruction policies. Public services and goods (sidewalks, roads, streetlights, schools, utilities, housing inspections, firemen, police, parks) were scarce in black neighborhoods, creating an overwhelming need for poverty relief, and limited sources of private funds. In spite of the significant structural causes of African-American poverty in the early twentieth century, the ideology that guided the relief efforts from the African-American elite was surprisingly moralistic and Puritanical (Rouse, 1984). Further, African-American philanthropists had less-altruistic motivations for their charitable endeavors: uplift ideology – a strategy promoted by DuBois most famously with the talented tenth – necessitated that in order for any (read: upper-class) African-American to have full political, social, and economic freedom in the

country, all African-Americans (read: lower-class) have to be lifted up by middle class values and practicing the politics of respectability (Ferguson, 2002). The social welfare organizations focused on curbing juvenile delinquency with organized youth activities (domestic activities for young girls, military and labor skills for young boys), providing public health and etiquette classes for adults of the lowest income bracket, and finally, providing political and philosophical talks for adults of all socioeconomic statuses (Rouse, 1984; Ferguson, 2002).

The politics of respectability within black political ideology and action remain relevant in a contemporary discussion of racial politics. At the root, this politics privileges white, male, middle-aged, middle-class interests, with their Puritanical influences and inherent racial and gender biases. The politics of respectability renders women invisible by making men the political leaders, although black men remain in supporting roles to white men or white male ideas. Youth are also silenced within the politics of respectability. The middle class values that dominate the politics of respectability are a sharp contrast to the values of the poor and working class; individuality and private property dominate middle class interests, whereas working and lower-class values privilege communal property and goods as necessary survival strategies (Stack, 1974). In short, the politics of respectability that dominates black political ideology silences the majority of the poor and working class interests in favor of the interests of a powerful, but minority, elite class.

The benefit of hindsight allows for the condemnation of uplift ideology, however, at the turn of the twentieth century, blacks were in such a subjugated position after nearly forty years of freedom from bondage, the lack of public goods and services in black neighborhoods created a desperate political environment. Black private relief had its roots in the integrated social organizations formed after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, yet following the end of Reconstruction black women formed their own social clubs to address the rise of lynching against black men that the integrated women's organizations did not protest. While national organizations such as the National Urban League (NUL) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) provided political visibility and legitimacy for African-Americans, the regional differences in African-American citizenship necessitated either a national overhaul of racial politics (e.g. a second Reconstruction) or targeted local organizing. In Atlanta, elite African-Americans sought to improve African-American conditions through a multipronged approach of securing the vote (before 1946, blacks in Georgia were allowed to vote in general elections and special elections, but could not participate in the whites-only Democratic primaries), improving black community conditions (sidewalks, roads, lights, utilities), and securing equal accommodation (parks, schools, hospitals) from local jurisdictions (Rouse, 1984).

One such organization that promoted the aforementioned political goals was the Neighborhood Union, founded in 1908 by Lugenia Burns Hope, wife of Morehouse College president Rev. Dr. John Hope (Rouse, 1984). Mrs. Hope's involvement with

political causes occurred as a result of the needs of herself and her neighbors: in 1901, the City of Atlanta did not provide one playground for black children; further, black children were increasingly left home alone or to wander in the streets as their mothers went to work to supplement the artificially low wages of their husbands. The inability for working-class black men to singularly support their families like their white counterparts created a host of inequalities in black communities, while simultaneously providing a wealth of opportunities for these communities to engage in political action and mobilization (Castells, 1983). The wage inequalities created both a submerged working and middle-class in African-American communities, and this submerged group became one of the more politically active segments of the community in the decades leading up to and including the Civil Rights Movement.

The inequality between the races was not limited to economics; politically, blacks were disenfranchised in Atlanta since the rollback of Reconstruction policies in the Compromise of 1877. The national rollback of Reconstruction (and the withdrawal of Federal troops from Southern areas) was accompanied with a rollout of Jim Crow state and municipal policies, mandating social segregation between the races and erecting racial exclusions and definitions around civil liberties. Political reconstruction threatened the stability of institutional white supremacy in the South, as the population of black citizens in heavy slave-trading markets far exceeded that of whites. With the Compromise of 1877, Federal troops left Southern states, effectively ending the decade-long era of Reconstruction. Virtually

overnight, Southern legislators constructed policies to exclude African-Americans from participating in political, social, and economic activities with whites. The purpose of Jim Crow and various Black Codes throughout the South was to legally subjugate African-Americans into a marginalized political, social, and economic caste. While the economic effects of a legally subjugated group has been documented (Wilson, 2009; Omi and Winant, 1996; Fustfeld and Bates, 1984) for maintaining a white supremacy, the political effects of this subjugation to maintaining white supremacy in the South warrants exploration as well.

As Progressive reform shifted the political environment from a laissez-faire approach to the economy to a more Keynesian approach to labor and social policy, black philanthropists utilized the uplift ideology and respectability politics as a way of creating a deserving poor within the previously ignored black communities. As the scale and magnitude of the Great Depression necessitated supply-side policies that provided publicly funded jobs, housing, and infrastructure to the struggling nation, elite African-Americans saw the New Deal as an opportunity to lift the masses up and establish a new black citizenship.

### *The New Deal: Liberal Politics and the Great Depression*

The politics of the New Deal embodied a variety of Progressive (liberal) and conservative economic interests lobbying to influence the final policies. The Great Depression that prompted this political economic shift in the United States triggered a series of disasters in both the private and public sectors: approximately



50 percent of all mortgages in 1933 were in default, housing starts had declined by 90 percent since the previous housing boom of 1925, and the unemployment rate was 25 percent when President Roosevelt took office that year (Radford, 2004). The failure of his conservative predecessor, Herbert Hoover, to improve the economy after several policies to subsidize the private sector prompted the Democratic Roosevelt Administration to create more supply-side (i.e., job creation) policies. The political economic shift was also supported by the changing demographics in the country. Industrialization and a major immigration boom two decades prior (ca. 1880s) produced Democratic ward politics in the nation's urban areas. Thus, northern Democrats who supported urban social welfare policies in Congress outnumbered rural-based southern Democrats who dominated the party for a century prior (Radford, 2004). Progressive politics marked the beginning of a technocratic era in planning and policymaking, yet these politics, for all of their liberal window dressing, were still quite conservative with regards to racial and gender issues. The obvious usage of white, Protestant, middle-class values as a normative goal for Progressive policymakers – applied in public housing policy with the community modernism framework – reinforced structural inequalities across racial, gender, and class lines across the nation, as well as set the precedent for the stratification of welfare recipients in modern social policy.

Parson defines community modernism as an era in urban planning emphasizing the value of the built environment in the social reproduction of low-income communities in urban areas (Parson, 2005). Rooted in Park's theories, Progressive

Housers designed public housing developments with expansive public spaces for domestic, political, and economic interaction (Parson, 2005). Community modernism is an approach to urban growth and city planning that incorporated the emerging social work literature regarding the moral inferiority of the poor (O'Connor, 2001). Progressive policies and programs that focused on the built environment as a determinant of social life were reactionary responses to the perceived urban crime waves that occurred after the 1890 Depression (Bayor, 1996). As a result, the concept of “reform” or “settlement” housing – where private philanthropists developed, constructed, and managed affordable housing for the working class – included significant social programs that attempted to acclimate the (largely ethnic white) working class into middle-class norms and values (Radford, 2004). These social programs were mimicked in early public housing developments via the largely management-controlled tenant associations (Parson, 2005).

Industrializing urban areas had growing minority populations, but the success of the community modernism experiment was largely limited to ethnic white communities (Parson, 2005). The reform and settlement programs that predated the PWA Housing Division efforts in Midwestern and Northeastern cities were generally not constructed in “Black Belts” or neighborhoods with significant African-American populations. Reasons why settlement houses did not locate more frequently in African-American neighborhoods are not discussed at length in the literature (however, see Radford, 2004, for discussion on Rockefeller’s Co-

operative Dunbar Homes and the PWA's Harlem River Houses). I posit these reasons are rooted in the individual and institutional discrimination of the period. Individually, the notion of communal living with African-Americans was unattractive for developers and philanthropists as residential integration was considered immoral – the very behavior co-operative housing was attempting to inhibit. Institutionally, African-American neighborhoods (or Black Belts) often contained the worst housing stock on the most marginalized tracts of land (Sugrue, 1996). To invest in the private housing stock was risky, as the surrounding area would also require significant private (or public) investment to generate return on the investment capital (Marcuse, 1971). Further, given the precarious nature of African-American employment in the industrializing city (a precariousness reinforced through individual and institutional discrimination), the operational feasibility of African-American multi-family housing was bleak in the early twentieth century. The individual and institutional discrimination that produced unstable African-American social and economic conditions in the City creates the context for the role of African-Americans in urban disinvestment. As a result, poor African-American communities received lesser political consideration (project funding, materials, planning, programmatic support, publicity) during the New Deal than their white counterparts.

African-American liberal political interests were suppressed in favor of the conservative economic interests. These conservative economic interests were represented by the real estate and banking lobby that were likely to feel the

greatest threat from the Federal government's intervention into property markets via housing finance, construction, and slum clearance (Radford, 2004). New Deal legislation threatened to reduce the profitability of both industries, with increased regulation of housing finance and increased competition in the housing construction and finance markets.

### *Reconstructing Race*

Legally, race in the United States was in a constant state of flux, with different places and spaces allowing for varying levels of black citizenship throughout the country. At the origin of this divide was the peculiar institution of slavery, and the original division of the country into free and slave states. The ability for blacks to transform their citizenship through either political or economic means (either escape to a free state or outright purchase of one's freedom) supports the idea of race as a socially constructed ideology in the United States. Similarly, the ability for those in power (white, upper-class, Protestant men) to racialize processes, events, and spaces supports the idea that the social construct of race is an ever-changing process (i.e., racialization), as opposed to a fixed thing.

It's appropriate to critically analyze race at this juncture in the research as black Atlantans in the 1930s were politically, economically, and socially disadvantaged *relative to black Atlantans fifty years prior*. Specifically, the rollback of Reconstruction-era policies marked a period of dramatic racial reconstruction, in addition to the racialization of previously race-neutral processes of urbanization.

In the 1870s, African-Americans sat on Atlanta's City Council, and prominent blacks had a limited, but necessary, role in the electoral and governing regimes of the city – a pattern that emerged again in the 1950s, as described in Hunter's *Community Power Structure* (Bacote, 1955; Hunter, 1953). The role of African-Americans in Atlanta politics reduced significantly in the next decade due to the rising influence of the Democratic Party in the South, and the growing reliance of the one-party system in urban politics. Anti-Federalism from former Confederate statesmen made the Republican Party less attractive, and these Democratic factions created regulations that limited not only blacks', but also poor whites' political participation. Poll taxes and property requirements made voting an elite activity, and provided the first blatant connection between businessmen and politics in the City.

At the time of University Homes' planning and design, Atlanta's black political participation was at its "nadir" according to esteemed African-American political scientist C.A. Bacote (1955). In 1892, the Atlanta Democratic Executive Committee, as a private political organization, adopted a whites-only primary, preventing blacks from voting in the influential Democratic primaries for municipal and state offices. During the Reconstruction Era in the South (1870-1890), blacks had a tenable amount of political power and legitimacy in urban politics, resulting in two black City Councilmen elected from Atlanta's Third and Fourth Wards in 1870. By 1890, Blacks held positions on the Citywide Democratic Committee, which was now splintered in factions against the growing Populist movement, as national issues of

the unstable economy and prohibition dominated urban politics (Bacote, 1955). The divided Democratic Party created a divided Black vote, and this inability to capture this presumed easy voting bloc, coupled with weakened Republican and Populist parties, allowed the Democrats to enforce the all-white primary in 1892, and again in 1897 after it was temporarily repealed in 1895.

The all-white Democratic primary had the dual purposes of consolidating white political power while also redefining the social construct of race in the post-bellum South. With slavery prohibited with the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments granting African-Americans new rights in the South, whites and blacks grappled with new social and political dynamics in the Southern urban political economy. In the post-Emancipation South, Blacks immediately sought about obtaining new social equality and political legitimacy by mobilizing the resources of existing community and religious organizations. The election of William Finch and George Graham to the Atlanta City Council in 1870 demonstrated the power of a harnessed and targeted “black vote,” and the black population continued to support the Republican candidates in local elections until the withdrawal of Federal troops in 1877. The black vote was particularly powerful in post-bellum Southern municipal elections given the high proportions of black populations at the time. The growing power of a virtually new group of citizens (Southern blacks) was tempered via white supremacist legislature in the South. As Georgia transformed into a one-party state through the physical removal of the Republican Party (via the removal of Federal troops to enforce

Reconstruction policies in the South) and the electoral removal of the Populist Party, blacks were stripped of virtually all political power until the 1946 *King v Chapman* Supreme Court decision that would deem the Georgia all-white Democratic primary unconstitutional. As such, the white primary provided white Southerners with the ability to consolidate their political power around the social construct of race, while relegating blacks to virtually the same political and social rights they had during bondage.

In spite of this second-class citizenship, blacks were as politically active as possible during the period of political nadir to which Bacote refers (Bacote, 1955). Although black Atlantans could not vote in primaries, they were permitted to vote in the general and special elections, and redefined their citizenship through this political action. In 1921, a four million dollar bond issue was on the general election ballot to construct new schools for the area's white children. Black voters organized both registration drives and voter education drives to reject the bond issue twice (Bacote, 1955; Bayor, 1996). The bond issue finally passed on the third try, and \$1.25 million was allocated to the construction of schools for African-American children. With this repetitive and focused political action, black Atlantans were able to redefine their citizenship (and as a result, their racial status in the post-Reconstruction South) through political action.

Political action as a means to redefine racial status and citizenship had its limits as a sustainable strategy. As free blacks grappled with whites over political,

economic, and social power in the post-bellum political economy, white supremacy as an overruling ideology was enforced outside of a legislative structure. Violence permeated all facets of post-bellum Southern life, and race relations were often framed by the varying intensity of violence against blacks (i.e., good race relations meant little visible violence against blacks, poor race relations meant significant visible violence against blacks). Young notes that violence as a form of oppression is systemic, and can be used as a tool of the dominant to keep another group subjugated (Young, 1990). In the case of violence in the post-bellum South, it was used in concert with a political, economic, and social structure that promoted white supremacy and marginalized black interests. Therefore, much of the black political apathy and lack of political participation is tied to the ominous, oppressive presence and threat of violence throughout the post-bellum South. That mere acts of civil disobedience (as an example, the act of Primus King voting in a Atlanta Democratic primary that eventually led to the Supreme Court ruling) required years of planning and alliance with white liberals who could provide police protection, suggested that black political action would always be subjugated to white political interests (Bayor, 1996; Bacote, 1955, Ferguson, 2002).

The planning, construction, and management of the University Homes – and to an extent, the importance of the Black Cabinet within Roosevelt’s Administration – allowed for black Atlantans to control their political interests on a more favorable political scale. That is, black Atlantans were able to bypass the white supremacist local and state power structure that oppressed black political interests with legal



disenfranchisement (the whites-only Democratic primary) and state-sanctioned violence (unequal protection of blacks and enforcement of laws by all-white local police forces) by accessing the Federally-supported New Deal resources (Pritchett, 2008; Ferguson, 2002). While Bacote claims that black political action was at its nadir during the 1930s in Atlanta, by re-adjusting the scale of the political action from the Local and State to the Federal level, we see the black elite who comprised the local advisory committee for University Homes were quite engaged, active, and acquired political legitimacy for African-Americans in the City. This political legitimacy (or political capital) would provide political opportunities in the forms of Federal benefits and pilot social welfare programs in the City for the next half century (Ferguson, 2002).

#### *University Homes: Planning and Design*

On October 18, 1936, the *Atlanta Daily World* (ADW) published an article announcing two major events in Atlanta's African-American community: the impending registration for application to the city's first public housing project for African-Americans, and the arrival of the project's assistant housing manager, Alonzo G. Moron (ADW, 1936). Moron, the former Commissioner of Public Welfare for the Virgin Islands, was a graduate of Hampton Institute (later Hampton University, where he was accepted into Phi Beta Kappa), Brown University (awarded a Masters of Arts in Sociology), and served as an Urban League Fellow at the University of Pittsburgh between 1932 and 1933 (ADW, 1936). The article listed many of Moron's accomplishments, including that he was the first African-

American appointed as a social worker by the Baltimore Emergency Relief Committee. The ADW article quickly (and discretely) identified Moron as a man of the Atlanta upper crust, and thus, as a member of Atlanta's united yet powerless African-American power structure. This inclusion in the African-American power structure was not limited to Atlanta – Moron's elite educational background and political connections qualified him to ascend to the growing black elite power structure in Washington, DC. At the time of the article's publication, there had not been a Federal appointment for the manager of University Homes. By 1939 Moron had performed his duties so well he was in the position to demand a promotion, which his supervisors at the Housing Division quickly awarded him (Letter from H.A. Gray, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

The Advisory Committee of University Housing, a "local citizens advisory committee" (ADW, 1936) had been reconfigured in the wake of John Hope's (president of Morehouse College and committee chair) death in February 1936. Ironically, several elite African-American Atlantans served on this "local committee", despite their non-local addresses – two of the eight committee members resided in New York and Washington, DC, and none of the committee members resided in the Beaver Slide neighborhood that was demolished for the construction of University Homes. However, these committee members all had a vested interest in the public housing development, and eradicating the slums that preceded it, as they were all affiliated with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Atlanta – later known as the Atlanta University Center

Consortium (AUC). John Hope, as president of Morehouse College, proposed University Homes in conjunction with C.F. Palmer (proposing Techwood Homes). The alternative (and paternalistic) motives for constructing University Homes suggested heavy interference from the elite and accommodating African-Americans in Atlanta; the overly paternalistic housing programs of the PWA Housing Division guaranteed that such interference would receive Federal support, both financially and politically. From the onset, the poor African-Americans who resided in the Beaver Slide community prior to the slum clearance, and the working-class African-Americans who would reside in University Homes were virtually excluded from the planning and policymaking processes (Bayor, 1996).

The planning, design, and construction processes for University Homes placed it at the center of black elite life in both Atlanta and Washington, DC. As the first public housing development financed exclusively for black working-class families, it demonstrated an affirmative redefinition of black citizenship, in its inclusionary planning for a largely disenfranchised group. While the New Deal provided poor and working class whites with the political and economic resources to create a white middle class, it simultaneously provided limited political and economic opportunities for a submerged black working class (Ferguson, 2002). The plan for a black public housing development was the result of an all-black advisory, design, and construction committee. While those in charge were most certainly not the same as those who would directly benefit from the new housing, the elite members of the University Homes Advisory Committee were in just a visible a role as the

future tenants, acting as an “Outer Wheel,” or spokesmen, for the African-American race to white Americans (Ferguson, 2002). In fact, advisory committee chairman John Hope was often placed in politically visible roles after being named the first black president of Morehouse College in 1906. The role in the Outer Wheel allowed for privileged African-Americans to gain direct political, economic, and social opportunities within a white supremacist urban political economy, while dictating the opportunities available to the “Inner Wheel,” (Ferguson, 2002), or working- and lower-class blacks.

After the untimely death of John Hope in 1936, Spelman President Florence M. Read was named as interim chairperson of the local advisory committee, and was instrumental to the planning, design, and opening of University Homes. Read, a Mount Holyoke alumnae, served as president of Spelman College from 1927-1953 (Biography of Florence M. Read, Read Papers Archives). During her tenure as Spelman president, Read was an ideal candidate for membership in the black section of the Community Power Structure, the black elite electoral coalition of the Atlanta urban regime, and was thus instrumental in supporting the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. Read’s leadership of the advisory committee provided a great deal of practicality and humanity when structuring the first Federally-financed public housing program for blacks. During the committee meetings, Read often advocated for economic allowances for women, non-traditional family structures, individuals susceptible to structural causes of poverty and discrimination, and other marginalized groups. An adept politician, Read was

able to advocate for these marginalized groups while navigating the covertly racist and gendered political environments between Washington, DC and Atlanta, GA (Minutes of University Homes Advisory Committee, 1937, Read Papers Archives).

As committee chairperson, Read took her leadership responsibilities seriously, organizing, running, and taking the minutes of each of the bi-weekly committee meetings. The advisory committee also took their duties seriously, and understood the gravity of their obligation to the African-American community – both within Atlanta and throughout the United States. At this point, drafts of the Wagner Housing Bill were circulating through the House of Representatives, and the public housing program that PWA piloted had a strong possibility of becoming permanent. University Homes was the first major expenditure in African-American communities at a national level, and in the minds of many, would set a precedent on how (or whether) blacks received national, state, and local resources in the future. The rolling out of the public housing program at University Homes was a simultaneous redefinition of race and citizenship in the South.

One of the first meetings following Hope's death covered topics ranging from the size and location of the development's community center to the political implications of the housing manager's birthplace and pedigree. On March 23, 1936 in the Administrative Building at Atlanta University, Read convened the local advisory committee to discuss the progress of the planned buildings and facilities (non-residential) for the University Homes project (University Homes Advisory

Committee Minutes, 1936, Read Papers Archives). Before the meeting officially started, recently appointed member (and prominent member of Atlanta's "Outer Wheel") Austin Thomas (A.T.) Walden, Esq. debated with fellow committee members Kendall Weisiger (assistant to the President of Southern Bell Company) and Solomon W. Walker (founder and President of Pilgrim Health and Life Insurance) about the feasibility of getting a new public school for black children constructed after University Homes was built. The four committee members seemed aware that financing was the smallest obstacle in the provision of public infrastructure for Atlanta's black communities; the assembly of land – suitable, adjacent sites that were within the black community and did not impinge on white property values were becoming more difficult to assemble as black populations grew.

The aforementioned is an example of the local committee taking advantage of the political opportunities at the Federal scale, and mobilizing these resources into opportunities at the local level. Slum clearance and public housing construction increased population estimates for communities, warranting a re-examination of public goods and service provision. Certain basic public goods were required in the site plans, and the PWA bore the cost of installing new public infrastructure for sewage, water, gas, and electric. University Homes was the only PWA construction in Atlanta to have an on-site power plant, providing reliable and safe electricity to the 675 units. For black communities, these basic utilities had exponential effects, often creating safer and more sanitary neighborhoods. Prior to University Homes,

local officials had done little with regards to service and infrastructure provision in black neighborhoods. Although the community was able to gain political benefits during general and special elections, the majority of planning and budgeting decisions in Atlanta excluded black communities prior to the New Deal. The federal status of the project, and the spaces created within and around the development, afforded political opportunities to both University Homes' tenants and residents of the surrounding community.

To maximize these political opportunities from the Federal level, the local advisory committee deliberated for several months over the qualifications of the housing manager for University Homes. The two candidates for the job were Alonzo Moron and Albert W. Dent (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1936, Read Papers Archives). Dent was preferred to Moron, as Dent was from Atlanta and had briefly returned after an unsuccessful foray into Houston's black real estate market in the 1920s. In 1931, Dent returned to Atlanta to work as alumnus secretary for Morehouse College, thereby developing a close relationship with the late advisory chair John Hope, who served as president of Morehouse College (Notes from John Hope Papers, Hope Presidential Records, 1932). It was Hope who asked Dent to return to Morehouse after his trouble in Houston, likely attempting to use Dent's real estate experience for the University Homes advisory committee and the concurrent slum clearance in the AUC community. In 1932, Dent accepted a job at Dillard University's Flint-Goodridge Hospital in New Orleans, and would eventually become the president of the HBCU (University Homes Advisory Committee Notes

1937, Read Papers Archives). Committee member Kendall Weisiger suggested the development hire both men, an option which Read thought Ickes and the Housing Division staff would consider:

“I think that is one thing they have been working on up there, they told me. If through employing two pretty high-class men – I talked with the acting head of the management division about this – you could get more resources that wouldn’t cost you anything in other ways, it would merit it. If we make use of the University resources, it’s going to need somebody to coordinate them with the community. Take the things that students might do in their leadership – dramatics, and music, and in the nursery school even, the whole range of activities might come from the University. It is going to take somebody there...” (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1936, Read Papers Archives).

Read, and the other committee members, understood that in order to maximize the resources available from Weaver’s Black Cabinet and the New Deal, there would have to be strong local involvement to coordinate and mobilize these resources at the local level. Moron had the stronger background and qualifications (he was a trained social worker), but Dent was favored amongst committee members as he was from Atlanta. According to committee member Eugene Martin (Executive at the Atlanta Life Insurance Company):

“Between the two, I think Mr. Dent would be the better man from a civic standpoint. Moron is not an Atlantan and Dent is. So far as getting cooperation, that has some bearing. I do not mean that a person from out of the city could not get cooperation. Moron’s home is the Virgin Islands. At least he was born there; I guess he spent most of his life here. Mr. Dent would be able to get more cooperation from the city at large, of doctors, etc, than someone out of the city” (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1936, Read Papers Archives).



“Cooperation” with existing resources in the City required both intimate knowledge of the local scene, and the proper social background (middle, or upper-class African-American with a minimum of a college education, preferably with an advanced degree). The post-Depression public relief resources for black communities were primarily private philanthropic and religious organizations, most of which were led by men and women of similar social pedigree. The strategy of the advisory committee appeared to be to promote an uplift ideology, both within and around the University Homes development. The significance of Federal resources to local black communities was already apparent in the planning and design processes, and would surely continue to improve once the homes were constructed.

The same March meeting continued with discussion of the development’s construction activities (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1936, Read Papers Archives). Weaver, an economist by training, was adamant about black architects, construction workers, masons, landscapers, and other relevant laborers having fair representation on PWA Housing Division projects, particularly those designated for African-American residents (Pritchett, 2008). It was noted in the black community that African-Americans felt the Great Depression more harshly and for a longer duration than whites in the country. Albert Dent’s early departure from Houston’s booming real estate market in 1927 suggests that even professional blacks were not immune to the effects of the Depressions’ racial bias. The committee members discussed the difficulty a group of black painters had in

organizing as a legal trade union (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives). Specifically, the civil disobedience these painters encountered within the Fulton County administrative departments, as well as the racial discrimination they received from the white labor unions. The two groups worked in concert to promote and maintain the difference between white and black work, that is, by racializing the labor market through racial segmentation. The denial of black painters to organize as a legal union, and thereby receive better wages and legitimacy in the labor market, promoted a difference in wages on the basis of race. These acts of civil disobedience within the white supremacist power structure in the South sustained the structure and the marginalization of blacks, by snubbing Federal legislation and privileging State interests. Without full enfranchisement, Southern blacks had little recourse to these open acts of local and State defiance.

Read and the committee, however, were using the new Federal relationship and the visibility of University Homes to suppress this civil disobedience and begin redefining the racial politics in the South. Read had taken it upon herself to visit national labor heads when she was in Washington, DC, in an effort to get the black painters unionized (Note from Read's Personal Records, 1937, Read Papers Archives). Her efforts were stymied as local unions in Atlanta accused one painter of having communist affiliation. After the Herndon trial in 1932, accusations of black communists suggested anarchist leanings or other radical political connotations. However, Read remained optimistic that the black painters would

triumph in the union battle, increasing the already impressive number of black laborers working on the project. Per Read, two-thirds of the plasterers were blacks, and one-third of the brick masons (Letter to Robert C. Weaver, Read Papers Archives, 1936).

In January 1937, the advisory committee (and the recently hired Moron) met with the district manager for University and Techwood Homes (the PWA Housing Division project for white residents), and a PWA Housing Division staff member (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives). The committee was meeting to set rental rates for the 675 units at University Homes, which would in turn set the Federal minimum and maximum income limits for the development. Table 3.1 shows the proposed rent schedule for University Homes, both with and without the utility allowance.

**Table 3.1: January 1937 Proposed Rent Schedule for University Homes Units**

# of Bedrooms	Monthly Rent	Monthly Rent with Utility Allowance
2	\$12.32	\$17.37
3	\$16.32	\$22.12
4	\$20.32	\$26.77
5	\$22.82	\$29.77

Committee members S.W. Walker and L.D. Milton (bank cashier at Citizen's Trust Company and Economics professor at Atlanta University) debated whether these rents were too high for black Atlantans, and whether it was feasible to set rents at this rate if they required income limits that would only include "the top 2%" of the

black Atlanta population (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives). Committee members did not feel the rents were particularly high, as the average four-bedroom rent for a wooden house in a black neighborhood was approximately \$20 to \$25 per month depending on the proximity to the CBD. Professor Milton argued that it was not sustainable for the black population to continue renting homes at such high rates, while wages remained artificially low for black workers. By reducing the rent burden for black families, these renters could potentially save for a home down payment, and start to gain wealth and equity in the housing market. Using the political capital to gain economic capital in the black community was yet another benefit of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure.

Non-traditional family structure and the role of working women as household leaders were also discussed during this meeting, and it was at this point we see the racial and gender politics within Atlanta play out. District supervisor D.A. Calhoun argued with Florence Read about non-traditional family and gender roles, as Read advocated for more flexible admittance procedures than those at Techwood Homes. While Calhoun indicated that each unit must contain one “legal family” – that is the immediate family of a married couple, Read countered that black families were often comprised of dependents outside of natural offspring, such as a cousin or aunt:

“I think you will find quite frequently that colored families are very generous about helping friends and relatives. Perhaps they have just taken

in a girl of high school or college age who got her living and helped with the children” (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives).

This common survival strategy in the black community allowed for black families to survive in spite of the economic, political, and social disparities with whites.

Black families, due to low wages for black workers, were often comprised of at least two working adults, with other family members or close friends exchanging child care services for room, board, or other goods and services (Stack, 1974).

Read also advocated for non-traditional family structures and gender equality with a suggestion to make allowances for single-person applications:

“I want to ask whether you have allowed for one person. I wish to make a stand for that. When the Advisory Committee talked about the 2-room units, it seems to me we did have in mind the question of the lone female. I don’t see why it isn’t performing a useful service to society to permit her to occupy a 2-room apartment in the housing. There are some school teachers, for instance. They cannot have a home of their own if their income does not permit it. If they live with another family it is a hard life. I do not see why a housing unit should not be –why they should not be permitted to live in a housing project” (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives).

The topic of black, single women struggling to carve out their economic and social independence in the post-Depression South was close to Read’s heart, as she was a single woman herself, who was once a teacher. Her plea was met with immediate dismissal during the committee meeting, with Calhoun indicating it was better to help “three or four people” than just help one, and Moron going so far as to suggest permitting single families into the development would promote the dissolution of black families. The Progressive ideology that guided the PWA Housing Division

policy prohibited single persons, and strongly discriminated against single-parent households. The purpose of public housing was to help poor families out of poverty by allowing them to save for home down payments. What Read suggested was impossible at the time, particularly for the first black public housing development. However, her advocacy for women and non-traditional family structures did not go unheard. The PWA Housing Division staff allowed the University Homes' Tenant Selection Committee to place single-family households on a special waiting list. Once married couples were given priority for the apartments, single-family households would be given an opportunity to apply for the extra units (University Homes Advisory Committee Minutes, 1937, Read Papers Archives).

*University Homes: Management and Tenant Associations*

The elite influence and privileging of middle-class norms and behaviors was not limited to the planning processes. Implementation of public housing policy was subject to this top-down mentality as well, as evidenced by Alonzo Moron's activities during his tenure as housing manager. Moron was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior (Harold Ickes), but was likely referred by Ickes' second-in-command, Robert C. Weaver. Ickes served as administrator of the Public Works Administration (PWA) Housing Division, and Weaver was promoted to Ickes' advisor on Negro Affairs in October of 1934 (Pritchett, 2008). Weaver's educational background (a Bachelor's Degree from Dunbar College and Harvard for

a PhD in Economics) and privileged family connections placed him in the new African-American elite in post-Reconstruction Washington DC.

These connections, along with the symbolic and tangible benefits of the public housing development, made University Homes a political opportunity structure for the residents, and to a lesser extent, for those living in the surrounding community. As a federally-financed and managed housing development, University Homes residents had direct access to a wide range of networks and benefactors that provided opportunities for the residents and community, along with tangible financial, social, and political benefits. Moron's years of social work experience, and the symbolic and political importance of this first black federal project in the post-Reconstruction era South, placed University Homes at the forefront of housing and social policy in the United States, not only for African-Americans, but also for other races and ethnicities. As the manager of this nationwide social experiment in public housing, Moron carefully, and somewhat paternalistically, oversaw the social activities of the tenant association and public housing residents. However, Moron's guidance provided the structure for residents to take advantage of the unique space and position of the public housing development in the evolving urban political economy, mobilizing these new resources to sustain the development as a political opportunity structure.

Three months after the April 1937 opening of University Homes, the public housing development was 80 percent occupied (Letter to H.A. Gray, Moron Papers, 1937,

AHA Archives). One, two, and three-bedroom units were full, and the less popular (at least, for the income requirements set by the Public Works Administration Housing Division) four and five-bedroom units remained available (Letter to H.A. Gray, Moron Papers, 1937, AHA Archives). The vacancy of four and five bedroom units – that is, the units for the larger, and likely poorer, black families, shows one of the early biases in US social and housing policy – rewarding the deserving poor. In the case of the University Homes Tenant Selection Office, applicants for four-bedroom units needed a monthly income of at least \$66 (or, \$1,082 in 2013 dollars); conversely, the income for a family with three or more children could not exceed \$216 per month (or \$3,542 in 2013 dollars) (AHA Annual Report, AHA Archives). Although most black families at the time were headed by two wage-earners, the pay for “Negro work” (e.g., laborers and domestics) in 1930s Atlanta was well below that of whites, preventing larger black families from meeting the minimum income requirements for larger units in public housing.

In spite of this early example of “cream-skimming”, or separating the upwardly mobile working class from the intransigent poor, Moron was eager to make examples of the University Homes residents for the City of Atlanta, as well as the nation. That is, Moron wanted to show that the model citizenship found in public housing tenants extended to black families as well, in the hopes of refuting some of the negative images and stereotypes of blacks that had emerged since the rollback of Reconstruction policies. In May of 1937, Moron selected eight female tenants - one from each of the “blocks” of University Homes, with two representatives for



Blocks “A,” “B,” and “F,” due to their sizes – to act as the first informal tenant association (Letter to Editors of Tenant Bulletin, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). He instructed the women to organize the first party to introduce tenants to one another, at the expense of the managerial staff. The Public Works Administration Housing Division provided no funds for social activities and most recreational facilities; therefore, management staff and tenants were solely responsible for both organizing and funding any social activities. Given the lower wages of black tenants relative to white tenants, there was an immediate racial disparity between the social activities in the segregated housing developments (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). As mentioned earlier, however, these racial disparities provide ample opportunities to mobilize resources and create formalized community institutions out of informal communal survival strategies (Stack, 1974; McAdam, 1999).

The emphasis Moron placed on getting University Homes residents to organize and assemble were risky at the time. The PWA’s Housing Division developments faced rampant accusations from the real estate lobby as being hotbeds of communism, fostering communal living and proletariat organizing via tenant association meetings (Parson, 2005). These accusations were heightened in Atlanta, as the Angelo Herndon case of 1932 equated all black political activity with that of radical, communist activity (Harmon, 1996). Herndon was charged with inciting an insurrection in July of 1932, and began a five-year crusade against the Georgia legal system, following his swift conviction. This culminated in the US Supreme Court

case of *Herndon v Lowry*, a ruling that helped to redefine race in 1930s Georgia, via new political organizing rights and protections for African-Americans. During the 1930s, even the elite philanthropic black organizations (i.e., Neighborhood Union) faced police harassment and raids in an effort to suppress communist (and black labor) organizing (Ferguson, 2002). This suppression effectively eliminated a means of political action and engagement for working class black Atlantans.

Moron, aware that the local authorities were wary to interfere with University Homes activities given the “Federal status” of the residents (in spite of the 1935 George-Healey Act officially transferring residents to local jurisdictions), took advantage of this positioning by frequently organizing assemblies, parties, and political speakers for residents (Personal Notes and Letters of Alonzo G. Moron, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). Similar to how Read subjugated the local biases of labor unions by advocating for black interests to national labor leaders, Moron utilized the perceived Federal status of black residents to rebuff local and State police efforts to suppress black organizing.

The first block party organized for University Homes residents by the management-selected tenant association was done so to recruit more (particularly, male) residents to join the tenant association, and to raise money for a library within the University Home development (University Homes Tenant Bulletin, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). It is unclear whether Moron or the tenant association was responsible for deciding what the receipts from the block party funded. However, it is clear that the number of attendees of the block party

exceeded the number of residents living in University Homes, suggesting that residents of the surrounding Beaver Slide community partook in the festivities (Letter to H.A. Gray, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). The results of this first tenant association event was approximately \$140 (approximately \$3,000 in 2013 dollars) towards furnishings, books, and periodicals for the library and several photographs (sent to the PWA's Housing Division's publicity office) showing thousands of African-Americans gathering and socializing peacefully, respectfully, and without incident. Moron would send these types of publicity photos often to Washington, D.C., attempting to showcase the University Homes residents as role models for all poor and working-class African-Americans (Letters to Walton Oslo, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

While the funding and creation of a University Homes library may not have been driven by the residents, it had far-reaching effects for both residents and the community. Libraries, like all public facilities in Atlanta, were segregated by race, with black facilities intentionally subpar to those of whites (either through construction materials, availability, location, staffing, or resources). Although a public library system had been available to white Atlantans since 1902, black Atlantans were unable to take part in this system until the Carnegie Library was constructed in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood in 1921 (Bayor, 1996). Although Andrew Carnegie had donated money for both libraries in 1902, local leaders, unable to find a suitable site in a black neighborhood, refused to utilize these funds while denying blacks access to the (white) library system. Thus, the entire black

community had only one public library in Atlanta, and it was primarily accessible to those who lived on the more affluent east side of the city. For those in the southern and western districts of the city, the library at University Homes would have been a welcome resource. The issue of poor blacks and public housing residents' access to public libraries in Atlanta would remain a relevant and pressing topic - thirty years later (Public Housing in Atlanta Survey, 1966, Atlanta Community Relations Commission Papers).

Another much needed facility in the University Homes development was the large playground that was shared by all of the housing blocks. Each apartment building had a smaller, centrally located play area that allowed small children to play while their mothers (or neighbors) monitored them from the apartment units. The larger playground was the milieu of the pre-teen and teenage children. Outside of the standard play equipment (slides, bars, etc), this playground was equipped with a baseball field, a workshop for woodworking, and the development's recreation center. Moron wrote to PWA's Housing Division staff:

"Following out the principle of using at University Homes whatever existing services the community offered, we requested a Playground Director from the City's Department of Parks and Playgrounds. The request was received very graciously and referred to the Works Progress Administration who promptly supplied us with a very good Playground Director, Mr. Scott Edwards" (Memo to Housing Division, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

Moron requesting from the City first, and the subsequent need to hire someone from the Works Progress Administration, shows the development's ability to

formalize or legitimate these racialized and disparate public spaces in black communities. Prior to University Homes, black playgrounds and parks numbered less than 10 in the City of Atlanta, and the number of black Playground Directors was likely half that, if any existed at all. Hiring Edwards as the Playground Director at University Homes created more formal black spaces in the city, and allowed for black residents to continue redefining their citizenship with the New Deal programs.

Moron continued in his memo to the Housing Division about the use of the large playground, and the activities offered by Edwards, in the context of the surrounding Beaver Slide community:

“An interesting question arose as to whether or not this large playground at University Homes should be closed to children from the neighborhood. To date this has not become a problem and the tenants have not raised the question of their children playing with outsiders and the Management has taken the position that as long as no friction develops between the two groups and as long as the playground has not been fenced in, it will be well to let matters remain as they are, for it would be difficult to keep outsiders from the grounds unless there was a fence with gates which could be controlled by the Director. Within the next few weeks, however, a fence will be erected around this large playground and it is our hope that we shall gradually be able to restrict use of this space to adults and children living in University Homes. This will be with some regrets as this particular play area is the only play space available for colored children within this neighborhood which is about one and a half miles square” (Memo to Housing Division, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

The neighborhood surrounding University Homes (and the slums that were cleared to construct the development) contained African Americans that were much poorer than the residents of the development. In order to prevent a negative externality from more children using the facilities than anticipated, the fence provided benefits

for those that are considered deserving, and the undeserving poor continued to go without. This appeared to be the only divisive decision during Moron's tenure at University Homes, one that exacerbated the class divisions in the black community. Moron shifted the blame of this decision to erect a fence from the local advisory committee and the black elite, and instead insisted that Federal employee Scott Edwards requested limiting playground activities to the children of University Homes' residents only (Letter to Editors of Tenant Bulletin, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

In a September 1937 letter to M. A. Hornsby, Chief of Police and Captain T.J. Malcolm, Chief of Atlanta's Traffic Bureau, Moron followed up from a previous week's meeting about traffic signals and signage in and around the University Homes development (University Homes Tenant Association Notes, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). One of the qualifiers that made Beaver Slide a "slum" was the lack of formalized streets and sidewalks, in addition to the lack of public services in the area. The PWA installed the necessary infrastructure to provide utilities for the neighborhood, but recognition from local authorities to provide public services to its communities in spite of the residents' race did not occur immediately after the April 1937 opening. The City had installed sidewalks and paved streets as agreed in the original lease between the PWA and the City, but traffic control and police enforcement of traffic regulations in the neighborhood were insufficient according to Moron (Letter to Chief Hornsby and Captain Malcolm, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

Moron requested a traffic light outside of the development, at the intersection of Fair and Chestnut streets, to curb the speeds of commuters and allow neighborhood children to safely cross the street to the local school. In addition to the traffic light, Moron requested a stop sign at the intersection of Leonard Street and Greensferry Avenue, the latter which was recently widened and transformed into a main artery between the east and west sides of the City. At the intersection of the new stop sign, Moron also wanted motorcycle police stationed to deter speeding “bugs” or private bus lines that were repeated offenders of traffic laws (Letter to Captain Malcolm, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

Police presence in black communities was a contentious subject in Atlanta, and throughout the South after the end of Reconstruction, and Federal troop protection. Police officers in Atlanta were all white, and the secondary status of black citizens in the city prohibited equal application of the law and its penalties. Inviting more police scrutiny into the University Homes community seemed antithetical to the theory of public housing as a political opportunity structure for black residents. Moron was hoping that by engaging the police with the support of the Federal government (the letter which he addressed to the respective Chiefs was on official Department of the Interior stationary) would legitimize his requests, and hopefully, help legitimate the citizenship status of the black community (Letters to Chief Hornsby and Captain Malcolm, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). He offered to work in concert with the Police and Traffic Bureaus, indirectly suggesting that

Management would not interfere if arrests were made against residents of the development and surrounding community (Letters to Chief Hornsby and Captain Malcolm, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). The hiring of black police officers was still a decade away, but the steps Moron took started redefining the relationship between the local white power structure and black citizens in Atlanta.

One of Moron's final and most ambitious projects was the construction of an auditorium within the University Homes development. There was only one City Auditorium for black use – again, located in the affluent Sweet Auburn neighborhood, thus church basements and privately owned homes acted as substitutes throughout the City. Placing an auditorium for public use in the middle of the AUC community would encapsulate the public housing development as political opportunity structure. Immediately following the opening, Moron pleaded with Housing Division staff in Washington to allocate more funding to construct an auditorium. In a July 1937 letter (three months after opening day), Moron requested:

“[A]n auditorium which can be used for large group meetings and which will give the tenants an opportunity to express themselves and allow us to abandon gradually the idea of having all activities originate from the Management or from the steering committee. It is our sincere hope that the plans for an auditorium at University Homes now being considered by your office will be approved at an early date and then we can engage in more worthwhile activities than an occasional party or dance” (Letter to H.A. Gray, 1937, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).



This request was not immediately acted on, and over the course of the first year, Moron and the tenant association collected money during parties and raffles to construct the auditorium. There appeared to be an agreement amongst both Management and residents that an auditorium would greatly improve resident social and political life, by allowing for larger and more inclusive parties and more distinguished speakers interested in orating to a larger group. After much hard work, the Auditorium was opened in 1938, and most of the development's events took place within the building. During the massive voter registration following the *King v. Chapman* decision in 1946 when 18,000 black voters were registered in fifty-one days, the auditorium at University Homes acted as a registration space. On the first day of registration at the auditorium, 750 blacks were enfranchised in three hours (Bacote, 1955). Again, the political opportunity structure of the public housing development (in this example, the resources of the local community and Federal government provided a safe public space for black civil disobedience) created political benefits for local residents of both University Homes and the surrounding community.

After the passage of the Wagner Housing Act in September 1937, University Homes' residents, along with the management staff and advisory committee, were fearful of losing the Federal protection of the Housing Division ownership, and the loss of political capital that accrued in the short year since the development opened. Moron discussed his fears in a memo to Florence Read and members of the

advisory committee with regards to different ways of transferring ownership from the Federal to the state and local level:

“While these first fifty-two projects are more or less a novelty and have that appeal at the present time, it must be recognized that the changes in policies after they have been in operation for a period of time will have a very definite effect on the demand for housing of this type from the group of people most in need of it and also upon the ability of the Authority to secure and keep qualified personnel for the management of the projects...Those of us who are living in the south should be aware of the possible danger to Housing for Negroes if management of these projects is turned over to local Housing Authorities. At present the Housing Authority would be a creature of the state which means that to some extent it would be dominated by the same views and prejudices which characterize the actions of the state affecting Negroes. There would also be a tendency to depart from National standards of maintenance and operation and sink to the levels of local standards of administration and maintenance of public property” (Letter to Florence Read, 1938, Moron Papers, AHA Archives).

In several letters found amongst Moron’s papers, residents sent pleas to the local advisory committee, the management’s office, and even to the Housing Division in Washington, DC in an attempt to keep Moron as housing manager after the development was leased to the newly formed Atlanta Housing Authority. Moron’s guidance in establishing and maintaining the tenant association, the men’s, women’s, girls’ and boys’ clubs, the Federal Credit Union, the account for tenant activities and supplies, and the entertainment and political speakers was noted during these letters. One resident spoke of how a lease to Atlanta for sixty years should require the mandate of black management and supervision for sixty years (Handwritten Unsigned Letter, Moron Papers, AHA Archives). In spite of this resident-led rally to keep Moron as housing manager, he was let go in 1940. After his departure, the tenant association took a more active role in organizing

activities, continuing Moron's legacy of uplifting the masses through education, job training, and domestic assistance. The departure of Moron marks the end of the top-down mobilization of public housing development as political opportunity structure, and marks the beginning of a more radical, tenant-driven mobilization of resources through the development's tenant association.

The end of the top-down mobilization approach of public housing developments as political opportunity structures in the 1950s coincides with larger shifts in black political engagement in Atlanta at the time. This approach to mobilization using a black political ideology that required an enlightenment of the masses was simply not sustainable following the enactment of the *King v Chapman* decision in 1946. Reed argues that disenfranchisement increased the costs of political participation, thus limiting the political action of the non-elite African-American population (Reed, Jr., 1999). However, with the emergence of the black vote and a substantial increase in black popular political participation, came the requisite co-option of this voting bloc by Atlanta's new urban regime, led by longtime mayor William B. Hartsfield (Harmon, 1996). However, the urban regime was inclusive primarily of these elite interests – specifically those interests privileged by African American civic, business, and religious leaders (Stone, 1989). Yet again, this exclusion of the black popular interests provided a vulnerability in Atlanta's political system that permitted the public housing development as a political opportunity structure for its tenants and surrounding community.

Following the passage of the 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts, and the commencement of the Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal programs, the population of public housing was altered dramatically to include more low-income displacees from the aforementioned federal programs. These displacees were not subject to the strict admittance standards of the public housing program, and created a population with non-traditional family structures, lower incomes, and less formal ties to the growing black (elite) electoral coalition within the urban regime (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). The displacement of black families, particularly those headed by black women from the new housing acts, created new claims on the State in a search for spatial justice in Atlanta. The spatial consciousness that emerges from these displacees in the public housing development is the direct result of the exclusionary planning and political processes that acted as a proxy for the racial disenfranchisement that existed before the *King v Chapman* decision. While the traditional (or elite) black political movement focused on outcomes and justice in space, radical approaches to black politics focused on processes, or justice through space. The latter movement marks the next transformation of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure (see Chapter 4).

The University Homes' case helps to illustrate both the capabilities and the limitations of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. The capabilities of the structure are evident – with the creation of the structure at a time when popular enfranchisement was limited to white Atlantans, the public housing development provided the resources and attention of the State for the

disenfranchised black population. The University Homes' library would serve the larger black population that was only permitted to borrow books from the Auburn Avenue branch just east of the CBD. Further, the installation of traffic lights, paved sidewalks, sewer lines, and the University Homes power plant provided public goods and services to black Atlantans in the Beaver Slide neighborhood. However, the top-down approach to political mobilization limited the inclusiveness and representation of tenant and community interests that were largely shaped by an elite housing management and advisory committee. In spite of comprising the first tenant association that Moron selected, women were largely excluded from making decisions and determining grievances for the tenant association. The autonomy of the University Homes' tenant association emerged once men were elected to its leadership positions, although these men did little to provide a more inclusive environment, keeping with the established goals of the uplift ideology movement favored by Atlanta's black elite. Changes in Atlanta's political system, particularly the establishment of the Atlanta Housing Authority as redevelopment agent for the Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal programs, would provide new political opportunities for public housing residents and transform the political opportunity structure into a more inclusive movement.

#### **Chapter 4: Perry Homes: The Northwest Advocates**

This chapter will discuss the shift of public housing developments as political opportunity structures in postwar Atlanta, specifically how population shifts within and around the developments created new interests for the developments. Using the case of Perry Homes as an example, this chapter further examines the impact of exclusionary planning on poor, African-Americans' welfare within the postwar city and how the development responded to these local challenges. At the State and Federal levels, the battle over the 1954 Housing Act's (e.g., Urban Renewal) funding and administration, and the simultaneous ruling on the *Brown v Board of Education* case, prompted spatial and institutional rearrangements in Atlanta. Throughout this postwar period, the politics of race in the city were internally unstable but externally presented as collegial and progressive, with Mayor William B. Hartsfield notoriously declaring Atlanta as the "city too busy to hate" (Bayor, 1996). The formation of the bi-racial coalition and relegation of African-Americans to the electoral coalition as opposed to the governing coalition of Atlanta's urban regime created strong racial divisions within the city spatially, socially, economically, and politically (Stone, 1989).

This chapter will also mark a new phase in the evolution of public housing as political opportunity structures. After having strong managerial influence on both the political opportunities available and the interests supported by the tenant association in the development's early years, residents began taking on a more

independent political identity that was reflected in tenant association initiatives and organizational formations. After the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision prohibiting the all-white primary in Georgia, African-American political legitimacy and power increased significantly in Atlanta, whereby the black population comprised 27 percent of the total electorate (Harmon, 1996). This newfound political and social identity within the city briefly shifted power relations, and directly led to the token inclusion of the upper-class black coalition within Atlanta's urban regime (Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). Using this growing political power as leverage, tenant associations increased in legitimacy as political units and public housing developments provided a platform for the interests of the low-income African-American population. The case of Perry Homes demonstrates the typical postwar Atlanta public housing development, from its segregated origins at the planning stages to its radical responses to the spatial, social, and economic disparities that resulted from the exclusionary planning process.

#### *The Postwar Housing Acts and the Creation of the Northwest Ghetto*

Prior to the end of World War II, the Atlanta Housing Authority and the Public Works Administration constructed eight public housing developments in the city; four for whites and four for blacks (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). Following the plan of Charles Palmer and other downtown business interests, all of the first phase of public housing construction occurred in areas within or south of the Central Business District. The purpose of the developments was to clear the existing slums and create an environment conducive for additional investment.

Tenant selection for these first developments was a multi-stage process, with applicants first screened for income requirements (having to meet a minimum annual income based on family size, and not to exceed a maximum annual income), and then subject to a series of interviews and home visits to determine whether the current home was substandard and if the family dynamic was stable (employed head of household, children enrolled in school). These early developments attracted the submerged middle class – those who were unable to save enough for a home down payment as a result of an unstable economy or tight capital markets – but may be able to ascend to the middle class with government assistance. Single parent households were not eligible to apply, and the entrenched poor (unemployed, disabled, etc) were also prohibited by income minimums.

The second phase of public housing construction (1953-1957) focused less on the quality of the public housing resident and more about the quantity. During this period, the Atlanta Housing Authority constructed its largest developments (Carver, Harris, and Perry Homes) to house approximately 12,000 residents within 2,500 units. Carver and Perry Homes were constructed for black residents in the southwestern and northwestern sections of the city, respectively; Carver contained 990 units and Perry contained 1,000 (with an additional building of 140 units constructed in 1959). Harris Homes contained 510 units and was located southwest of the CBD (AHA Annual Report, 1958, AHA Archives).



Changes at the federal level enabled local authorities to create more segregated geographies within the city using public housing developments (Hirsch, 1998). The 1949 Housing Act was the shift to the conservative ideology of housing policy. Title I (slum clearance), removed the equivalent elimination clause of the 1934 and 1937 Acts, which replaced one demolished slum home with one new unit of housing. Title III provided funding for the construction of 800,000 units of public housing. However, due to active propaganda from the real estate, banking, and construction industries, very little public housing was built in the 1950s as the “Red Scare” had rebranded the communal modernism experiment of active public housing developments into “hotbeds of socialism” (Parson, 2005, 28). Further, Title II provided increased funding for the Federal Housing Administration. The FHA during the 1934 Housing Act had explicit guidelines that enforced residential segregation through the provision of mortgages to neighborhoods/properties with residential covenants. In spite of the removal of this language through the 1948 *Shelley v Kraemer* ruling, this conservative housing policy did nothing to ameliorate the past inequities of the earlier act. In fact, the failure of integration attempts in public housing, as well as the explosive violence of communal riots in the North and Midwest, likely led to the race-neutral language of the 1949 Housing Acts, and later acts, which would perpetuate these residential inequities.

The marginalization of African American communities, and their residents, was the result of the 1954 Housing Act and the Urban Renewal program. These conservative programs privileged business interests, particularly commercial and

residential real estate developers in the deindustrializing city. This policy was intended to create new spaces of investment by “renewing” (demolishing) the less profitable and marginalized areas in and around the Central Business District (CBD). It is in this act we see the end of housing production as a social welfare policy, as this marks the first turn away from US housing policy’s attempt to solve the housing problem of the industrializing city. The program cleared hundreds of thousands of homes in predominantly African-American communities and re-segregated this group into marginal, isolated areas in the deindustrializing city. Unlike previous slum clearance/public housing relocations (i.e., the 1937 Housing Act), this transition did not allow the relocated group to make claims on the State through newfound citizenship. The effect, in the case of African-Americans, was quite the opposite. While both African-Americans and the ethnic whites that inhabited the slums in both rounds of slum clearance lost the use and (partial) exchange value of their homes, the PWA and early public housing developments were planned within the liberal ideology of community modernism (Parson, 2005). Thus, even as the ethnic, working-class whites were losing their homes, they were advancing towards the American concept of “citizenship” – active participation (patriotism through engaging with the State), equal access to public amenities and goods (residential rights), and gainful employment (individual achievement). The public housing developments that would become the “second ghetto” - or contiguous tracts of impoverished, African-American communities (Hirsch, 1998) – would have limited access to these citizenship programs. Thus, in racializing public housing, poor African-Americans were made invisible to the State, as marginalized

as the land on which their communities were rebuilt. This marginalization from the conservative policy of the 1954 Housing Act transformed the purpose of African-American political struggles, and was finally manifested in the social movements of the 1960s. In Atlanta, these social movements developed in a variety of political spaces across the city, including the public housing developments.

The creation of public space in the 1950s through Federal policy shows the influence of racial and economic tension in declining urban centers. African-Americans, the target of this particular variety of slum clearance, were “warehoused” or “contained” (Hirsch, 1998; Sugrue, 1996; Manning Thomas, 1997) in high-rise public housing developments on isolated tracts of land with “superblocks” of open, concrete space – a visible reminder of unfunded green spaces, parks, and recreational spaces for African-American residents (Hirsch, 1998). The slums, their former home – where few public housing developments were built given the liberties of the slum clearance clause of Title I via its separation from public housing construction (Title III) – were demolished and used to create a safe (non-Black) and consumptive space for cities’ central business districts. The emphasis on urban redevelopment in the first housing act is the last attempt to keep cities as the production sites of the national economy. However, the overwhelming success of the suburbanization process (via the strengthened FHA guaranteeing home mortgages) created different outcomes for Blacks and Whites (Sugrue, 1996). These separate, and unequal, processes of creation and

outcomes of space produced the racialization of public space in American cities.

“Raced” space occurs when the normative definition of public space uses is exclusive to white, middle-class residents (Slocum, et al, 2011). The differences in spaces were maintained through systemic and institutionalized residential segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). While Jim Crow legislation provided “separate but equal” public spaces and institutions for blacks and whites in Atlanta until the mid 1950s, Hartsfield’s regime managed to integrate the city while increasing residential segregation – creating de facto, as opposed to de jure, raced spaces.

The 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts provided superficial “solutions” for problems of urban disinvestment and inadequate housing for African-American and other minority communities (Marcuse, 1978). These two Federal policies reflect the local shifts from redevelopment of the urban CBD to its renewal (Hirsch, 1998). In spite of the Federal support to cities, the support for suburbanization policies was even greater with regards to funding levels (Manning Thomas, 1997). According to June Manning Thomas, the relatively low funding for urban redevelopment and renewal created structural tensions that inhibited the success of these programs: “[p]eople were leaving the central city by the tens of thousands, a process that redevelopment did not slow” (Manning Thomas, 1997, 80).

The failure to keep populations (both residential and employer) within urban boundaries – within the context of an increasing African-American population –

created aggressive urban growth machines that resisted the integration of African-Americans into their political regime and economic development (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Therefore, the urban redevelopment and renewal programs mark the beginning of institutionalized raced spaces in the urban landscape. The shift from redevelopment to renewal occurred when governments were unable to recoup the high costs of demolition, and private investment continued to flow towards the suburbs. A profitable transformation of slum housing into middle- and working-class housing was not possible with the targeted specificity of the Title I funds. Real estate developers were weary of investing in the unstable city, particularly when returns on suburban residential development were so lucrative (Kaplan, 1966). Calls were made for a more comprehensive redevelopment program, one that would implicitly account for the individual and institutionalized racism of the urban political economy. Per Kaplan, in his study of urban redevelopment in Newark, this Federal redevelopment program would reconcile the contradictions of Title I and urban race relations in the following way:

“The ideal solution, from NHA [Newark Housing Authority]’s point of view, was to tear down the entire ghetto and build a “city within a city” ....[the locus and contours of a redevelopment site]... were dictated by a search for natural boundaries (a railroad, a park, and a major thoroughfare) to contain the project as a community within itself and protect it from its immediate environment” (Kaplan, 1966, 237-238).

As the passage shows, the longevity of urban renewal and redevelopment plans on processes of urban growth and urban race relations stem from the general credo of local administrations during the 1950s – to contain and isolate African-American

residents to areas of the city which were of low or marginal use, while maximizing the investment potential of the CBD and its adjacent areas. The relegation of African-Americans to marginalized physical and political spaces within the city were a direct result of the Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal programs.

The Urban Renewal program differed from Urban Redevelopment in that it called for comprehensive plans that outlined visions, goals, and renewal areas, instead of focusing on the costs of redevelopment projects (Kaplan, 1966). Section 701 of the 1954 Housing Act funded comprehensive planning reports and education - the formal institutionalization of urban planning. Urban race relations were literally externalized from the bureaucratic structure, and planning departments and housing authorities implicitly sustained racial segregation and inequality through the exclusive and technocratic creation and implementation of renewal plans (Manning Thomas, 1997). This exclusionary and overly technical approach to planning in the 1950s strengthened the processes of residential and social segregation in the post-industrial city.

The City of Atlanta institutionalized its ability to create a new racial geography following the expansion of black suffrage in the city, the prohibition of racial covenants, and the *Brown v Board of Education* decision that integrated public schools by establishing the Citizens Advisory Council for Urban Renewal (CACUR). This mayoral-appointed committee of socially prominent businessmen existed as an independent body to advise the Atlanta Housing Authority on its Urban Renewal

projects. The responsibilities of CACUR included site selection, creation of comprehensive plans, and holding stakeholder meetings to gain political support. In concert with the Atlanta Housing Authority's Urban Renewal Policy Committee, these groups acted as an informal governing coalition for urban renewal planning during Hartsfield's regime. While neither group was publicly elected, the bodies were likewise not independent of the mayor's office, and benefitted greatly from Hartsfield's patronage.

The Bureau of Planning (BoP) and the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) were two other bodies that allowed for Hartsfield's regime to manipulate the racial geography of the city in a way that was beneficial to his white business allies. Founded in 1947, the MPC was the first publicly funded metropolitan planning group in the nation – receiving funding from both Fulton and DeKalb counties (Silver and Moeses, 1995). The MPC focused on race relations and racial transition within Atlanta neighborhoods – this all-white governing body assembled bi-racial coalitions to negotiate the racial transition between residents of both races and black realtors. The Commission also worked to expand the availability of residential land for both black and white residents within the city following the expansion of city boundaries in 1952. By 1956, the MPC had drafted a plan for race relations in Atlanta that took into account the dual housing markets and mass displacement of poor blacks in the city due to Urban Renewal projects (Atlanta Plan for Race Relations, 1956, Bureau of Planning Archives). The entire plan revolved around the housing market and reaching a consensus with representatives of both

racess within the “home building, financing, and selling businesses in the metropolitan area” (Atlanta Plan for Race Relations, 1956, BoP Archives). The plan sought to eliminate the violence inherent in transitioning neighborhoods, as urban white residents across the country resisted the influx of black residents following the effects of the Great Migration and the *Shelley v Kraemer* decision.

Unfortunately, tasking the all-white MPC with designing this plan created an exclusionary planning process that largely excluded citizen participation and limited African-American interests to token inclusion.

In spite of these homogenous planning bodies that dominated the governing coalition, Black leaders were not completely excluded from the planning processes in the postwar city. In addition to the black real estate interests invited to participate in the MPC’s plan for race relations, Black leaders lobbied to get appointed to CACUR’s many advisory subcommittees, leveraging the black electorate for improved goods and services in black communities (Silver and Moeses, 1995). Further, the Perry Homes Advisory Committee, an appointed external committee similar to the University Homes Advisory Committee discussed in Chapter 3, listed J.B Blayton Sr, Bishop J.W.E. Bowen III, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, William A. Scott, and R.A. Thompson as its members (Perry Homes Advisory Committee, 1954, AHA Archives). These men represented a similar cross-section of the black community that was thus far overrepresented in Atlanta politics – businessmen, academics, and churches.



The West Side Mutual Development Corporation (WSMDC) was a bi-racial organization dedicated exclusively to integrating the west side of the city in a manner that ameliorated racial violence. There are few documented incidents of communal riots (e.g., riots over neighborhood space and amenities) in Atlanta during the time of school integration and increasing black populations within the city. Established in 1952, soon after the city implemented the Plan of Improvement, the WSMDC provided a space for black business leaders to exert some influence on the creation and planning of black communities throughout the city (Report to Housing Coordinator, 1960, BoP Archives). Representatives from the all-black Empire Real Estate Board, in addition to representatives from Atlanta's banking, development, and insurance companies headquartered on Auburn Avenue negotiated with their white counterparts to safely transition white neighborhoods on Atlanta's west side. The group provided one of the few inclusive planning processes of all the city's governing bodies; in 1954, the WSDMC surveyed residents in a neighborhood targeted to transition. The purpose of the survey was to gauge resident opinion on their neighborhood amenities and the feasibility of selling to black residents (Results of WSMDC Survey, 1954, BoP Archives). Conversely, the WSMDC also met with working-class and low-income black residents, particularly those facing displacement from Urban Renewal projects. Nonetheless, the group advocated for and usually secured the best concessions for middle- and upper-class black residents; black leaders leveraged the power of the electorate to "provide a number of public improvements, such as street widening,

paving, drainage, lighting, and the construction of a park and a golf course.” (Silver and Moeses, 1995, 140).

The Temporary Coordinating Committee on Housing (TCCH) acted as a precursor to the West Side Development Corporation, providing an all-black group that assessed the housing needs of black residents in postwar Atlanta. Created by the Atlanta Urban League and led by black real estate developer W.H. Aiken, the TCCH controlled the racial geography of Atlanta by purchasing and building homes in vacant west side neighborhoods (Harmon, 1995).

It was in this exclusionary planning environment that city leaders designed and planned Perry Homes and its surrounding neighborhood. Following the passage of the 1949 Housing Act and the authorization of 800,000 new public housing units throughout the country, the Atlanta Housing Authority immediately began constructing several large-scale housing projects for African-American and white residents (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). The planning process for these projects had a different aim than the ones constructed in the prewar era. Instead of linking slum clearance to the redevelopment of residential and commercial lands in the City, the 1949 Housing Act permitted the AHA to clear slums (and, to an extent, clear poor residents) into marginalized areas for residential development while redeveloping slum areas for commercial use only (Radford, 2004). The 1949 Housing Act allowed city planners to exacerbate existing residential segregation patterns by incorporating local prejudices into federally financed plans. In the FY

1953 Atlanta Housing Authority Annual Report, the Board of Commissioners described the site for Perry Homes as follows:

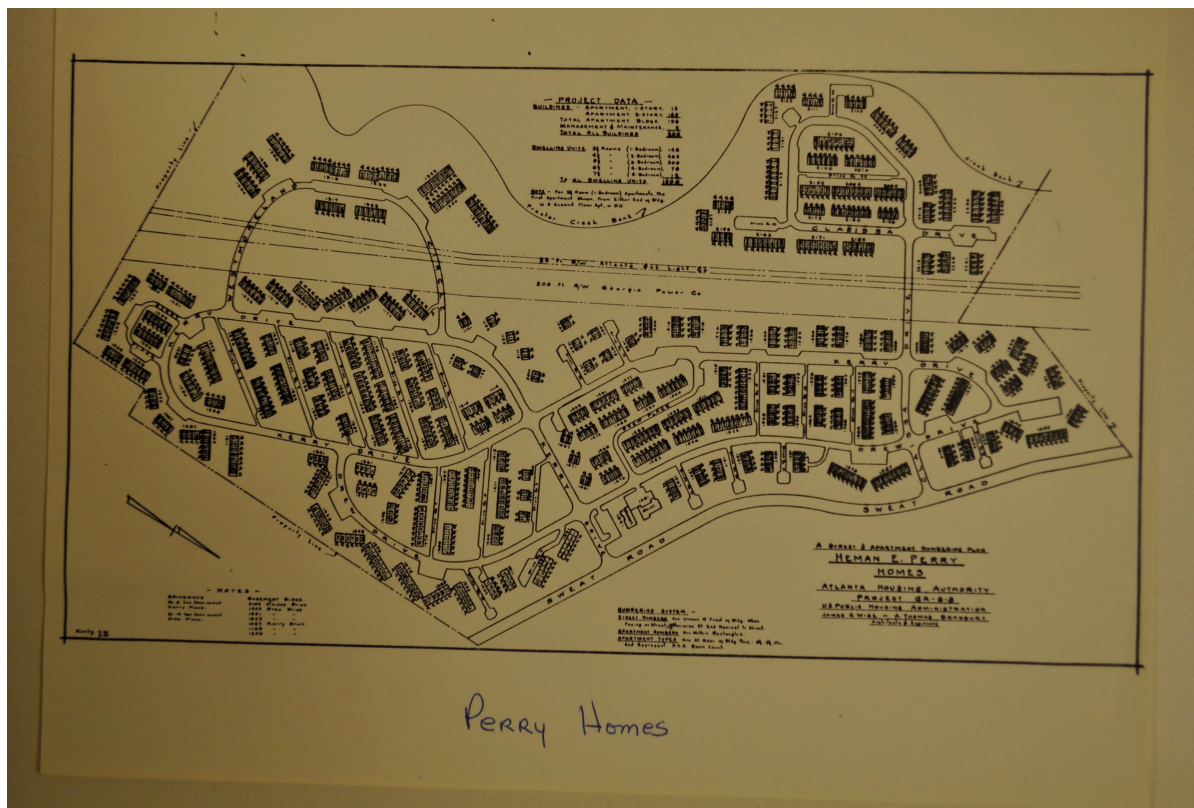
“On April 26, 1953, the ground was broken for the second multi-million dollar post-war housing project to be developed by the Atlanta Housing Authority. This project, containing 1000 units for Negro occupancy, is scheduled for completion by the winter of 1954. It is located on previously undeveloped land in the Sweet Road area of northwest Atlanta, not far south of the Southern Railroad’s Inman Yards, approximately midway between Marietta Road and Hollywood Road” (AHA Annual Report, 1953, AHA Archives).

The map below demonstrates the isolation of this undeveloped tract of land for Perry Homes (see Figure 4.1). Note the natural barriers (Proctor Creek, Rockdale Park) that separate this area from the larger northwest community, preventing easy access through Perry Homes from the Central Business District. Further, manmade barriers (Southern Railroad Inman Yards) limited access to the growing employment opportunities in Atlanta’s prosperous northern suburbs. From a design standpoint, public housing developments were becoming increasingly landlocked, designed with circuitous streets with limited outlets onto main roads, as well as massive superblock structures that literally isolated the developments from the larger community (Hirsch, 1998).

The design for Perry Homes was comprehensive and similar to that of University Homes. Paved roads, new sewage systems, and fully modernized amenities (electric stoves and refrigerators) were included, in addition to multiple play areas for children. Centralized laundry facilities would limit the water usage in each unit and individual dry lines in backyards would not interfere with the uniform

appearance of the property (AHA Annual Report, 1955, AHA Archives). Social and economic spaces, specifically a community center and commercial spaces for rent, would allow for an insulated community. What the plan did not include, however, was accommodation for the increase in students in the undeveloped area (within ten years, Perry Homes would house 3,350 minors), nor did it include accommodation for increased public transit for this isolated population. Even though Perry Homes was the first residential development in this area, designers managed to bi-sect the community by designing it around a railway thoroughfare. Approximately forty buildings were constructed between a railway and a creek, with no throughway roads to connect residents to the City, or even to nearby communities. Despite this deficiency of public goods and services, city planners continued to increase residential development for low-income African Americans in the northwest, particularly after the passage of the 1961 Housing Act.

**Figure 4.1: Perry Homes Site Plan**



Source: AHA Archives

Section 221(d)(3) of the Housing Act of 1961 created funding for multifamily rental housing for residents with income above public housing income limits, yet were unable to qualify for mortgages for private housing. In Atlanta, this program allowed for black families to leave public housing developments and enter another public housing program that provided limited socioeconomic mobility. Turnover in black public housing developments was rather low as the two-tiered mortgage market largely prohibited African Americans from qualifying for government guaranteed mortgages (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives; Massey and Denton, 1993). Working- and middle-class African-Americans who were unable to qualify

for mortgages yet were still financially able to purchase private housing were equally stymied as the available land for black residential development was limited to select areas of the city, mostly in the northwest. During the site selection for Perry Homes, the AHA chose a site that would accommodate the needs of a wide range of African-Americans, thus creating a racialized space in the most marginalized area of the city:

“The project site occupies only a portion of the above-mentioned tract of land. The remaining portion, wooded and rolling, extends northwestward to the Brownsville Road Settlement on Hollywood Road. It is bounded generally on the southwest by Proctor Creek and on the northeast by Sweat Road. Paved access roads and main utilities lines will be brought into the area in conjunction with our project. The Atlanta Housing Authority has worked closely with civic and private groups who have expressed an interest in developing the remaining portion of the tract. Well planned private developments here, adjacent to Herman E. Perry, would add up to a balanced, model community” (AHA Annual Report 1953, AHA Archives).

Advocates to prevent such racialized planning were few and far between in Metropolitan Planning Commission illustrates the disparity between the rhetoric that promoted the token participation of the elite African-American electoral coalition and the spatial injustice that created more segregation during the bi-racial urban regime:

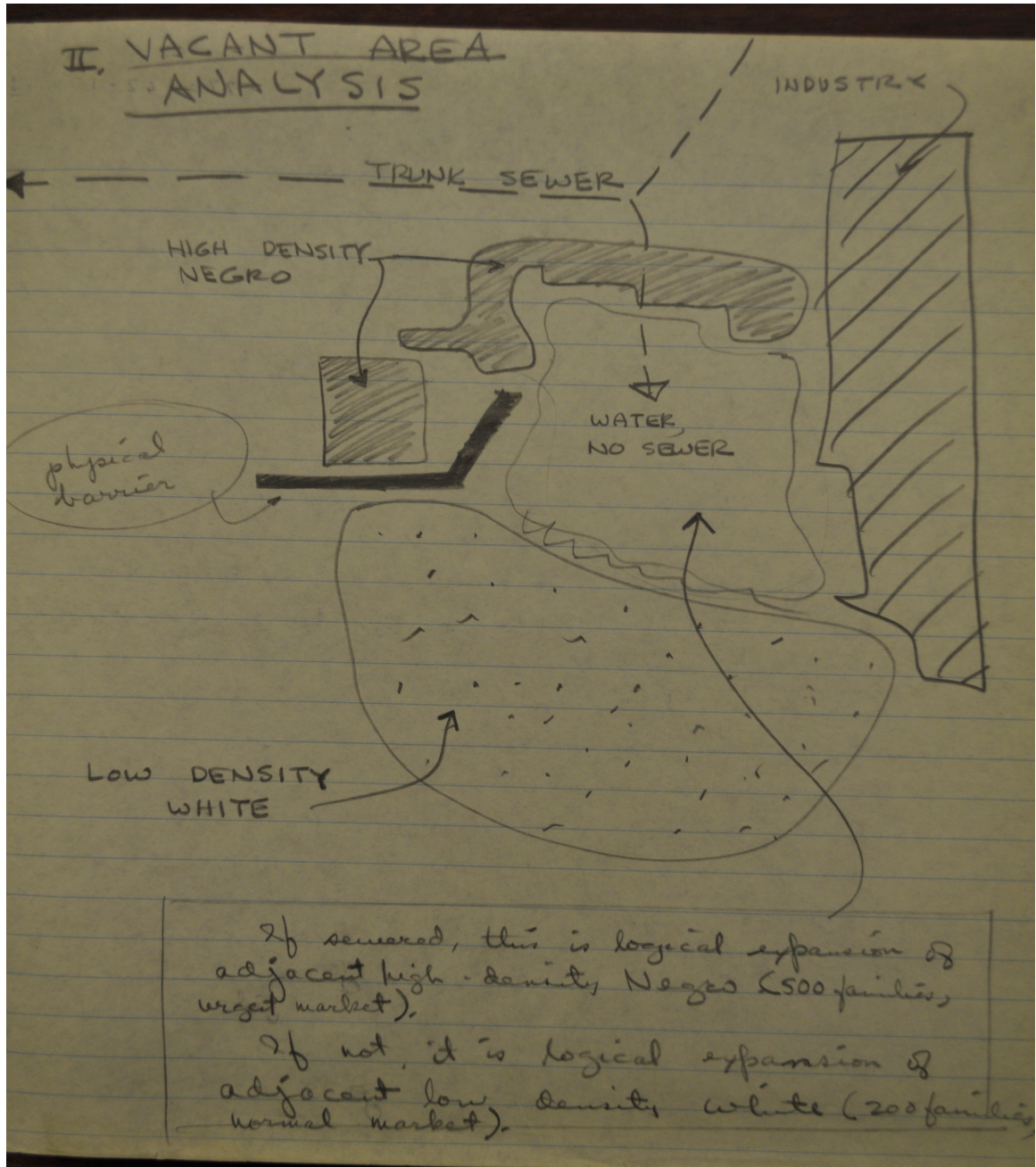
“Top level program to create general agreement between leaders of both races about the need for planned expansion of housing space for Negroes, avoiding community disruption wherever possible.... Work to modify the FHA’s policy of refusing approval to projected Negro developments in outlying areas. Dispersion of Negro communities throughout the area will help to avoid the high densities conducive to so many social problems, will make exploitation of Negro voters less likely, and will help preserve the economic strength of the valuable central business district” (Memo from departing Housing Coordinator, 1960, MPC Archives).

The result of this empty rhetoric and token, exclusive participation for elite blacks was a spatial justice that focused on outcomes and not one that focused on processes. The bi-racial coalition worked in favor of the middle- and upper-class African-American residents, providing for new parks and golf courses in their subdivisions. Residential development for African-Americans remained situated in the northwest, and virtually all residential development was high-density, or extremely concentrated. A vacant area analysis from the Bureau of Planning illustrates the approach to planning for black residential neighborhoods. Figure 4.2 shows a vacant area just south of a white neighborhood that was slowly transitioning to African-American residency. The Bureau of Planning predicted this neighborhood would transition to all African-American resident within five years, and conducted the vacant land analysis as a failsafe for resistant white residents (Drawing of Neighborhood Transition, ca. 1960, BoP Archives). Surveys from the WSMDC indicated that while most white residents were amenable to ceding a neighborhood to African-Americans residents, others were resistant to such change (Results of WSMDC Survey, ca. 1960, BoP Archives). The political implications of this resistance required painstaking planning for city leaders, with African-American residents making the most concessions. The illustration below demonstrates these concessions: the vacant area analysis suggests that if the proper sewage infrastructure is constructed, both African-Americans and white residents could reside in this area. The white residential units were planned as low-density, suggesting single-family homes to accommodate the “normal,” white housing market. African-Americans, given the “urgency” or high demand of their

housing market, would be forced to reside in high-density, or multifamily residential units. The city planned to construct a physical barrier to separate the two races living in an “integrated” community. Conversely, if the city did not install the sewage infrastructure, they would designate the area for white residential use only. Racial zoning was still illegal at the time, suggesting that such concessions were only made with the agreement of the bi-racial coalition. This exclusive and racialized planning process limited the 35.6% African-American population to 16.4% of Atlanta’s residential land (The Housing Problem in Atlanta, 1960, MPC Archives).



Figure 4.2: Bureau of Planning Vacant Area Analysis (ca. 1960)



Source: Bureau of Planning Archives

The urgency of Atlanta's African-American housing market was outlined in the Metropolitan Planning Commission's 1960 "Report of the Housing Coordinator."

The MPC calculated that the City had netted 14,000 housing units for African-American residents between 1950 and 1960, yet this number barely satisfied the number of residents displaced by government and non-government action (estimated as 11,700). Table 4.1 and 4.2 display the estimated housing needs of African-Americans between 1959 and 1963, following government and natural displacement, in addition to natural in-migration and existing population growth. The report notes that neither estimates accounts for the existing overcrowding and substandard living conditions of the current African-American population. The estimates were later reduced by 75 percent to account for African-Americans “that were displaced for so long, they left the City” (Housing Problem in Atlanta, 1960, MPC Archives).

**Table 4.1: Estimated African-American Housing Needs, 1959-1963**

<b>Gross Need (No. of Families)</b>	<b>Resources Committed to Housing Needs to Date (No. of Dwelling Units)</b>	<b>Net Need (No. of Dwelling Units)</b>
9,100 – displacees of al government action – urban renewal, expressways, public buildings, etc.	2,500 – Turnover to existing public housing	
2,600 – displacees by non government action – fire, demolition, etc	4,500 – in urban renewal areas	
10,000 – new family formation and net in-migration	500 – Section 221	
21,700	7,500	14,200

*Source: Metropolitan Planning Commission Archives*

**Table 4.2: Estimated Land Requirements for African-American Housing, 1959-1963**

Housing Type	No. of Dwelling Units	Density (Units per Gross Acre)	Gross Land Requirements (No. of Acres)
Public Housing	1,200	10	120
Single Family	3,000	3	1,000
Multi-Family and Duplex	6,400	10	640
Transitional	3,600	-	-
	14,200		1,760
			880
			2,640 (the equivalent of 12.75 land lots)

*Source: Metropolitan Planning Commission Archives*

The report identified white resistance – and underreported communal violence - as the greatest “stumbling block” (Report to Housing Coordinator, 1960, MPC Archives) to relocating the increasing and displaced African-American population.

The “unlikely, but not impossible” solutions to such resistance included:

- “Some form of minimum price assurance by local government to whites selling their homes to Negroes. Bonuses or help with moving expenses might be another form of financial assistance.
- Something like ‘221 eligibility certificates’ for whites ‘displaced’ by Negro expansion
- Special assistance for widows and elderly people who frequently do suffer financial hardship when ‘forced’ to move because of the Negroes
- An intensive interpretation program by newspapers designed to attach ‘civic virtue’ to selling a house to a displaced Negro family in an appropriate community.
- For the die-hard race haters, the idea might be sold negatively, in terms of saddling Negroes with old houses and big mortgages containing their expansion to avoid general dispersion. This, of course, could only be done

on an individual basis” Report to Housing Coordinator, 1960, MPC Archives).

With the northwest providing the only vacant land available to black residents, the city created a low-income neighborhood without sufficient public goods and resources and even less political representation. Within the first few years of Perry Homes’ existence, the tenant association worked quickly and effectively to remedy the deficiencies of their development, and the community at large.

*Reactions to Growing Black Political Power in Postwar Atlanta*

The transformation of Atlanta’s political landscape following the *King v. Chapman* decision was immediate, as black organizations spearheaded a major registration drive to establish a black electorate in the city. The Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), a bipartisan association founded by black elite leaders and led by Republican John Wesley Dobbs and Democrat A.T. Walden (advisor on the University Homes advisory committee) in 1949, subverted the partisan interests of the two national political parties for the advancement of African-American interests in the city (Bayor, 1996). The impact of the ANVL and a new black political electorate was demonstrated during Hartsfield’s 1949 mayoral re-election. With a large portion of progressive white liberals and businessmen residing outside the city limits, Hartsfield lobbied for the black vote by appointing a racially progressive police chief who was responsible for hiring the first black police officers in the city (Bayor, 1996). During the 1949 campaign, Hartsfield would attend black political events with the eight policemen in tow. The hiring of black

policemen in a southern city that formerly awarded police patronage to members of white supremacist groups was considered racially progressive in 1948. However, these officers were not allowed to arrest white citizens and were relegated (e.g., segregated) to the Butler Street YMCA building, a YMCA branch for African-Americans (Mason, Jr., 2000). In spite of this obvious tokenism, Hartsfield received 78 percent of the Black vote against Fulton County commissioner Charles Brown. Conversely, he received only 54 percent of the city's white vote – suggesting that the working-class interests within the city were less than pleased with Hartsfield's racially progressive platitudes (Keiser, 1997).

Another outcome of the increased political power of African Americans in postwar Atlanta was the atypical organization and strategies deployed to advance black civil rights. Utilizing a black population that was relatively large for a major urban center, African-Americans' civil rights interests were advanced using the power of the vote, instead of the more public displays of civil unrest used in other major cities across the country. The need for Mayor William B. Hartsfield and local white business leaders to maintain the "too busy to hate" business-friendly image provided the political leverage for black leaders to advance their own interests. By threatening to disrupt the amicable images of integration with public demonstrations advocating for black civil rights, black elite leaders were able to (quietly) negotiate with the governing coalition for more land for housing, improved public goods and services in black neighborhoods, and greater political representation in the city's governing coalition (Harmon, 1996).

Hartsfield's bi-racial coalition is an illustrative example of race relations and political power in postwar Atlanta. The policymaking, or governing, coalition was comprised of Hartsfield and the white businessmen that had influenced Atlanta's local policies since the city's founding. The interests of white businessmen located in downtown Atlanta (and later, re-located to the elite northern neighborhood known as Buckhead) were prioritized during the Hartsfield administration, as the city positioned itself to be the economic leader of the New South. As northeastern and midwestern cities deindustrialized due to increasing labor costs, aging infrastructure, and the diminishing returns on capital investment (Sugrue, 1996; Beauregard, 2003), the productive forces of the US economy shifted to the South and Southwest. Social unrest in southern cities created hostile business environments for firms, and Atlanta leaders realized the economic benefit to promoting the city as a progressive racial environment. As such, black elite leaders acted as liaisons between Hartsfield's governing coalition and Atlanta's black community. The black leaders were relegated to the electoral coalition of Atlanta's urban regime, utilizing their power over a significant portion of the electorate to negotiate on behalf of black interests. Unfortunately, the influence these leaders had on Atlanta's policymaking was minimal, as residential segregation markedly increased during Hartsfield's tenure (Bayor, 1996).

William B. Hartsfield first entered the Atlanta political arena as a business-friendly alderman in 1922. During his two terms (1922-1928) Hartsfield was a member of

the council's finance subcommittee, and later chairman of the first aviation subcommittee. His close relationships to businessmen in the city allowed for him to enter a favorable deal with Coca-Cola founder and former mayor Asa Candler, to lease the Candler Speedway and convert it to Atlanta's first airfield. During his time as Fulton County State Representative (1932-1936), Hartsfield continued to promote Atlanta as an aviation center. However, he first earned his reputation as a progressive candidate when he amended Atlanta's charter in 1936 to reduce the number of wards and limit the influence of ward political machines on urban politics (Williams, 2000). Early twentieth century Atlanta politics resembled the democratic machines typically found in northeastern cities. The city had a mayor-council structure, with thirteen gerrymandered wards intended to maximize white working-class votes. The ward system was dominated by the white working-class, and patronage appointments were distributed among the various white supremacist groups in the city (Harmon, 1996). As a result, organizations such as the Columbians and the Ku Klux Klan had intimate ties with both the administrative and policymaking units of Atlanta's municipal government. The white supremacist political institution extended to the state level in Georgia, creating a political economy that relegated African-Americans to marginal roles and spaces throughout the state.

The passage of the New Deal legislation created a political opportunity for white businessmen, particularly those who were able to leverage their political capital to increase their economic capital. The city's rapid growth before the Depression

necessitated improved infrastructure and increased public services, while eradicating the existing slums borne of swift urbanization. Slum clearance and public infrastructure would increase Atlanta's ability to attract outside capital, positioning the city as the economic leader of the new (economically diverse and socially progressive) south. Hartsfield earlier legislation to decrease the number of wards in the city weakened the working-class' grip on the city's political machine during the 1937 election. Further, the city's financial woes decreased patronage to working-class whites, allowing business and professional interests to elect Hartsfield over former three-term mayor James L. Key. Business interests directly influenced municipal governance when Coca-Cola president and Hartsfield ally Robert Woodruff loaned the City the funds to cover the December 1936 municipal payroll (Harmon, 1996).

In spite of his progressive platform, and his inclusion of black leaders in his electoral coalition, Hartsfield was not interested in ceding political or economic capital to African-Americans (Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). As early as his first term, Hartsfield proposed annexing the white, upper-class northern suburbs, and portions of all-white southern and southwestern suburbs. As whites continued to migrate to the suburbs on the northern edges of the city, the black populations increased in the inner city and western sections of Atlanta. Hartsfield believed that a black majority in the city would reduce its ability to attract capital, and remove white business interests from the governance process. Proposals to annex white populations in the suburbs were rejected by their State Representatives, with



Hartsfield unable to convince suburban interests of the tenability of black political and economic power in the postwar city (Harmon, 1996). However, following the *King v Chapman* decision and the pivotal role the black electorate played in Hartsfield 1949 election, Hartsfield was able to gather greater support of the annexation plan. In 1951 the Georgia General Assembly approved the proposed Plan of Improvement for the City of Atlanta and Fulton County. The Plan of Improvement would consolidate city and county services to avoid duplication of efforts and minimize costs – it would also annex 82 square miles to the north, south, and west of the old city limits, and increase the residential population by 100,000 (Research Atlanta, 1977). Consequently, the proportion of black residents decreased from 41 percent to 33 percent; black leaders were willing to accept the reduction in population with the annexation of black residential areas to the west of the city (Bayor, 1996).

The Plan of Improvement had immediate consequences for black and white residents, and provided the institutional and legal context for Hartsfield's urban regime to negotiate the racial politics of the postwar city. Tables 4.3-4.5 show the new responsibilities for city and county departments under the Plan of Improvement. Note the politically controversial departments of planning and zoning, schools, and streets and roads remain separated under the new plan. As the next section demonstrates, these departments would provide the means for Hartsfield's regime to negotiate the increase in black populations as a result of rural in-migration with working-class white residents who primarily resided

within the inner city. A series of legal decisions that would prohibit outright residential and educational segregation in the postwar era required the city leaders to navigate the politics of race in Atlanta in new and creative ways.

**Table 4.3: Services Provided by the City of Atlanta**

Continued by City	Shifted to City (Contract with County for Unincorporated Areas)
Water	Police
Sewer	Fire
Libraries	Refuse Collection
Auditorium	Inspection
Traffic Engineering	Parks
Airport	

*Source: Research Atlanta, 1977*

**Table 4.4: Services Provided by Fulton County**

Continued by County	Shifted to County
Sheriff	Public Health
Coroner	
Agriculture	
Almshouse	
Public Welfare	
Courts	

*Source: Research Atlanta, 1977*

**Table 4.5: Services Provided by both the City of Atlanta and Fulton County**

Separate County and City
Streets and Roads
Schools
Planning and Zoning

*Source: Research Atlanta, 1977*

The rise of black political power following the *King v Chapman* decision was fleeting, but did have lasting effects on the black community. African-American residents, particularly those of economic means, were able to access and utilize the political capital within the electoral coalition of Hartsfield's regime (Stone, 1989). While the political power of the black elite was not equal to that of white elites, black leaders were able to leverage the "black vote" to the benefit of the community. The expansion of black residential lands under the Plan of Improvement, while segregated and underdeveloped relative to the expansion of white residential lands, was largely beneficial to a growing black community that had limited residential mobility. However, under this new regime, poor blacks saw their political power diminish relative to their proportions within the black electoral coalition. As urban renewal and highway construction reconfigured the Atlanta inner city, poor blacks were relegated to marginalized areas and beset with issues they did not share with upper-class blacks. As a result, public housing developments (where many poor blacks were relocated during urban renewal) became necessary political opportunity structures for a marginalized group within the city.

*Perry Homes Tenant Association, 1955-1968*

Within the first six months of Perry Homes' January 1955 opening, 904 families moved into the development following the established tenant selection process of the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA Annual Report, 1955, AHA Archives). In spite

of the tight housing market for African-American residents, tenants were selected following an initial screening of income requirements, an inspection of the current home to verify whether it was substandard, and housing manager approval.

Minimum income requirements (except in the case of government relocation) and employment verification limited the socioeconomic status of residents to what Katz terms the deserving poor (Katz, 1989). Yet while the residents themselves were working- to middle-class African Americans, the northwest neighborhood they moved into did not reflect their economic standing. Compared to the neighborhoods inhabited by their white counterparts, the public goods and services of the northwest neighborhoods were considerably inadequate (Bayor, 1996). This section will describe how the Perry Homes tenant association, in conjunction with local and citywide organizations, mobilized the resources of their residents to correct the racial and economic inequities in the city's allocation of public goods and services.

The disparity of public schools, libraries, and parks between whites and African-Americans was significant in 1954 Atlanta. A city map shows there were 3 libraries designated for black use: a University Homes branch (discussed in Chapter 3), the first branch constructed for African-Americans on Auburn Avenue, and the West Hunter branch, located in the southwest quadrant of the city (Map of the City of Atlanta, 1954, BoP Archives). There was one library branch in the northwest – Dogwood Branch on Bankhead Highway – that was constructed in the early 1960s for African American use, but was largely inaccessible to Perry Homes' children

lacking transit fare (Report on Meeting for the Northwest, 1967, ACRC Archives). Consequently, the once-lauded bookmobile available to Perry Homes' residents was seen as inadequate after no funding or planning advanced to make the mobile library a permanent fixture.

When Perry Homes opened there were no high schools for African-American students in the area, except for the overcrowded Turner High School – which was one of three black high schools at the time (Perry Homes Tenant Association Notes, 1956, AHA Archives). Construction soon began on the Samuel Harper Archer High School, which accepted its first students in 1957, with construction of the classrooms still ongoing (Perry Homes Tenant Newspaper, 1957, AHA Archives). Within a decade, this high school would also face serious overcrowding issues; the 1,661 students attended the school in double shifts, while the night school for adults further strained the school's limited resources (Report on Meeting for the Northwest, 1967, ACRC Archives). In spite of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision in 1954, Atlanta schools were not integrated until 1961.

Parks, recreational facilities, and green spaces were similarly difficult to access and over capacity for black residents in the northwest (List of Atlanta Parks, 1954, BoP Archives). At the time of Perry Homes' construction, there was one large park for African Americans in the southwest, compared to ten large parks for whites throughout Atlanta (List of Atlanta Parks, 1954, BoP Archives). The two large parks located in the Central Business District were restricted to white use only, in

spite of large population of African Americans who resided in the CBD until the start of Atlanta's Urban Renewal program. There were also ten white community parks – smaller parks that included playground equipment – compared to three community parks for African-American use. Neighborhood parks and green spaces, designed to accommodate neighborhood children and provide open space throughout the city, were located exclusively in white neighborhoods. In 1954, there were approximately 29 neighborhood parks and 16 green spaces for white Atlantans (List of Atlanta Parks, 1954, BoP Archives).

In addition to insufficient libraries, schools, and parks, public services remained inadequate during the first decade of Perry Homes' existence. The trunk line sewer installed during the developments' construction could not accommodate the growth in 221(d)(3) homes over the next decade – at which time the population of Perry Homes and its surrounding community totaled over 10,000 residents. As a result, residents complained frequently about sewage backup in their yards and their homes (Report on Meeting for the Northwest, 1967, ACRC Archives). Further, sewage overflow ran into Proctor Creek, the northern boundary of Perry Homes, creating an environmental hazard and unpleasant odors for residents. Residents complained about unpaved areas around front and back entrances that left floors and drying clothes caked in a fine red clay dust (Letter from Perry Homes Manager, 1958, AHA Archives). Further, there were few sidewalks throughout the development, which limited the walkability of the area for all residents, but particularly for children en route to school. Similar to University Homes, there

were no traffic lights installed at the major intersections on the southern and eastern entrances of the development, creating difficulties for children walking to school and adults walking to bus stops (Letter from Perry Homes Manager 1958, AHA Archives).

The first elected tenant association at Perry Homes reflected the residential population: three men held the leadership positions (Reverend C.A. Samples, President; Reverend Jerome Graham, Vice-President; Mr. Willie Schofield, Treasurer), while three women comprised the remaining positions (Mrs. Helen Grimes, Secretary; Mrs. Louise Williams, Publicity Director; Mrs. Margie Freeman, Assistant Secretary). Mr. John Cullen held the newly-created position of Tenant Chaplain (Perry Homes Tenant Newspaper, 1956, AHA Archives). Another change in the tenant association structure was the introduction of two-year terms for tenant association officers, which allowed for long-term projects and initiatives (Perry Homes Tenant Newspaper, 1956, AHA Archives). With such a large residential population, tenant association officers were tasked with large-scale projects and often worked with local community groups to achieve project goals.

The first project of note was the construction of the planned, but not built, Perry Homes Community Center. As described in Chapter 3 and throughout this chapter, public space was sorely needed in the black community, as the majority of African-American land use was dedicated to residential construction. Hunter describes in detail the segregated spaces of power for black and white leaders; while white

leaders met in private homes and hotels, black leaders of equal socioeconomic status were typically confined to the basements of black churches and the Butler Street YMCA (Hunter, 1953). In spite of the significant gains in political economic power after 1946, Atlanta's black community remained spatially marginalized in the postwar city. Upon the 1955 completion of Perry Homes' construction, families moved into a development that was not yet a fully formed neighborhood. On a positive note, this allowed residents, and by extension, the tenant association, to take an active role in shaping the community around them.

Unlike the auditorium at University Homes that was planned and constructed as a political space, the AHA's intent for this multi-purpose space was decidedly social. The programmatic initiatives of postwar public housing in Atlanta focus less on "Americanizing" residents into white, middle-class norms than of those built by the PWA and AHA in the prewar era (Parson, 2005). During the 1958 dedication of the community center, AHA Executive Director M.B. Satterfield (a white male) noted that the event "marks the end of a period of delay and discouragement and the beginning of a period of pleasure of fulfillment in its use" (Program for the Dedication of Perry Homes Community Center, 1958, AHA Archives). Conversely, African-American housing manager J.R. Henderson described the community center as a space of enrichment and social welfare: "[w]e shall call upon all community resources in the fields of Education, Health, Religion, Welfare, and Recreation to help us utilize this facility toward the building of better children, better parents, better homes, and a better City" (Program for the Dedication of



Perry Homes Community Center, 1958, AHA Archives). Thus, even as the AHA planned to provide for a play area for resident and neighborhood children, the tenants actively shaped the agenda for the community center to fit both their political and social needs.

During the early years of Perry Homes, the tenant association worked with the Butler Street YMCA and the Board of Education to lobby for new school construction in the area (Notes from the Perry Homes Tenant Association, AHA Archives). What the residents lacked in economic power they made up for in sheer numbers, and it was through pressure on the city's electoral coalition that Perry Homes residents was able to advance their agenda. While city leaders constructed the northwest ghetto to isolate poor African Americans from their white neighbors, they also indirectly created a powerful political base for poor, black interests. Perry Homes alone housed 5,000 residents in the development (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). In the first three years of the development's existence, a shopping center, elementary school, and high school were all constructed within or adjacent to the Perry Homes development (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives).

The community center further strengthened the alliance between the Butler Street YMCA and the development, while also continuing to divide black interests within the development. The Atlanta Community Chest and Gate City Day Care Association provided funding and staff to open a branch of the Gate City Day Care in Perry Homes' community center to provide caretaking services for both residents and

members of the surrounding community (Perry Homes Monthly Newsletter, 1957, AHA Archives). However, the recreational services the Butler Street YMCA provided were available only to those who had a membership at the YMCA. For the vast majority of the first families residing in Perry Homes, their working and middle-class salaries could bear the expense of a membership for childhood enrichment. However, a growing proportion of families in Perry Homes were not only receiving government subsidies, but were also increasingly led by single women (AHA Annual Report, 1963, AHA Archives). These demographic changes were not yet visible in the tenant association leadership until the early 1960s, when a number of officers are referred to as “Ms.” (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives).

This changing demographic reflected in the development’s leadership focused much more on institutionalizing survival strategies than previous tenant associations. The AHA was openly hostile to working with the new tenant association – labeling the rise of single-woman households as implying “the existence of serious family problems, some of them economic, and some social” (AHA Annual Report, 1963, AHA Archives). However, the leadership was persistent in advocating for programs and facilities to accommodate the new reality in public housing. When Archer High School attempted to deal with overcrowding through double shifts, Perry Homes and the newly-formed Atlanta Commission on Community Relations protested (Report on Meeting for the Northwest, 1967, ACRC Archives). The majority of these women worked outside of the home (another

major demographic shift) and early dismissal of students without after-school activities or adequate recreational facilities would produce a major social problem of idle youth. Thus, the tenant association turned to advocating for increased recreational opportunities and facilities, in addition to employment opportunities near the development to match the skills of the resident population (Notes from Perry Homes Tenant Association, AHA Archives).

The transformation of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure that began incorporating the interests and activism of women and women leaders, as well as began advocating more directly for inclusion in urban planning and policymaking processes is directly tied to the demographic shifts within and around public housing in postwar Atlanta. Federal programs such as the Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal programs created an increasing number of displacees from government redevelopment projects that were forced to relocate into Atlanta's public housing developments. After decades of careful tenant selection processes that admitted two-parent families with stable incomes, the effects of these federal programs on local developments was a turn towards a more bottom-up, radical approach to political action from the tenant associations. The cream-skimming approach of the AHA's tenant selection procedures was a structural limitation of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. By excluding a more socioeconomically diverse – and more vulnerable – population of black Atlantans, the top-down mobilization of early public housing

developments promoted the elite-driven uplift ideology that tended to excluded the most marginalized of the population - poor, black women.

Public housing developments were also able to evolve as political opportunity structures following the exclusionary planning processes that produced spatial injustice within Atlanta's new metropolitan area. The Plan of Improvement in 1951 countered the political gains of the African American community following the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision, by increasing the white population relative to the black population through annexation. The inclusion of more whites, and more residential area for whites to move to within Atlanta, allowed for the weakening of the black electorate, as well as the beginning of the ghettoization of African American residents using the federal policies of Urban Redevelopment and Urban Renewal with the local prejudices and power of the AHA and CACUR. While the segregation and concentration of African Americans was considered to have the potential of the exploitation of the black vote, in addition to promoting social unrest in black communities (Memo from departing Housing Coordinator, 1960, MPC Archives), using a Castellan argument, these excluded spaces also acted as spaces of political organizing and permitted the development of a spatial consciousness that was served as a new interest for the tenant associations.

The claims of the Perry Homes tenant association that focused not only on spatially just outcomes, but also on spatially just processes, mimic the shifts in black organizing just before and immediately following the passage of the Civil Rights

Act. In Atlanta particularly, black political organizing had been heavily influenced by the elite, and remained the domain of an all-male, or socially advantaged female leadership. Black churches, historically black colleges and universities, and black social organizations were the traditional spaces of political organizing that promoted uplift ideology and accommodationist approaches to civil rights claims on the State. The more aggressive, youth-oriented, and radical approaches to black organizing that appeared on black college campuses, segregated black communities, and within the welfare rights movement, demanded immediate attention to the social, economic, and political disparities between blacks and whites in urban areas. As the demographics of public housing tenants transformed to a younger, female-headed family, with increasing dependence on welfare subsidies, this bottom-up, radical approach to black political organizing appeared in tenant associations and produced new goals for the public housing development as political opportunity structure. However, just as previous iterations of the political opportunity structure was limited, the focus on spatially just processes of inclusion for Perry Homes and other second generation political opportunity structures tended to ignore the larger shifts in urbanization that would soon produce a weakened urban tax base, less resources for public residents, and an increasing spatial mismatch for low-skill workers in the City as jobs moved to the northern suburbs (Keating, 2001).

The shift in tenant activism away from political equality and opportunities toward social and economic benefits during this period also reflect the new interests

produced by the changing demographics in public housing, and the effects of the unequal spatial outcomes of the existing planning process. While the Civil Rights Act and related legislation would provide a brief “new deal” for poor African-Americans to reclaim their political legitimacy on State processes and institutions, the disparity between blacks and whites on social and economic issues was addressed through tenant activism throughout the 1960s. The next chapter discusses the institutional effects of this activism, and how it provided another transformation of public housing developments as political opportunity structures.

## **Chapter 5: Grady Homes: Institutionalizing Radical Responses to Urban Politics in the South**

This chapter will discuss the evolution of the poor black political movement in Atlanta during the late 1960s and early 1970s, with particular emphasis on the period immediately following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Atlanta in the 1960s was one of great inter- *and* intra-racial turmoil – and this turmoil played out in the city’s public and private political spaces. This chapter will view these political tensions from the perspectives of three influential persons during this period: Ivan Allen, Jr., 52<sup>nd</sup> mayor of Atlanta from 1962 to 1970; Susie LaBord, President of the Grady Homes tenant association from 1959 to 1991; and Maynard Jackson, Jr., 53<sup>rd</sup> mayor of Atlanta from 1974 to 1982.

The focus of this chapter is Grady Homes, a public housing development of approximately six hundred units located in Atlanta’s Sweet Auburn neighborhood. Since the 1906 race riots, Sweet Auburn has functioned as an anchor of Atlanta’s middle- and upper-classes of African Americans, with Auburn Avenue serving as a vital economic, social, and civic space for upwardly mobile black Atlantans. Home to headquarters of the black-founded Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Citizens Trust Bank, Mutual Federal Savings & Loan, as well as the black-owned Rucker Office Building and Savoy Hotel, Auburn Avenue provided a comprehensive, though segregated space for African American life. Since the *King v Chapman* decision of 1946, the business, religious, and philanthropic leaders of Auburn Avenue were

incorporated within Atlanta's urban regime, functioning as a crucial proportion of the city's electoral coalition. However, while elite blacks were granted patronage of municipal services and contracts for the votes of African Americans of all classes, poor blacks were marginalized in both the political process and gains of postwar black Atlantans.

The national Civil Rights movement and the demographic transformation of public housing in the 1960s produced a more radical politics in black communities, one that would clash with the longstanding, accommodating black leadership in Atlanta. As Community Action Agencies encouraged the maximum feasible participation of poor residents in the planning and implementation of urban development programs, new interests, particularly those of poor, black women in Atlanta were briefly represented in the new urban regime. Public housing developments as political opportunity structures transformed during this period and were institutionalized into another urban political institution. While these institutions flourished during the Jackson Administration, bureaucratic issues of program implementation and internal leadership issues failed to sustain these institutions over time. Similar to the rise and fall of Community Action Agencies, public housing developments as political opportunity structures would quickly stagnate following the urban crises of the 1970s.



*Ivan Allen, Jr. and Civil Rights*

The Civil Rights Movement created a schism in Atlanta's black electorate between the middle-to-upper class African Americans with ties to the city's urban regime, and the poor and working-class blacks that received only token inclusion as part of the electoral coalition. The political negotiations that occurred in the private political spaces of Atlanta (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce meetings between white business leaders and black business, civic, and religious leaders) tended to address macro political economic issues using accommodationist tactics. As radical, student-led movements thrived as a result of Atlanta's strong historically black college system, these negotiations became increasingly visible throughout city spaces. Student leaders waged sit-ins, kneel-ins, and lie-ins to desegregate lunch counters, churches, and hotels (Harmon, 1996).

Prior to his election as Mayor, Ivan Allen, Jr. was the President of Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce during a major economic boycott of segregated downtown stores by black leaders. As a member of several Atlanta civic boards (including the Citizens Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal), Allen had previously taken a "moderate" stance on race; insisting that Atlanta's segregation was *de facto* and part of the natural order of Southern society. These segregationist leanings were exacerbated when Allen ran for governor in 1957. However, Allen was one of the first on the Chamber of Commerce to advocate for negotiating with black protestors, and brought the demands to integrate lunch counters, restrooms, elevators, and water fountains to the other chamber members (Allen, 1971). The Chamber rejected the

initial demands of the boycott – calculating that the loss of black business was less than the potential loss of white business if stores were integrated. However, negative national press following the arrest of 51 student protestors (and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) prompted a hasty decision to allow Allen and Mills Lane (a local banker) to meet with black leaders on the behalf of downtown interests. In spite of Georgia's extremely conservative approach to desegregation and black civil rights, Atlanta's businessmen were pragmatic enough to understand the costs of upholding segregation would soon outweigh the benefits. Sales during the holiday season were flat, and 80 more arrests were made during February boycotts. However, the negative impact of sit-ins for blacks appeared as several counter employees lost their jobs due to weakened sales.

In February 1961, Chamber of Commerce hosted these meetings at their headquarters in the private Commerce Club, creating one of the few private, integrated political spaces in the City. Racial negotiation meetings typically occurred in the Mayor's office, where segregated restrooms and water fountains still delineated the social separation of the races. The Commerce Club prohibited African Americans from using any of their facilities, thus meetings were held without the members' or the public's knowledge (Pomerantz, 1996). As host of the negotiations, the Chamber had a bit of an upper hand; during the five weekly meetings, tensions between the Auburn Avenue established leadership and the rising student leadership emerged. The result of the negotiations was a deal to desegregate stores within 30 days of the Atlanta Public School plan for

desegregation in September 1961. The actual contract was vague; lunch counters would reopen immediately as segregate and desegregate along with “other facilities” in the fall (Pomerantz, 1996, 261). Student leaders did not want such non-committal language, nor did they think hinging department store desegregation on the contentious plan to desegregate public schools was in their best interests. Auburn Avenue leaders, set in their accommodationist ways, supported the good faith efforts of the downtown businessmen and forced student leaders to sign the deal (Pomerantz, 1996).

In the 1961 mayoral race, Allen ran against local businessmen (and fierce segregationist) Lester G. Maddox in a carefully orchestrated runoff election. There were three other candidates in the race, and Allen worked strategically with political consultant Helen Bullard to ensure a run-off against a racist demagogue (Maddox) and a racially progressive Southern businessman (Allen). Bullard was attempting to capitalize on the white liberal vote and the black vote to secure Allen’s election. Yet the recent plans to desegregate public schools by the 1961-1962 school year incited racial hysteria among Atlanta’s moderate and conservative whites. With African-American voters comprising 29 percent of the electorate, a candidate could not risk splitting that vote. The other candidates, State Representatives Charlie Brown and M.M. Smith, both had significant ties to Auburn Avenue leaders, and Fulton County Commissioner James Aldredge had the support of the northern suburbs. Allen spent over \$175,000 on the mayoral race (more than all four opponents combined), using television commercials to spread

his message while targeting the social and civic events of the liberal white and black communities (Allen, 1971). Allen beat Maddox in a runoff with 64 percent of the vote, with African-Americans casting over one third of his votes (Pomerantz, 1996). Allen was granted a mandate by the white liberal and business communities, as well as black residents to serve in their best interests.

Allen's first year in office was disappointing for both sides as his first major bond initiative to revitalize downtown failed, and his inability to negotiate Atlanta's tricky racial relations created national headlines. Allen proposed an \$80 million bond issuance to support major public works projects for schools, parks, roads, and a civic center, he was defeated by moderate whites who claimed the projects were a way to circumvent the current segregation of several public facilities (Allen, 1971). Allen facilitated a schism between blacks and whites in southwest Atlanta when he barricaded a white subdivision to stall alleged blockbusting tactics of realtors selling to black residents in adjacent streets. Allen claims he wanted to use the barricade to appease whites while negotiating for black expansion into nearby undeveloped land, but legislative action removed the barricades before any deals were reached. In 1962, Allen had significantly less political capital and support than when he was first elected.

However, during his first year in office, Allen met with his allies in the black community, and in particular the segment of the community represented by the Auburn Avenue leadership. Using recommendations from John H. Calhoun, a

leading black realtor, Allen sought to desegregate City Hall facilities, eliminate the segregated City Hall job listings, allow black police officers the right to arrest white citizens, and hire the first black firemen. According to Allen, these were “the extent of the hopes and aspirations of the Negro people at the time” (Allen, 1971, 82).

While most public parks, schools, and downtown businesses were integrated, poor black residents isolated in the northwest ghetto received a disparate share of public goods and services relative to their white peers. These disparities, in addition to the stark wage disparities between the two races, were not addressed during Allen’s first term. However, Allen cemented his chances for re-election among Atlanta’s black voters when he was one of the few Southern politicians who testified in Washington in support of the Public Accommodations bill of 1964 (Allen, 1971).

Following the 1965 election, Allen turned his attention to the downtown business interests and led one of Atlanta’s most prosperous periods of economic development. Unemployment reached an all-time low of 2.9 percent in 1966 as Atlanta added approximately 20,000 jobs per year (Atlanta Employment Data, 1966, Bureau of Labor Statistics). Allen oversaw the construction of the \$18 million Atlanta Stadium, a \$10 million civic center, and a \$13 million arts center (approximately \$130 million, \$67 million, and \$87 million in 2013 dollars).

Further, the number of conventions doubled between 1965 and 1969, the number of hotel rooms tripled from 1960 to 1969, and in 1969 Atlanta’s airport was ranked as the third busiest (Allen, 1971; Walcott, 2000). Allen relied on the relationship

between the downtown business interests and the Mayor's office to control economic growth while leaving the societal welfare problems of this growth to President Johnson's Great Society programs.

Allen's involvement with the black community had decreased since his first term, designating a Washington liaison to lobby for Federal funding to support the programs under the Economic Opportunity Act and Model Cities program. He preferred the political activism of the established Auburn Avenue leadership comprised of businessmen, clergymen, and academics as opposed to the "now militant Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee" (Allen, 1971, 176).

Although he understood the value of the grassroots political movement in Atlanta, he excluded their involvement in the city's governing coalition, preferring to convene with the established bi-racial coalitions/citizens' advisory committees of liberal white businessmen and established black leadership. In September 1966, when SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael arrived at the Mayor's office to protest the arrest of antiwar protestors with a group of young men the Mayor dismissed their demands in the interest of law and order. Later that evening, a disturbance emerged in the Summerhill neighborhood of southeast Atlanta, where black immigration from rural areas produced an inexplicable unemployment rate of 20 percent (Allen, 1971). The Summerhill disturbance magnified the issues of the poor black community that had long gone ignored by Atlanta's governing coalition: high unemployment rates, disparate public services, and increasing crime rates and incidents of police brutality. With little recognition of their political interests,

residents battled with police over four days following the death of a local youth. Allen attempted to meet with young leaders, but eventually used police force and the influence of the traditional black leaders to assuage the protestors.

The exclusion of marginalized black interests following the *King v Chapman* decision was difficult to sustain as Federal funding and programs promoted community organizing and human development amongst low-income residents. Federal funding provided the institutional support for grassroots interests in low-income communities to ascertain political legitimacy in the post-Civil Rights era. With neighborhood organizations and resources at increased capacities, public housing developments evolved as political opportunity structures to represent the shared interests of political allies outside of the developments. This evolution is discussed in the following two sections.

#### *Susie LaBord and the Grady Homes' Tenant Association*

The origins of the Grady Homes' Tenant Association, particularly its influences and outcomes, are quite similar to that of the University Homes' Tenant Association (see Chapter 3). Part of the first wave of public housing construction in Atlanta (1936-1942), Grady Homes opened in August 1941 east of Atlanta's Five Points and west of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood (AHA Annual Report, 1942, AHA Archives). Following the 1906 race riot in the city, African-American residents migrated from the CBD to the adjacent neighborhoods to the east, including (in

descending order of affluence) Sweet Auburn, Old Fourth Ward, and Buttermilk Bottom. Siting a black public housing development in one of the premiere black neighborhoods was a politically expeditious move on the part of Atlanta Housing Authority. Similar to previous public housing efforts, the number of displaced households (871) far exceeded the 616 units that AHA constructed, and the strict admission standards suggest an even smaller percentage of those displaced were even eligible for re-housing in Grady Homes (AHA Annual Report, 1942, AHA Archives). However, given the strict tenant selection standards of the early public housing developments that required minimum incomes and traditional family structures, there was minimal resistance from black property owners in the neighborhood. In fact, due to the segregated shopping experiences offered by businesses in the adjacent CBD, an influx of black consumers, laborers, and parishioners was welcome in Sweet Auburn. Advertisements in the opening ceremony programs and first printing of the Grady Homes newspaper (*The Voice*) welcome tenants to the neighborhood, and offered delivery service of a variety of goods to the development (The Voice Tenant Newspaper, 1942, AHA Archives).

An analysis of early issues of *The Voice* and internal AHA documents show male residents led the tenant association in the first decade of its existence (The Voice Tenant Newspaper; AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). The tenant association collected a \$1.00 annual “Community Fee” from each household to fund its events that would provide social, academic, and economic development activities for tenants. One of the earliest endeavors of the tenant association was the



organization and administration of “The People’s College,” an offering of 75 different topics (ranging from Salesmanship to the Southern Labor Problem) over ten weeks (The Voice Tenant Newspaper, 1943, AHA Archives). The courses required a \$0.50 registration fee and required no other payment. Atlanta University sponsored the courses, and credited President Rufus E. Clement with conceiving the idea. Clement, an accommodationist that promoted uplift ideology for poor African Americans, modeled the People’s College off the successful “Citizenship Schools” the Atlanta NAACP offered in the 1930s to provide civic education to poor blacks (Ferguson, 2002). Here we see the similar attempt to acclimate the poor black populace using social, economic, and political mores of the black professional and upper classes that was used in University Homes by Alonzo Moron and the influential (and affluent) advisory committee (see Chapter 3). Clement would later go on to become the first African American elected to an Atlanta municipal office after Reconstruction, when he was elected the city’s school board in 1953 (Bacote, 1955).

Grady Homes differed from University Homes in its spillover effects into the community. While University Homes served as a resource for local residents that were spatially and legally isolated from adequate public facilities, the Sweet Auburn neighborhood was affluent and established enough to not require extensive resources from public housing developments. Thus, Grady residents were able to benefit from the wealth of offerings for Atlanta’s black citizenry, such as the long-standing civic, religious, and philanthropic institutions of the Wheat

Street Baptist Church, Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Butler Street YMCA. The Auburn Avenue branch of the Carnegie Public Library offered the first books for African-American Atlantans to check out in 1921, while the Atlanta Life Insurance Company issued some of the earliest life insurance policies for black residents, when white insurers refused to cover them. Many local branches of national organizations (the NAACP, the Urban League) located on Auburn Avenue, and in the pivotal 1960s, mayoral candidates shrewdly located campaign offices in Sweet Auburn (Pomerantz, 1996). In spite of this resource-rich setting, Grady Homes did offer one benefit to Sweet Auburn – publicly funded and maintained space for youth and adults. Local schools and youth-oriented groups used the playground and ballfields at Grady Homes, while the community center provided meeting space for adult activities (Notes from Grady Homes, AHA Archives).

As urban renewal and open housing transformed the demographics of public housing developments from traditional nuclear families to single woman-headed households, the goals and composition of the tenant associations changed to reflect this transition (see Chapter 4). With a poorer public housing population, the relationship between public housing tenants and local residents became less communal and reflected the NIMBYism often displayed in contemporary public housing communities. A telling example of this NIMBYism is displayed with Atlanta's ambitious highway program that encircles and twice bisects the city limits. Interstate 285 encircles the city, isolating the prestigious northern white

suburbs from its less affluent neighbors. Interstates 75 and 85 bisect the city into eastern and western halves, while Interstate 20 bisects the city into northern and southern halves (see Map 5.1).

**Map 5.1: Atlanta's Major Highways and Streets**



*Source: The City of Atlanta Geographic Information Systems Catalogue, Department of Planning*

Displacement for highway construction targeted primarily the poor black and white communities around the CBD, as Atlanta's business interests continued to dictate urban development policy (Keating, 2001). Atlanta's highway planning and construction began well before the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, when the State Highway Department of Georgia commissioned a comprehensive highway and transportation plan from the H.W. Lochner Company of Chicago in 1946. The Lochner report emphasized the necessity of highway construction, and advocated for the clearance of substandard areas in order to rejuvenate the City. The report's arterial system of expressways that converged into the CBD facilitated the transformation of the downtown from a mix of commercial and residential land use to an area of private and public office buildings. In 1955, the Atlanta Housing Authority sold land surrounding Grady Homes and the white-inhabited Capitol Homes to the City of Atlanta for the construction of the Downtown Connector (North-South Highway, or Interstate 75/85). The Connector created a man-made buffer between the Sweet Auburn neighborhood and the CBD. An AHA Annual Report states:

"The downtown connector segment of the main Expressway, in its finally determined location, will pass through a portion of two low-rent housing projects, Grady Homes and Capitol Homes. The City of Atlanta desired to begin Clearance work in the Grady Homes section first. The Authority, recognizing the compelling area-wide need for completion of a North-South Expressway, agreed to transfer the necessary Grady Homes project land to the City for Expressway use. In return, the City furnished the Authority with additional land to compensate for that relinquished by the Authority, and agreed to move the sixteen buildings standing in the Expressway path to other locations approved by the Authority. By June 30, this complicated move of sixteen large concrete buildings was well underway" (AHA Annual Report, 1955, AHA Archives).

The “compelling need” to complete the expressway was that of the powerful northern suburbs wanting an expedient mode of transport through Atlanta’s less desirable areas for the work commute downtown. Over the next three years, the city moved over twenty public housing buildings to accommodate highway construction, in addition to demolishing several hundred substandard homes in poor communities (Research Atlanta, 1972). These moves were conducted largely without any resistance from neighborhood advocates. In the quest to develop Atlanta as a regional transportation hub in the postwar era of automobiles, the political interests of the poor were frequently subsumed to those of the downtown business interests and their allies. The Lochner report’s original plan for the East-West highway (Interstate 20) would have demolished Auburn Avenue, had the *King v Chapman* decision not increased the political power of the black upper classes. Just as elite blacks advocated for - and received - expanded and improved residential areas in the 1950s in exchange for support of downtown political interests, they were also able to preserve Auburn Avenue by shifting the construction of the East-West highway just south of their neighborhood. The bi-racial coalition that served as a shining example of the power of the ballot in 1946 was beginning to lose its luster for poor black Atlantans, as they continued to have their electoral power exploited while their social, economic, and political gains remained stagnant relative to their elite leaders.

One woman who attempted to rectify this disparity between Grady Homes and its wealthier neighbors was Susie LaBord. LaBord and her husband Gus operated a barbeque restaurant at Fourth and Cain Streets in the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood for 22 years before their business was demolished for the construction of the Downtown Connector (Metro United Way Alexis De Tocqueville Award Program, LaBord Papers, AHA Archives). During the Great Depression, the LaBords created an alliance of small business owners in the Old Fourth Ward to provide money and goods to poorer residents. The demise of these informal networks of social welfare services were yet another casualty of the disruptive processes of urban renewal and redevelopment on poor black Atlantans.

The LaBords moved into Grady Homes in the early 1950s following Gus' cancer diagnosis; he died a year after. Susie LaBord never remarried, and instead devoted the remainder of her life to improving the Grady Homes community. As a single, black woman living in public housing, Grady focused on childcare, public health, and educational programs for poor black families. As a resident, LaBord both founded and volunteered at Grady Homes' daycare center (Susie LaBord Day Dedication, LaBord Papers, AHA Archives). Using her previous experience as a charitable coordinator in the Old Fourth Ward, she arranged for tenants to act as volunteers during the day until the program was able to attain AHA funding. This commitment to Grady Homes elevated LaBord to president of the tenant association, a position she held for over 30 years until her death. After Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964 to combat his "War on

Poverty,” LaBord sent Johnson a hand-written letter asking for funding and support for a Grady Homes Head Start program (Biography of Susie LaBord, LaBord Papers, AHA Archives). LaBord frequently utilized her unofficial position as Grady Homes advocate to circumvent classist urban politics and gain political opportunities at the Federal level, quite similar to the relationship between early University Homes’ leadership and the progressive Roosevelt administration (see Chapter 3). The combination of LaBord’s ability to mobilize resources, the Johnson’s administration’s goal to create landmark legislation with the Great Society programs and Civil Rights Act, and Atlanta’s legacy as a pilot for federal social welfare programs created a new political opportunity structure within Atlanta’s public housing developments in the 1960s and 1970s. The White House replied to LaBord’s letter within two weeks of receipt, and coordinated funding with Economic Opportunity Atlanta (EOA) to launch the East Central Neighborhood Economic Opportunity Atlanta Center, where LaBord was named founder and President. Through the East Central EOA, LaBord was able to host a variety of means-tested programs to benefit the Grady Homes community (Susie LaBord Day Dedication, LaBord Papers, AHA Archives).

The East Central EOA, like all other EOA branches, used two complementary strategies to address community needs. At the Director level, advisors (who were either elected by residents at their local EOA service center, or appointed by local community leaders) identified community needs and possible programmatic solutions. At the service aide level – paid employees from the community who



were hired to meet the maximum feasible participation requirements of the Economic Opportunity Act – advisors went into the communities to find marginalized individuals to match to available programs, funding, education, training, and employment (Dare, 1970). This two-pronged approach of place- and people-based strategies for community economic development provided a bottom-up approach to community organizing that was not previously available to the poorer residents of the Sweet Auburn neighborhood.

The launch of the East Central EOA suggests another transformation of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. As resources for political opportunities bypassed urban governments and focused more on neighborhood groups and organizations (encapsulated in the Community Action Program with maximum feasible participation by disenfranchised populations), the urban poor were able to create political spaces that provided inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes for their interests. The late 1960s and early 1970s allowed for radical interests to briefly dominate at the urban level, which in Atlanta translated to the rise of the poor and working-class interests at the expense of the downtown business and Auburn Avenue bi-racial coalition. Many of these changes in Atlanta's urban politics stemmed from the demographic shifts within the City, as school desegregation, fair housing, and a stagnant economy contributed to the loss of Atlanta's upwardly mobile population (both black and white), and their jobs, to its suburbs (Keating, 2001).

In 1972, LaBord was the first public housing tenant appointed as a voting member to the Atlanta Housing Authority Board of Commissioners. Under Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., two black men had been appointed to the Board of Commissioners: Jesse B. Blayton, of the Perry Homes Advisory Committee and founder of the first black-owned radio station in Atlanta, in 1964, and Dr. Rev. William H. Borders, pastor of the Wheat Street Baptist Church in 1969 (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). The Board of Commissioners set policies for the Atlanta Housing Authority, and previous commissioners had all been professional or academic males. Although the terms were only five-year appointments, there had only been 16 Commissioners since 1938. The average tenure for a Commissioner was 10 years, with four Commissioners serving over 15 years (Research Atlanta, 1972). LaBord had served previously as a resident Commissioner, a non-voting member of the Board of Commissioners. Since 1970, resident members served one-year terms on the Board of Commissioners; the President of the Advisory Council on Public Housing was automatically appointed as a member, and the ACPH held a body-wide election for the second resident board spot (AHA Annual Report, 1970, AHA Archives). Thus, the appointment of Susie LaBord following Borders' resignation is another indication of the shift toward a more inclusive and community-centric urban political process. Mrs. LaBord held her voting commissioner position until her death in 1991. During her tenure with the Board of Commissioners, the AHA launched a series of work training and development programs for residents. LaBord was a major proponent of lifting residents out of poverty through better training and expanding job opportunities in low-income neighborhoods. She

insisted that AHA staff more positions with residents, and shunned welfare programs that “rewarded” women for having more children as job opportunities decreased in inner cities (Tuscaloosa News, 1977).

Beginning with her 1973 re-election as president of the Grady Homes tenant association, LaBord envisioned herself as not only representing the interests of her own public housing development, but for all public housing tenants in Atlanta: “[My goal is] to be a much better president in 1973. I want to make Grady Homes and all public housing in Atlanta the best in the nation” (LaBord Papers, AHA Archives, 1973). At this point, LaBord was actively involved in citywide and national organizations to promote the interests of poor residents and community associations. In 1974, LaBord was elected as Second Vice President of the National Association of Community Development (NACD) by a vote of 1283 to 500. The NACD was a nationwide coalition of community organizations dedicated to advocating for and promoting social programs for the poor (Letter to Resident Viewpoint Newsletter, 1974, Susie LaBord Papers, AHA Archives). At the time of her election, LaBord’s approach to her next two terms as Second Vice-President of the NACD was lock-step with the individualistic theories of poverty: “Lots of poor people of all races get a chance to stand on their own feet, learn, earn, and carry their share of the load through programs of community action. We cannot let them go down the drain now” (Letter to Resident Viewpoint Newsletter, 1974, Susie LaBord Papers, AHA Archives).

LaBord continued to spotlight Atlanta public housing at the national level in her many trips to Washington, DC by testifying on various subcommittees on issues of education, poverty, housing, and community economic development. LaBord frequently used examples from Grady Homes and her experience with poor Atlantans through the East Central EOA during her testimonials. Such examples likely contributed to the steady funding of poverty pilot programs that were sited within and around public housing developments in the early 1970s, such as day care centers, Job Corps training centers, nutritional and drug addiction programs, and adult literacy facilities. Within a decade of writing that first letter to President Johnson, LaBord was sought out as a speaker to community organizations, and was a legitimate expert in her work advocating for the poor. In spite of shrinking Federal funding to support public housing, LaBord was integral in organizing the funding and construction of the Susie LaBord Community Center at Grady Homes in 1976. Keeping with LaBord's focus on expanding the rights of the poor, the community center primarily functioned as a gathering space for tenant association and grievance committee meetings.

Susie LaBord's tireless advocacy on behalf of Grady Homes sustained this development as a political opportunity structure even as Federal funding continued to decline throughout the 1970s. Under LaBord's leadership, the Grady Homes tenant association mobilized resources from the Federal level to improve their marginalized political legitimacy at the City level. LaBord also strengthened the political legitimacy of neighborhood and community organizations through her

connections with the NACD, EOA, and United Way. In spite of LaBord's dedication to maintaining a social safety net for marginalized groups, poverty rates and welfare receipts continued to increase across Atlanta and its public housing population. The political evolution of Atlanta's low-income housing organizations in the 1970s and the response at the City level are described in the next two sections.

*Tenant Organization and Urban Bureaucracy: The Advisory Council on Public Housing*

In 1971, tenant association leaders and the Atlanta Housing Authority formed the Citywide Advisory Council on Public Housing (ACPH). The purpose of the ACPH was to formally bridge the gap between the Atlanta Housing Authority, the AHA management and staff, and the resident associations. The 1965 Housing and Urban Development Act and the 1968 Housing Act authorized the construction of over six million public housing units over ten years. Between 1968 and 1973, the AHA constructed ten public housing developments with over 5,000 new units of housing – over 30 percent of the total number of Atlanta's public housing units (Research Atlanta, 1983). Within a decade, public housing would comprise nearly 10 percent of all Atlanta's housing stock, 15 percent of all Atlanta's rental housing stock, and house nearly four percent of all Atlanta's residents (Research Atlanta, 1983). Atlanta's population was becoming poorer, blacker, and jobs were continuing to leave at a rapid rate. While organizations for tenant rights and poor advocacy truly

flourished in the late 1960s, during the 1970s these associations grew bureaucratized as they were subsumed within Atlanta's urban regime. Simultaneously, tensions mounted between advocates over territory (public housing development), resources (programmatic funding and staff), and the most effective solutions to poverty (individual versus structural).

By externalizing its shared interests and pooling resources, the utility of public housing developments as political opportunity structures had declined during the 1970s. ACPH tenant leadership was dominated by the larger public housing developments such as Perry and Carver Homes' residents. In addition, the tenant leadership was also predominantly African American and female, reflecting the majority populations in public housing. There were no white tenants involved in the leadership of the ACPH since its founding. In spite of the tenant population changes, AHA Executive leadership remained white and male until the 1977 appointment of Ernest C. Jackson as the first African-American AHA Executive Director (AHA Annual Reports, AHA Archives). The previous director, Lester H. Persells, was extremely reluctant to integrate public housing developments and equally resistant to the black female leadership of the ACPH (Memos to Lester H. Persells, ACPH Meeting Minutes, AHA Archives). Jackson had served for over a decade as the Housing Director of the AHA, and was a frequent target of Atlanta's black leadership for his complacency in AHA's deliberate (and possible illegal) process of housing integration (Letter to Ernest Jackson, 1967, Atlanta Branch of NAACP Papers, AARL Archives). Although Jackson was much more responsive to

tenant needs as Executive Director, the lack of funding limited his ability to affect change across public housing communities.

However, in its early years, the ACPH was extremely effective in spite of Persells' resistance to the more radical political voice of AHA's tenant associations. The ACPH voiced the shared grievances across public housing communities, maximizing the effectiveness of the organization as a new political opportunity structure for poor black Atlantans. The ACPH was also more effective because during its early years tenants worked *with* AHA executives and management staff instead of *against* them, particularly when it came to advocating for more Federal funds. One of the earlier efforts of the ACPH was to petition Governor Jimmy Carter, Senators Herman E. Talmadge, Sr. and Sam Nunn, and President Nixon to prevent budget cuts to dozens of public housing anti-poverty programs and resident jobs within the housing authority (Minutes from ACPH Meetings, 1971, AHA Archives). The ACPH was frequently able to mobilize its population of nearly 50,000 residents to support public housing programs and legitimize the political efficacy of poor Atlantans.

By November 1972, the relationship between ACPH tenant members and the AHA board became decidedly antagonistic as tenants launched rent strikes in April 1972 to protest the stalled modernization program and declining maintenance operations (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives). Louise Watley, president of the Carver Homes tenant association, emerged as the more radical

tenant leader of the ACPH, and clashed frequently with the more accommodationist Susie LaBord, who had resigned from the ACPH tenant chairmanship due to her recent appointment to the AHA Board of Commissioners (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives). While only Ernest Jackson (Director of Housing) typically attended the ACPH meetings as the formal AHA representative, Executive Director Lester Persells, and all five members of the AHA Board of Commissioners, in addition to the Housing and Urban Development Director of Housing Management and Community Services attended the November 1972 meeting (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives). The gathering of such influential leaders definitely increased the political visibility and efficacy of the public housing tenants and their interests through the ACPH. Launching a citywide rent strike, however, did little to expedite the congressional authorization of HUD funds to local housing authorities, and AHA leaders and HUD representatives used this meeting to shift the blame from themselves to Congress (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives). However, Watley also attacked the political process and advocated for more transparency from the government, particularly the release of HUD and AHA budgets to the public. Watley stated that if tenants had an idea of the budget, they would temper their demands and champion cost-effective and resource-efficient solutions. A compromise was reached between the two sides to streamline the maintenance process to prevent residential “favoritism” from maintenance workers and centralize maintenance requests through development management offices. Tenants who overburdened the maintenance system relative to the size of age of their unit would receive additional charges on their rent bill to



cover the additional maintenance. Further, the AHA would begin providing classes to educate tenants on housing maintenance and upkeep, mimicking its managerial approach to acclimating tenants to middle class values in the 1930s (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives). However, implementation stalled on both the classes and the maintenance system, and the rent strike continued (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives).

In February 1973, Atlanta Legal Aid representative to ACPH provided an update on the rent strikes. Following nine months of rent payments into escrow accounts set up by the courts, the AHA retaliated by sending eviction notices and dispossessory warrants to striking tenants (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). AHA and Legal Aid attorneys met to reach another compromise regarding the inefficient maintenance and grievance procedures that marginalized tenant needs and caused the current rent strike. The new maintenance procedure included mandatory semiannual housing inspections for each unit, which would result in a maintenance needs card for each household. Maintenance workers would address each need from the inspection, and tenants would submit their satisfaction with the maintenance to the Housing Director (Ernest Jackson). If the maintenance provided was not satisfactory, AHA would send out a maintenance person from their centralized staff to address the issue (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). The rent strike ended after nine months, and the resources of the ACPH and its member agencies provided a progressive resolution to long-standing issues about grievance procedures in public housing developments.

The racial composition and size of the ACPH and public housing developments made it a virtual electoral necessity for local candidates. The ACPH hosted a series of debates for the 1974 mayoral elections, using their significant voting power to make demands on municipal offices ranging from health programs to employment opportunities (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). Representatives from Congressman Andrew Young's office frequently attended ACPH meetings and offered the resources of Young's office to public housing residents (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). Three members of his office were staffed exclusively for public housing casework and other social welfare programs for the poor (Notes from Andrew Young Papers, AARL Archives). Thus, within two years of its creation, ACPH provided public housing tenants with access to local and national community organizations (from the EOA to the National Tenants Organization), legal and health entities (Legal Aid and the Fulton County Health Department), and local, State, and Federal elected officials (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives).

Bolstered by the effectiveness of the rent strike on the maintenance process and the support of outside organizations and officials, the ACPH's next campaign was against the public housing recreation centers. In recent years, the AHA was leasing the recreation centers to local childcare organizations to administer day care centers. Frequently, public housing tenants were employed in these centers. However, tenants lodged complaints with their ACPH representatives as they were

effectively barred from using the centers, even in the later hours. Meeting and gathering space served as an integral part to community development in public housing communities, and Watley (elected as Chairwoman earlier in the year) gave AHA one month to address this issue. At the next monthly meeting, Ernest Jackson relayed that he and the tenant associations of the affected developments were meeting with local organizations to provide space for tenant meetings that conflicted with day care operations (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). While holding tenant meetings off-site isolated tenant associations from the tenants, it also expanded the interests of the associations to include the needs of the surrounding community.

At the April 1973 meeting, representatives from EOA and Girl Scouts of America attended to discuss implementing Girl Scout leadership training and employment opportunities for residents and providing resources for AHA youth programs (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). An ACPH committee comprised of tenants and AHA management were already working with the Camp Fire Girls, the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the Atlanta Public Library to inject community resources into public housing developments. The resources of these organizations would supplant the dwindling social welfare programs that had long provided a safety net for public housing residents. In a rather radical move, Samuel Fullwood of the EOA (and University Homes resident) suggested that public housing developments without recreation programs and those with the highest crime rates receive priority assignment of external resources and programs (Minutes of ACPH

Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). This selection criteria was one of the first solutions that addressed structural issues of poverty instead of individualistic.

During the summer of 1973, tenant ACPH leadership focused on tenant job training programs and improved security measures in public housing developments (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). The Atlanta Housing Authority was one of the largest public housing agencies that did not have its own security force, and tenants were increasingly worried that “outside neighbors” were taking advantage of vacant units and under maintained streetlights to conduct criminal activity. As poverty rates climbed in public housing neighborhoods, so too did crime rates (AHA Annual Report, 1975, AHA Archives). Representatives from the Atlanta Police Department spoke at the June 1973 meeting, offering a community policing program which would provide residents with security and negotiation training in addition to supplying electronic surveillance equipment for developments (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). Police representatives seemed almost anxious to promote the latest advances in surveillance technology, including a new helicopter patrol that would necessitate the AHA to paint house numbers on the building roofs for easy identification. While tenant members of the ACPH were interested in curtailing crime through building a trusting relationship with police officers (e.g., encouraging residents to call the police when they witness a crime), the police favored a less personal approach that would do little to foster community trust (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives).

The summer also sparked more grievances against the management with regards to the AHA's policies and processes (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). Louise Watley demanded the ACPH draw up a resolution (an oft-used method of formally registering grievances with the AHA Boards of Commissioners and Directors) to force the AHA to release their budgets, as well as the racial composition of their employees. Mary Sanford, President of the Perry Homes tenant association and an ACPH member that promoted tenant inclusion on most AHA policy and programmatic decision-making, suggested the resolution should also include a caveat for tenants to sit in on AHA budget hearings. Sanford had previously questioned the AHA's process for selecting tenant job training and youth recreation programs, suggesting that such programs were often "forced" on tenants regardless of the tenants' interests (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). Sanford advocated for more specialized programming, that was crafted from the suggestions of tenants and not from outside consultants, a move supported by AHA Director of Management Improvement Program, Dwight Jackson. When polled by the ACPH training subcommittee, tenants requested courses in community organizing, group dynamics, and communication – suggesting that tenants were interested in becoming more politically active (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1973, AHA Archives). The outcome of the summer of 1973 suggests that tenant leaders of ACPH were focusing on radicalizing both the policy processes and outcomes of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

Although Executive Director Lester Persells had an extremely antagonistic relationship with the more radical tenant members of the ACPH, he rarely appeared at any of the meetings. His assistant, David Warner, often sat in on meetings, but not as an official representative of the Executive Director's staff (Memos from David E. Warner, AHA Archives). Instead, Warner would take notes of each meeting and provide them as memos to Lester Persells, even as the ACPH distributed meeting minutes to the AHA leadership. While some of Warner's notations highlighted issues that would be of interest to an Executive Director, such as requests for the progress of the housing modernization program, others include rather racist subtext that belittle the tenant leadership. Warner often noted the "disorganization" of and "melees" at ACPH meetings and the loudness of its participants. Resolutions were frequently derided as being "illiterate" and containing the "nonsense language" favored by tenant leaders (Memos from David E. Warner, 1973, AHA Archives). After Louise Watley and John Shabazz put forth a resolution to bar Lester Persells from anything related to tenant association elections, Warner suggested the two residents were targeting Persells to maintain their leadership positions within the ACPH (Memo from David E. Warner, 1973, AHA Archives).

Persells response to the new radical ACPH leadership was the use of legal stalling maneuvers and addressing tenant grievances with bureaucratic solutions. After successfully quashing previous rent strikes with eviction notices, Persells relied on the AHA's counsel to negotiate with ACPH, exhausting the group's legal aid

resources in the process. ACPH members accused the AHA Board of Commissioners of not showing good faith and appearing at meetings to address tenant inclusion into policymaking matters. They pursued legal action as a form of protest, suing the Housing Authority for failing to implement the federally mandated Model Lease and Grievance procedure (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1972, AHA Archives; Lefcoe, 1971). Compromises to the group's demands were frequently bureaucratized – mired in so many layers of procedure and legal language that changes in public housing policy and procedures were slowly realized.

When Maynard Jackson, Jr. was elected as Atlanta's mayor in the 1973 election, his longstanding relationship with public housing groups, including ACPH, made him popular with tenant leaders. At a January 1974 meeting, Louise Watley suggested that AHA Commissioners should respond a bit more quickly to their demands on they would "march to City Hall" with a powerful delegation to get new Commissioners appointed (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). Susie LaBord quickly interjected that Maynard Jackson would act as a mayor to "all people" and not just public housing tenants (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). The mayor's relationship to public housing developments and the changes he produced within Atlanta's urban regime are discussed in the next section.

*Maynard Jackson, Jr. and Public Housing Communities*

Maynard Jackson Jr.'s first term as mayor of Atlanta was a radical departure from the Allen and Hartsfield regimes that preceded it. Instead of the traditional governing coalition of downtown business white interests with Auburn Avenue black interests, Jackson favored a community-based, small-scale approach that focused on economic development across all neighborhoods. As the first African-American Vice-Mayor in Atlanta under Mayor Sam Massell, Jackson managed to assemble a loyal coalition of interests using this neighborhood approach. His advocacy for the preservation of peripheral downtown neighborhoods against highway construction aligned him with moderate white residents, while his support for extending the MARTA rail system to Perry Homes and Proctor Creek garnered him support in the public service-deficient northwest Atlanta. Jackson ruled over an Atlanta that had a sustained black majority, and the necessity of placating to white business interests within the urban regime faded significantly for black leaders in the 1970s (Eisinger, 1980).

In November 1974, Jackson appeared at a special ACPH meeting to discuss his plan for public housing in Atlanta, using the case of Bankhead Courts as an example. Built during the public housing construction boom from the 1968 Housing Act, Bankhead Court was a 550 unit complex in northwest Atlanta that was cheaply constructed and severely underserved by public services and private businesses. Crime rates soared due to the lack of recreational facilities and employment



opportunities for young residents, and Jackson approached the ACPH with solutions to improve not only Bankhead Courts, but also the surrounding neighborhood. He stated that “95 percent of the problems we have are not the fault of tenants. These problems are the result of the lack of proper environment for tenants of public housing” (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives). City councilman and former AHA Director of Family Services Carl Ware announced a Council Task Force to examine the improvement of quality of life in public housing, the improvement of rehabilitated housing, and the amount of housing produced. Further, Jackson asked that tenant association presidents submit comments about the state of their individual housing projects. His office was also convening a task force comprised of students from Emory, Georgia State, Georgia Tech, and the colleges of the Atlanta University Center to address these issues and draw up salient solutions (Minutes of ACPH Meeting, 1974, AHA Archives).

Jackson continued to promote a new guard of black leadership that differed from the traditional Auburn Avenue leaders of the 1950s and 1960s. One of his first appointments to the AHA Board of Commissioners was Louise Watley, creating a board that held a black majority for the first time in its existence. Jackson also appointed Ernest Jackson, longtime AHA employee and active participant in ACPH meetings and projects as the first black Executive Director of the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA Annual Report, 1975, AHA Archives). One of Jackson’s first major changes in the urban regime was the appointment of A. Reginald Eaves as Atlanta’s first black Public Safety Commissioner, and the removal of longstanding police chief

John Inman (Pomerantz, 1996). This controversial move promoted the idea that Jackson was only hiring African Americans, severely racializing the political environment that had long thrived as a bi-racial coalition. Although Jackson did much to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups (the poor, women, African Americans) into the urban governance process, there was little he could do to combat the structural issues that plagued American cities at the time. Atlanta's unemployment had increased from a low of 2.2 percent during the first term of the Allen Administration to 7.5 percent during Jackson's first term. Likewise, the national recession decreased job opportunities and public safety funds; Atlanta's crime rate increased 300 percent from 1965 to 1974 (Pomerantz, 1996).

Suburbanization of both Atlanta's middle class residents (both black and white) and its downtown economic engine harmed both the Mayor's image and his ability to stimulate the local economy. His failure to secure relationships with downtown business interests – Jackson claimed that he ran on the “issues” – subsequently isolated him from the influential media powerhouses, *The Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Constitution*. Since the Hartsfield regime, the two daily newspapers worked closely with downtown business leaders to promote Atlanta and protect the urban regime from any press that could detract from its progressive and business-friendly image. However, the business community's failure to openly support the new mayor weakened the newspapers' interests in continuing to act as journalistic city boosters. The weakened relationship between Jackson and business interests was not solely the mayor's fault. The national economic downturn limited the city's

ability to leverage the safety government funds (e.g., urban renewal funding) for risky capital investments in downtown construction. Further, the downtown establishment did not appreciate their weakened position within the governing coalition, and the new racial dynamics of the power structure did little to assuage their egos (Eisinger, 1980; Pomerantz, 1996).

At the end of Jackson's first term as Mayor, black residents of all socioeconomic status had finally realized true economic, social, and political gains. The \$400 million expansion of Atlanta's airport required 25 percent of all contracts go to minority businesses. In 1974, minority businesses received one percent of all city contracts; by 1976, minority businesses received nearly 25 percent of contracts, and received nearly 40 percent in 1978 (Pomerantz, 1996). Although Jackson received strong resistance from both white contractors (who would resist partnering with minority contractors until the City threatened to sue for damages) and white voters (who rejected a bond referendum in 1975 as a rejection of the increased black political and economic visibility in Atlanta), he was re-elected in 1977 with no opposition. Jackson continued to be a champion of public housing residents and their active tenant associations and citywide committees. Of greatest significance for all poor black residents were the neighborhood planning units in the city that promoted an inclusive planning process that utilized a bottom-up approach to neighborhood planning. By institutionalizing the small-scale approach to political processes encapsulated by the public housing development as a political

opportunity structure, the Jackson Administration finally lent these political spaces legitimacy.

The cases of Grady Homes and the Advisory Council on Public Housing describe the final transformation of public housing as a political opportunity structure in Atlanta. The case of Grady Homes describes the structural limitations of the development as political opportunity structure, particularly as the city's proportion of public housing tenants increases while Federal subsidies and local rent receipts decrease. However, it also provides an example of a tenant successfully using the organizational capacity and political legitimacy of the structure to transcend political scales for justice through space using the resources of new Federal programs and local organizations. Using the political acumen of Susie LaBord and her ability to acquire and effectively mobilize resources for Grady Homes' residents, the public housing development was able to weather the structural issues of the declining urban tax base, decreasing rental receipts, and increasing poverty rates amongst public housing residents. The Grady Homes Head Start program provided both jobs and childcare for a population of single-woman-headed households that were facing increasing employment discrimination and limited job opportunities in the postwar city. The 1969 Brooke Amendment that limited tenant rent to 25% of their incomes, in addition to the consistent influx of Urban Renewal displacees, decreased the working- and middle-class population in public housing that allowed local housing authorities to remain solvent. While the racialization of poverty had long undermined the political legitimacy (yet increased

the political necessity) of the public housing development as political opportunity structure, the subsequent intersection of the feminization of poverty further reduced the legitimacy of public housing tenants and their advocates. While poor black women were marginalized and generally excluded from participating in mainstream civic, social, and economic life, public housing tenant associations provided opportunities for these women to engage and express their interests to the State using the political opportunity structure. Thus, an individual like Susie LaBord was able to transcend this local discrimination and advocate for tenant rights' effectively at the Federal level, benefitting the residents and the city through increased Federal attention and funds.

However, Susie LaBord's resource mobilization came with its costs and constraints. Mrs. LaBord acted as president of the Grady Homes' tenant association from the late 1950s until her death in 1991. While her accomplishments during this tenure are numerous and effectively helped to achieve the goals of its residents, the structural limitations of a leadership structure without term limits and an engaged electorate restrict the inclusiveness of the development as a political opportunity structure. LaBord's individualistic approach to poverty continued a decades-long obsession of tenant associations' cream-skimming for the deserving poor, while excluding the most vulnerable of the poor population. While LaBord helped to address the lack of job training and employment opportunities in the city using her resources at Economic Opportunity Atlanta, it did little to address the increasing number of jobs that were relocating to the northern suburbs, and the obsolescence

of government job training and opportunities. During LaBord's brief tenure in the ACPH's leadership, she frequently clashed with incoming president Louise Watley of Carver Homes. These tensions reflect the end of the accommodationist and uplift political ideology of the old Atlanta leadership, and the rise of the more radical, insurgent approach to black political mobilization that emerged during the 1960s across the nation.

The ACPH helped to overcome the structural limitations of the public housing development as political opportunity structure by realizing and institutionalizing the spatial consciousness of Atlanta's public housing population in the 1970s. It also reflects the growing tenant movement that emerged out of the civil rights and welfare rights movements of the 1960s (Piven and Cloward, 1977). Due to declining urban resources and the political success of the Community Action Programs that required maximum feasible participation of community residents, local housing authorities were attempting tenant management programs to address the growing antagonisms between tenants and management (Lefcoe, 1971). This antagonism developed following decades of fairly amiable and cooperative relations between the Atlanta Housing Authority management and their tenants. Thus, the ACPH helped to overcome these structural limitations by creating a supra-tenant association that increased tenant representation, visibility, and political legitimacy, particularly in its founding years. The election of Maynard Jackson, Jr. and his neighborhood-centric administration helped to integrate the ACPH into the new urban regime, thus institutionalizing it as a new political

opportunity structure for poor blacks in Atlanta.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter will focus on the evolution of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure in Atlanta. Specifically, this chapter will examine how both the (re)construction of race and its eventual intersection with class and gender, and the effects of the politics of Atlanta's postwar urban regime contributed to this evolution. Finally, this chapter will discuss the viability of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure in the changing context of the neoliberal urban environment. As public housing ownership and management shifts from the public to the private domain and its residents contest within ever-marginalizing spaces and roles within the urban political economy, how effective are these developments as political opportunity structures in the 21st century?

### *The Transformation of Atlanta's Public Housing Developments as Political Opportunity Structures, 1936-1975*

The construction of public housing for Atlanta's African-American residents following the passage of the second New Deal permitted a new space for political action amongst a disenfranchised group. Following the end of Reconstruction in the southern states, local and state governments had systemically ignored the needs of its African American population by rolling back the significant social, economic, and political gains from Reconstruction policies. In spite of Atlanta's



substantial black population, Georgia's political system relegated black political action to participation in general elections. The State adopted a constitution in 1877 that mandated voters pay a cumulative poll tax and strengthened its residential requirements for voter registration (Bacote, 1955). Further, the State's county unit system (1917-1962) favored the political interests of the predominantly white, non-urban areas of Georgia. Under this system, three rural counties of any population would have the same political representation as the City of Atlanta. At the local level, Atlanta's (private) Democratic Executive Committee implemented an all-white primary in 1896 to maintain the integrity of the city's electoral system (Bacote, 1955). Thus, in 1936, the low registration numbers and electoral turnout of African-American voters reflected the marginalized political opportunities and spaces of Atlanta's African American population.

Public housing developments first emerged as political opportunity structures in 1930s Atlanta via the progressive policy goals of Roosevelt's New Deal administration. Robert C. Weaver of the Public Works Administration's Housing Division advocated for mandatory minority contracts on black public housing developments, as well as black managers and staff to oversee the developments' operations. Local advisory committees provided new opportunities for black interests within the city's planning processes. Racial disparities still remained from the use of cheaper construction materials on black public housing developments, and the lack of public goods and services for the black neighborhoods that housed these developments. However, black public housing developments were able to

circumvent the exclusionary political spaces and processes of the local and State governments using opportunities from the federal level to benefit residents, employees, and surrounding communities.

These developments functioned as political opportunity structures as a result of the exclusionary and segregating forces of the local and state political environments that marginalized black political participation and engagement. Unable to participate in any influential elections and having no black representation within local and State government, public housing tenant associations provided an organizational capacity for black political interests. Tenant associations allowed for black housing managers and tenants to mobilize the resources of the progressive federal government to recapture some of the social, economic, and political gains that were lost following the end of Reconstruction.

Early public housing developments in black communities provided increased public facilities and spaces for an increasingly segregated black population. Residential segregation produced overcrowded black neighborhoods with substandard housing stock. Black exclusion from city planning and budgeting positions and processes produced fewer parks, schools, and libraries to service black neighborhoods; there were no black policemen until 1948 and no black firemen until 1963. Atlanta did have the benefit of a well-established black middle and upper class with a thriving economic district (Auburn Avenue) and academic

community (the Atlanta University Center Consortium). However, for poor black residents around the city's central business district, there were few public resources and services. The disparities between black and white neighborhoods were exacerbated by the city's decision to site its negative externalities almost exclusively in black residential areas (e.g., garbage dumps, rail yards, and other hazardous land uses).

The funding and resources from the federally financed public housing developments provided expansive recreational areas, centers, and a library for Atlanta's black communities. The developments required indoor plumbing and standardized heating and electric systems, improving overall housing conditions for its tenants while removing substandard housing through slum clearance. Atlanta had the first public housing developments constructed by PWA's Housing Division program, and these initial developments warranted a great deal of attention from the national media. While the federal government used the successes of Atlanta's developments as an example of the overall success of the controversial Housing Division, black public housing tenants and employees used this increased attention as political leverage. Tenants and housing managers worked to maintain and improve the resources of the developments, such as continued support of public speakers, public health clinics, and course offerings through the local universities. Local residents outside of the developments reaped the benefits of this new political leverage, as tenants organized to improve

neighborhood street lighting, paving, public safety, and traffic circulation around the development.

The early stages of public housing developments as political opportunity structures utilized the dominant personalities of housing managers who proffered racial uplift ideology to their tenants. Managers typically hand-selected tenant associations or formed ad-hoc committees to address the civic interests of the black middle and upper classes. The tenant population was also subject to exclusionary processes that did little to address the hardships of the most economically disadvantaged in the city. Income minimums, in-house interviews, and strict family definitions admitted the upwardly mobile working class into black housing developments, thus limiting the impact of the political opportunity structure. The entrenched low-income black community was largely excluded from engaging in the political process until the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision prohibited the all-white Democratic primary, and created a black electorate that transgressed socioeconomic status.

The 1946 decision produced an electorate in Atlanta that was nearly 1/3 black. This dramatic shift in the local political environment prompted the swift enactment of the 1951 Plan of Improvement that expanded the City of Atlanta by 81 square miles and 100,000 residents. The black electorate decreased from 27 percent of the total electorate in 1946 to 21 percent in 1952. Although the power of the black vote was diluted relative to whites, two civic leaders from Auburn Avenue formed

the bi-partisan Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) in 1949 to establish a united political bloc. Local leaders had to court the black vote – even if in secret – in order to insure their electoral success. Unfortunately, the ANVL catered nearly exclusively to the interests of the black elite leaders of Atlanta’s Auburn Avenue business corridor and the Atlanta University Center Consortium’s academic leadership. While a guaranteed black vote for local candidates expanded the use of public golf courses to black residents and allocated more land for middle class black subdivisions, black public housing developments were increasingly sited in the underdeveloped and underserved northwest section of the city. Blacks, particularly low-income blacks, were more likely to reside in substandard housing relative to white residents and were relegated to low paying jobs with limited socioeconomic mobility, such as menial labor and domestic work (Bayor, 1996; Harmon, 1996).

The spatial isolation and emerging political needs of black residents in Atlanta’s northwestern public housing developments mark a new period in the evolution of these developments as political opportunity structures. The increase in public housing developments was related to increased federal funding from Title III of the 1949 Housing Act, authorizing 800,000 new public housing units. Urban Renewal programs of the 1954 Housing Act funded slum clearance and privileged commercial redevelopment and downtown revitalization over expanding the affordable housing market for booming postwar urban populations. The postwar public housing population, and as a result the resources and goals of the postwar

political opportunity structures, comprised both displaced residents of slum clearance, and the upwardly mobile working class families that were admitted through the Atlanta's Housing Authority's tenant selection process.

African-American working- and middle-class tenants were unable to move into the private housing market as a result of the racist practices codified by the 1934 Housing Act and upheld by private lenders to perpetuate residential segregation. The dual housing market of postwar urban areas limited the amount of turnover in black public housing developments compared to white developments (AHA Annual Reports, 1950-1960). Political organizing to address the lack of black residential land and financing emerged within the black political spaces legitimized by their inclusion in Mayor Hartsfield's bi-racial coalition. The black electoral coalition advocated for the interests of the upwardly mobile black community, in spite of the growing population of poor black residents contained in public housing in northwest Atlanta. The first decade of the Perry Homes tenant association focused on expanding this upwardly mobile population via racial uplift ideology – classes in civic behavior and professional education courses in subjects ranging from accounting to typing. Male tenant leaders worked with male leaders of academic institutions to improve the overall social and economic standing of the race through education. It was not until the early 1960s when women were first elected to lead Perry Homes tenant association that more communal political action occurred from public housing developments. Focusing on greater access to libraries and parks, improved access from public transit services, and more

neighborhood schools allowed these tenant associations to address the inequalities and inequities of Atlanta's planning processes. By the early 1970s, Atlanta had created a citywide Advisory Council on Public Housing (ACPH), and the leaders of this organization were permitted to sit on the policymaking body of the Atlanta Housing Authority, the Board of Commissioners. Tenant associations had evolved to address the spatial marginalization of planning processes and were able to mobilize more resources to address a larger population with the ACPH.

The focus on inclusion and political processes in Atlanta's tenant associations coincided with a national civil rights movement for African Americans. One of the outcomes of this national movement was a wealth of resources for poor black residents in the nation's cities. For Atlanta's public housing developments, this included new resources from community organizations that were encouraged to include underrepresented populations in its leadership and goal setting processes. An individual like Susie LaBord, who transcended the limits of the public housing development, used the tenant association to mobilize resources from multiple community organizations and maximized political opportunities for women, the elderly, and the unemployed. Following three decades of male-dominated tenant association, the emergence of the woman-headed tenant association has persisted in spite of the feminization and racialization of poverty since the 1970s. As the interests of poor, black women were marginalized in urban environments, public housing developments created a legitimate political space for the representation of and advocacy for these interests (Gregory, 1993). This legitimacy became

increasingly crucial as the decline of the Community Action and Economic Opportunity programs that supported the maximum feasible participation of the poor limited their community political spaces and resources. In 1970s Atlanta, public housing developments remained a space for political debates, community organizing, and social welfare programs for an increasingly disenfranchised and marginalized population.

The transformation of public housing developments as political opportunity structures was shaped by the politics of race, planning, and poverty in Atlanta. The next section addresses the shifts in these three ideologies, and how these shifts were leveraged amongst the different political interests over time. The social reconstruction of race and poverty in Atlanta significantly influenced the outcomes of the city's planning and policymaking processes. While the public housing development as a political opportunity structure influenced these processes, the processes were simultaneously shaping the developments. The gains of the structures were short term, as political processes quickly shifted to marginalize tenant interests in the long term. The demolition of Atlanta's public housing and the weakened role of tenant associations in the new mixed-income communities suggest that the development as political opportunity structure was not a sustainable political space for Atlanta's poor residents.



*The Politics of Race, Housing, and Poverty in Atlanta, 1936-1975*

The social construction and reconstruction of race in Atlanta between 1936 and 1975 reflects not just the progress in race relations through local, State, and Federal civil rights policies, but also the transformation of Atlanta's political processes and institutions to accommodate this progression. This project sought to understand race in Atlanta within the context of citizenship; particularly how blacks were accepted and integrated into majority white social, economic, and political environments. Following the gains of the Reconstruction era where two black Republicans were elected into citywide offices to represent the Third and Fourth wards, the civil rights of blacks were later reduced by exclusion from social, economic, and political activities. The Compromise of 1877 that established Republican Rutherford B. Hayes as the president necessitated the removal of Federal troops from Southern states and commenced the decline of the parties' influence within state and local politics. From 1877 to 1946, white Georgian democrats began a reign of tyranny using State and local governments to oppress African-American residents, thereby racializing the concept of citizenship (Young, 1991). Georgian democrats marginalized black voters through the establishment of a whites-only Democratic primary in 1896, removed their businesses and homes from the CBD in the 1906 race riot through violence, and systemically excluded them from positions of power and influence. These oppressive tactics established a white supremacy within local and state politics for over fifty years.

Following the restoration of full voting rights for African Americans with the *King v Chapman* decision, race was constructed for more utilitarian purposes, as a means to secure political and economic gains for Atlanta's white elite leaders. Under the postwar economic expansion, non-unionized southern states became new sites of production as manufacturers from the northeast relocated to reduce costs and maximize profits (Beauregard, 2006). Atlanta, as the regional transportation hub of the South, stood to profit from this massive shift of capital. The city's business leaders worked with its elected officials to launch a massive booster campaign that emphasized Atlanta's (relatively) progressive attitude towards race relations. The postwar economic expansion also brought about a change in national attitudes towards race relations, as exemplified with the 1948 *Shelley v Kraemer* decision prohibiting racial deed restrictions and the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision that ruled separate yet equal public schools were unconstitutional. Many southern states resisted Federal intrusion on what were previously regarded as state and local affairs (public education and private property) using the state-sponsored oppression of local and State police forces and militias. As the legislative ability to marginalize black claims of citizenship diminished at the state and local level, many southern states condoned violence, or used the threat of violence, to maintain the white supremacist control over social, political, and economic affairs. To separate itself from its less progressive cohort cities, Atlanta attempted to integrate its public facilities without violent resistance from the local government, relying instead on private negotiations between black and white elites (Hunter, 1953).

The negotiations were also necessitated by the growing political power of Atlanta's black residents following the *King v Chapman* decision. Black votes were now an integral part of citywide electoral success, and Atlanta's mayoral candidates over the next three decades would secure their office using a coalition of Atlanta's black and liberal (elite) white populations. Yet the negotiations between the black electoral coalition and the white governing coalition were limited to the professional and upper classes of both races. The urban regime and community power structure that Stone (1989) and Hunter (1953) describe in their analyses of Atlanta are both markedly elite and provide for little consideration of the poor's needs and even less for more inclusive political processes and institutions. Atlanta's postwar racial politics deemed racial integration and equal rights a product of economic necessity and political savvy. The black elites of Auburn Avenue were given token inclusion into Atlanta's political institutions, but remained relegated to ad-hoc committees and minority positions of power. In a time where cities nationwide were forming committees on race relations to address the growing racial disparities of urbanization (Manning Thomas, 1997), Atlanta's race relations were dictated by an elite group of whites and blacks. Fearing backlash from working class and poor white residents, the outcome of these private negotiations were usually not published in the media and were implemented over a period of time. The integration of public schools and downtown department stores were implemented in the fall of 1961 with little media attention. Similarly, public housing integration in 1965 was completed

without any major press releases from the Atlanta Housing Authority, nor any mention in its annual reports.

The 1970s marks the final decade of Atlanta's population growth, and also marks the first decade where black residents outnumbered white residents (at 51.3 percent and 48.4 percent of the population, respectively). Civil disturbances erupted across cities nationwide, and African Americans were increasingly using protest as a means to make claims on the State. In Atlanta, civil disturbances were limited to a three- day conflict in the Summerhill neighborhood (south of Auburn Avenue, southeast of the CBD) in 1967. The Civil Rights Act in 1964 and Johnson's Great Society programs of the late 1960s allocated substantial federal funding to urban programs and organizations that served and employed poor (and primarily African-American) urban residents. While the effectiveness of these programs was limited due to entrenched bureaucracy, the failure of urban revitalization programs and the rise of urban poverty were racialized. Black family structures and behaviors were labeled as dysfunctional (Moynihan and Glazer, 1970), and federal policies such as the 1969 Brooke Amendment and the expansion of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1968 contributed to this dysfunction. During the 1970s, race was viewed as a cause of the urban crisis, as opposed to a symptom (Sugrue, 1996). While Atlanta was able to elect its first black mayor under these racialized conditions in 1974, Maynard Jackson's failure to include white elite interests caused political gridlock and expedited the flight of white populations and businesses to the northern suburbs. Nonetheless, Jackson appointed several

African Americans to position of power in his administration, expanded opportunities for black business owners to compete for city contracts, and continued to support neighborhood organizations that promoted equitable outcomes for the urban poor. The 1970s was a decade where black Atlantans of all socioeconomic status were able to finally realize claims of citizenship on the State.

Housing provided both the means and the ends of racial politics in Atlanta between 1936 and 1975. Housing, and by extension, neighborhoods, is the foundation for a number of urban issues such as political representation (by ward), education (public school funding and control), and recreation (neighborhood parks and community centers). As blacks and whites struggled for space and political legitimacy in an increasingly segregated Atlanta, these aforementioned issues served as virtual battlegrounds of contestation. Since 1922, Atlanta had used race as a land use category, subordinating land for black residents to that of white residents. Black residential areas were separated from white residential areas using either manmade (industrial areas) or natural barriers. While upwardly mobile white residents were able to move freely in the private housing market, black residents faced restrictions from both government-subsidized capital availability and private realtor practices that promoted residential segregation. Atlanta's African-American population continued to grow, and until the construction of University Homes in 1936, much of the housing for African Americans was filtered down from white residents. As such, Atlanta's African-

American population was disproportionately residing in substandard housing relative to the white population.

Following the passage of the 1951 Plan of Improvement, black Atlantans had access to residential lands in the west and southwest of the expanded city limits that were informally zoned (e.g., privately negotiated) for private home development.

Similarly, between 1936 and 1950, the Public Works Administration and Atlanta Housing Authority constructed over 3,000 units for black residents. In spite of these gains in the black residential market, of the nearly 37,500 black households in Atlanta, over 67.1 percent were substandard. Of the roughly 25,000 substandard housing units zoned for black residency, 12 percent had no inside running water, and over 18 percent had no inside toilet or bath. Between 1950 and 1958, black and white populations increased, and blacks increased at a much higher rate than whites (see Table 6.1). During this same period, blacks also gained housing units at a higher rate than whites did (see Table 6.2); however, the disproportionate amount of developed residential land whites held relative to blacks (see Table 6.3) suggests that black residential development occurred at a much higher density compared to white residents. The disparate density ratios - .81 white dwelling units per unit of developed residential land compared to 1.97 black dwelling units per unit of developed residential land - likely contributed to the disproportionate amount of substandard housing in Atlanta's black communities.

**Table 6.1: Changes in Population by Race in Atlanta, 1950-1958**

Year	Total	White - #	% Increase	White - % of Total	Non White - #	% Increase	Non-white % of Total
1950*	437,785	301,369	-	68.8	136,416	-	31.2
1958	510,200	327,829	<b>8.8%</b>	64.3	182,371	<b>33.7%</b>	35.7

\*1950 boundaries adjusted to match 1958 boundaries

*Source: Bureau of Planning Archives*

**Table 6.2: Changes in Occupied Dwelling Units by Race in Atlanta, 1950-1958**

Year	Total	White - #	White - % of Total	Non White - #	Non-white % of Total
1950*	122,192	88,008	72.0	34,184	28.0
1958	145,435	98,418	67.7	47,017	32.3

\*1950 boundaries adjusted to match 1958 boundaries

*Source: Bureau of Planning Archives*

**Table 6.3: Distribution of Residential Land by Race in Atlanta, 1958**

	% of Total Developed Residential Land
Occupied by Whites	83.6
Occupied by Non-Whites	16.4

*Source: Bureau of Planning Archives*

The differences in housing condition, tenure, and density between blacks and whites in postwar Atlanta were the result of the legacy of the city's racial zoning code and the overrepresentation of white business interests on Atlanta's Bureau of Planning, Metropolitan Planning Commission, and Citizens Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal. These influential bodies with members appointed by the Mayor

served as tools to advance and implement land use policies that sought to maximize property exchange value while marginalizing the use value of its low income and African-American residents. The token inclusion of African-Americans (typically the elite representatives of black academia, commerce, real estate, and religion) on the ad-hoc committees of these planning bodies was not economically diverse enough to address the range of issues plaguing all black Atlantans. While these representatives were able to secure gains for their own class interests, including access to the public golf course and improved street lighting and sidewalk paving for black residential subdivisions on the west side, the interests of the black rental housing communities were largely ignored.

Local political representation of lower and working class interests was minimal following the election of William B. Hartsfield as mayor in 1936. Running as a reformist, Hartsfield used his connections to Atlanta's business elite to remove white working class interests from power and installed the contemporary urban regime that privileged white corporate interests. Prior to Hartsfield's regime, Atlanta's urban politics were driven by its generous ward patronage system, and neighborhood control between different Democratic factions influenced urban decision-making. Similar to their black counterparts, white low-income and working class Atlantans were often the target of private political negotiations between elites, but were not included in the decision-making process. When negotiating the processes of neighborhood turnover and change, Atlanta's planning committees did attempt to survey white residents in transitional neighborhoods to



determine how they would react to ceding their community to black residential use. The amount of resistance would determine how soon the city would permit black residential purchases in the neighborhood. Yet the inclusion of low-income whites into the planning process was only to avoid the costly racial civil disturbances that would tarnish the brand of the city's economic development goals. A partial list documents ten racial incidents between 1956 and 1960, ranging from two hundred people gathered in front of two black households in white areas to two counts of arson and one incident involving dynamite (Bureau of Planning Archives). The regime used its connections to the *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution* to minimize negative press that would tarnish the city's progressive image. Thus, even the more confrontational political expressions of white working class interests were marginalized by the regime.

After removing them from his governing coalition, working class whites were effectively removed from the electoral coalition of Hartsfield's regime following the 1946 decision. Under political consultant and campaign strategist Helen Bullard, Mayors Hartsfield, Allen, and Massell were all elected using the electoral support of northside white liberals and Atlanta's black population. For Ivan Allen Jr.'s first election, Bullard's primary strategy was to split the black vote during a contested race in 1961 to create a runoff election between himself and segregationist business owner Lester G. Maddox. Bullard used the controversial topic of race relations in the City to force white liberal business interests to align with black voters and elect Ivan Allen, Jr. Maddox publicly expressed his resistance to the

city's integration policies, going as far as to hold a funeral for private property rights in front of his restaurant. Thus, white low-income and working class political interests were narrowly represented as segregationist and detrimental to Atlanta's goal of economic development.

As the black population in the city began to exceed the white population in the 1970s, the nation was entering a sustained economic recession that eroded urban tax bases and increased urban unemployment rates. The 1969 Brooke Amendments adjusted public housing rent payments to 25 percent of household income, prompting the flight of what remained of the black middle class in public housing. Further, the 1968 Fair Housing Act continued to support the increasing suburbanization of the middle class and the homogenization of the urban centers. Urban centers, and their problems of unemployment, crime, and poverty, became increasingly racialized during this period. Race and gender were both inextricably linked to poverty, and propelled the national shift to devolution and the withdrawal of policies to support urbanization.

*Urban Restructuring and Housing Movements: The Neoliberalization of Housing Policy*

The retrenchment of the national welfare state in the 1980s and the increasing racialization of poverty during the 1970s prompted an ideological shift from Keynesian redistribution to Schumpeterian entrepreneurialism (Jessop, 2003). The

devolution of social welfare to the state and local level amidst an overall contraction in available capital fostered a policy environment that encouraged communities to compete for newly available global capital via multinational corporations. These ideological shifts were supported by the suburban politics of the 1970s, and enforced through the growth machine populated by these suburban interests (Davis, 1991). Similar to the first New Deal, the Federal government provided supply-side incentives for communities in response to capital scarcity. Empowerment Zone legislation and HOPE VI program (established in 1993 and 1992, respectively) were two supply-side initiatives that fueled the entrepreneurial attraction policies of cities during this time. The two policies allowed for a select number of cities to redevelop via the return of high-wage, high skill employment and the deconcentration of high-poverty housing developments. Each policy, administered by HUD, suggest a number of ideological shifts in housing policy. The ideological shift is both conservative and entrepreneurial, while also reorganizing the scales between local, state, national, and global. This ideological shift of entrepreneurialism (HOPE VI “revitalizing” inner city public housing to attract high-wage service workers of the new economy) and restructuring of scales (federally-funded Empowerment Zones in declining urban neighborhoods to attract global capital in the form of multinational corporations), suggest housing policy had an active role in creating sites of “actually existing neoliberalism” in cities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

The community response to these neoliberal policies was fractured, largely along home tenure status: urban homeowners welcomed the increases in property value and urban revitalization, while renters were largely displaced and deconcentrated due to these rising property values. For years, African-Americans communities and their social movements reflected the *outflow* of capital from their communities. These movements differed in that they were largely resisting the *influx* of capital. The poverty dispersal policies that accompanied the social welfare policies of the 1990s (HOPE VI, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998) effectively dispersed a political interest group that linked economic and social problems (high urban unemployment rates and disinvested public housing). The return of high-wage employees and dispersal of the poor throughout urban areas commenced a flood of capital into disinvested cities. However, minority resistance to poverty dispersal has been effective, yet episodic. Public housing tenant associations have participated in the discussions to sell public housing to private developers (Bhattacharjee, 2012), as well as resistance to processes of fortification, exclusion, and surveillance in around developments (O'Neill, 2012). These changes in both the grievances of tenants and the antagonist of these grievances reflect the rearrangement of urban space and the restructuring of the local state (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). It is within this new institutional framework that we see the materialization of new forms of social movements in urban space (Mayer, 2006).

This project has attempted to demonstrate how the exclusive planning approaches that marginalized Atlanta's most vulnerable populations (e.g., African American, the poor, female-headed households) created political opportunity structures within public housing developments. Further, it documents the evolution of these political opportunity structures, and how this evolution both expanded the political capacity of its tenant associations, while also constraining these organizations due to the structural limits of public housing developments. The production of unjust geographies throughout the city was not an unintentional byproduct of industrial growth and urbanization, but a targeted strategy of reducing black political action and legitimacy following the mass enfranchisement of the African-American population in 1901. Prior to this enfranchisement, popular black participation was limited to general and special elections, which had limited impact on Atlanta's political system that was dominated by the Democratic Party after the end of Reconstruction. As a result, during the first half of the twentieth century, black claims on the State were frequently ignored, and black political participation and legitimacy were at their lowest in Atlanta (Bacote, 1955).

However, to completely focus on race and the role of race in this story is to ignore some of the larger intersections between race, class, and gender. One thing this project illustrates is the different approaches to marginalization exercised by Atlanta's urban regime, and how increasing black enfranchisement and populations shaped these power relations. Hartsfield's regime established the bi-racial coalition with the inclusion of the black elite – or black power brokers – into the

token electoral coalition. The power brokers of Atlanta's black elite were primarily men, yet covered a range of socioeconomic status. Working class clergymen with access to large congregations were considered just as important as the black businessmen of Auburn Avenue and the black academics affiliated with the Atlanta University Consortium Center. Elite women, such as Lugenia Burns Hope and Florence M. Read, played important roles in the twentieth-century African American Atlanta community, particularly in the progressive role of corporate modernism as African Americans remained largely excluded from receiving government benefits and welfare.

Following the 1946 *King v Chapman* decision, the role of black women in Atlanta's black political community remained relegated to non-leadership positions. Similarly, poor blacks that were not considered power brokers (i.e., those outside of positions of power in the church, school, or black civic life) were also relegated to non-leadership positions in the institutionalized coalitions of Atlanta's urban regime. Spatially, this privileging of black middle class interests is expressed through the annexation of residential lands to the south and west for black single-family residential development after the 1951 Plan of Improvement, as public and rental housing development remained concentrated in the northwest. When the Atlanta Housing Authority was named redevelopment agent for Atlanta's urban redevelopment and renewal women excluded from participating in the urban regime by declaring their existing communities as slums, while constructing marginalized spaces of concentrated disenfranchisement with public housing

developments. Thus, while the segregation and concentration of African-American residents in Atlanta between 1940 and 1970 appear to be solely racial, this project hopes to illuminate some of the intersections between race, class, and gender that were exploited during Atlanta's processes of urbanization. Race is conveniently deployed given the historical codification of racial discrimination in Atlanta's political economy: Jim Crow laws, legal black disenfranchisement, racial zoning, and, of course, the peculiar institution of slavery. As these policies were declared unconstitutional, and black political legitimacy increased in Atlanta, the urban regime was still able to exploit vulnerable populations through the spatial re-arrangement and manipulation of public housing locations, the distribution of public goods and services, and the location of and access to low-skill employment opportunities.

This spatial, political, and economic marginalization created vulnerabilities, or opportunities, within Atlanta's political system. Public housing developments, with their disenfranchised, displaced, and disparate populations, were able to mobilize the resources of tenant organizations to make their claims on the State, vis-à-vis their interaction with the Atlanta Housing Authority. The evolution of these developments as political opportunity structures reflects both the demographic changes of Atlanta's public housing population, and also the changes in Atlanta's black political movements over time. What began as a top-down structure guided by both housing management and the male-dominated influence of the elite local advisory committees encapsulated in the University Homes case developed into a

bottom-up, more radicalized and inclusive approach with increasing women leadership in the Perry Homes case. The Grady Homes case illustrates the ability for tenants to transcend the scale of the public housing development and the local prejudices and constraints of the opportunity structure by engaging directly with the Federal government, taking advantage of resources and policies that better aligned with the interests of the development's political base. Finally, the creation of the Advisory Council on Public Housing reflected the brief, but influential, shift in federal housing policies that privileged tenant management and control, and recognizing the legitimacy of public housing residents as political actors.

The reliance on tenant control and management was a short-lived experiment in public housing policy as the decreasing Federal and local revenues to sustain the program, coupled with the growing costs of maintaining aging buildings and a population that required more social welfare programs and resources, rendered several local housing authorities insolvent. As a result, the Atlanta Housing Authority began exploring options to sell public housing developments near the highly valued central business district as early as the 1980s. These options were not economically viable until Atlanta won the rights to host the 1996 Olympics, and all property value increased throughout the city (Rutheiser, 1996). Residents were initially accepting of the demolition and reconstruction of public housing developments into mixed-income communities, with the benefits of new housing and safer communities outweighing the costs of relocation and rehousing (Fraser et al, 2001). However, as the number of public housing units constructed were far



below initial estimates that were already less than the number of units demolished, tenant organizations began resisting the demolition of their political opportunity structures. Yet the strength of the new urban regime in Atlanta that privileged a neoliberal approach to public goods and services subjugated the interests and political legitimacy of the public housing development as a political opportunity structure. The inability of the developments to produce profit in the postindustrial city relegated its residents to marginalized political positions yet again.

The demolition of all of Atlanta's traditional public housing in 2011 marked the end of an era in the city. As residents are redistributed throughout the city with Housing Choice Vouchers and former development sites remain gated, vacant lots, the question remains just where can poor, black residents engage with the State in the ways they did during the height of public housing developments as political opportunity structures? This question remains largely unexplored in the public housing and urban political literatures, yet is worth considering given the void the demolition of public housing developments has created within the urban political landscape in Atlanta.

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