THE EFFECTS OF URBAN RENEWAL ON AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA, THE CASE OF THE BROOKLYN NEIGHBORHOOD: 1960-1974

by

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ABSTRACT

KHALID HIJAZI. The effects of urban renewal on African Americans in Charlotte, North Carolina, the case of the Brooklyn neighborhood: 1960-1974.

The federal urban renewal program, which was created as part of the Housing Act of 1949, was designed to provide cities with money to rehabilitate their infrastructure by replacing old decaying buildings and blighted inner city areas. Almost in every city urban renewal took effect, African Americans were the ones whose homes and places of business were deemed blighted, and as a result, were removed to make room for new governmental and private business structures. The city of Charlotte chose to participate in urban renewal in 1960. The Brooklyn neighborhood, which was located in Charlotte's Second Ward, was the first black community chosen to be developed. In a period of 14 years, more than 900 families were removed from their homes in Brooklyn as the entire neighborhood was demolished. This paper will first, establish the historical background of how African Americans were treated in terms of housing policies in Charlotte during the twentieth century. Second, it will construct the story of urban renewal in Charlotte by exploring the role of the media and local leaders in the decision making. Third, this paper will evaluate the aftermath of urban renewal upon the former residents of Brooklyn.

INTRODUCTION

"I sure loved it … cause it was home."[1] These were the words of Maggie Sinson, a black female, 78, who was interviewed by a reporter from the *Charlotte Observer*, in 1973. Sinson commented on the destruction of her home in the Brooklyn Community of Charlotte, North Carolina, which was entirely demolished to make room for the urban renewal project the city of Charlotte had adapted between 1960 and 1974.[2] While such projects were touted by many city officials and the media as a step toward desegregation, progress, and profitability, to many African Americans, this project was perceived as a way to remove them from inner city areas.[3] In other words, African Americans in Charlotte, like many other urban centers in the United States, felt exploited and deceived by having to be the ones who had to pay the price for cities' business endeavors. For people like Sinson, such policies meted out by the local and federal governments against her community were not the first. Rather they were the culmination of a collection of laws and policies that began in the earliest years of the twentieth century. Several scholars of urban history have found that local business leaders, with the help of the local, state, and national governments, instituted policies of racism and segregation in housing against African Americans, which had resulted in preventing blacks from taking advantage of the economic and other life facilities accorded to whites.[4]

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[1] Vivian R. Nivens, "I sure loved it … cause it was home," *The Charlotte Observer*, May, 20, 1973.
[2] Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 239.
[3] Robert C. Weaver, *Dilemmas of Urban America: The Godkin Lectures at Harvard* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 57.
[4] William Brown, Jr., "Access to Housing: The Role of the Real Estate Industry", *Economic Geography* 48 (1972): 66.

Urban Renewal occurred during the Civil Rights era – in the mid-sixties, when laws for the first time in the history of the United States., were amended to enfranchise and integrate African Americans into the political system. In 1964, the United States enacted the Civil Rights Act which outlawed major forms of discrimination against racial, ethnic, national and religious minorities, and women.[5] Furthermore, it called for equality in voter registration requirements, and prohibited racial segregation in education, employment, and other public facilities. As has been found in many cities of the United States, however, urban renewal resulted in further separating and isolating African Americans from the city center and suburbs, and from all public and business establishments.[6] By focusing on the story of the former Brooklyn neighborhood, which used to exist in downtown Charlotte, this thesis will enrich and expand the existing literature on urban history by comparing the story of Charlotte's urban renewal to other United States cities, which had experienced urban renewal. There seems to be a consensus amongst historians and scholars on how urban renewal was handled in cities such as Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, and Savannah, Georgia.[7] This narrative goes as follows: areas which were chosen for urban renewal were mainly inhabited by African Americans. These black communities were selected because city officials deemed them to be blighted and unsuitable for rehabilitation. As a result, African Americans who used to live in these urban neighborhoods were forced to move out of the center city to

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[5] John R. Howard, *The Shifting Wind: The Supreme Court and Civil Rights from Reconstruction to Brown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 32.

[6] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47.

[7] For example, see: Mindy T. Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: *One* World/Ballantine, 2004); Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South*; William Domhoff, *Who rules America Now?* (New Jersey: Waveland Press, 1997).

neighborhoods only inhabited by blacks, as whites - covertly and overtly, organized to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods.[8] Moreover, these practices would never have been completed without the aid of the federal, state, and local governments. As has been cited in the U.S Commission on Civil rights, 1975, the federal government has been most influential in creating and maintaining urban residential segregation.[9] As a result, blacks were further segregated from city centers, and from the suburbs; which were mainly reserved for, and inhabited by whites.

Urban renewal did not only affect low income blacks, middle class African Americans could not escape its effects. They faced similar circumstances. Well-maintained homes and businesses, which belonged to middle class African Americans, were all torn down as a result of urban renewal.[10] In this case one can surmise that blacks of all walks of life were affected, irrespective of class distinctions. In Brooklyn, for example, a good number of the residents owned their businesses on Second Street, which was in the heart of Brooklyn. All of these businesses were removed, and only a few of them were able to relocate. Also, houses that were well maintained and neatly-built did not survive the demolitions. Their residents were not able to move into white middle class areas because, as many former residents of Brooklyn noted, blacks were not welcomed in areas inhabited by whites. [11]

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[8] Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis, 51.*
[9] Beth J. Lief and Susan Goering. "The Implementation of the Federal Mandate for Fair Housing," in *Divided Neighborhoods*, ed. Gary A. Tobin. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), 227.
[10] Sugrue, The Origins of Urban Crisis, 38; Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City,* 230.
[11] John Thrower, interviewed by Jason L. Harpe, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, April 9, 2005, http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/Thrower.htm.

Although this paper focuses on urban renewal, which began in 1960 and its aftermath, it would be considered incomplete without examining the different forms of policies which served to - either directly or indirectly - enforce segregation, and functioned as a major impediment in bringing blacks' houses and neighborhoods into compliance with city code standards. Once the historical perspective is examined, one can better decide whether urban renewal could be viewed as a continuation of segregationist policies which had further perpetuated the marginalization and disenfranchisement of blacks in Charlotte and elsewhere in the U.S,[12] despite the civil rights gains. In this case, W.E.B. Du Bois' forewarning in 1903, that the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,[13] would hold a great deal of truth.

The term "urban renewal" was generally used to refer to improvement in cities. In the United States the phrase was also used to define federal programs that began under the Housing Act of 1949. The Act; however, did not gain serious attention from local and state officials; in relation to urban renewal, until 1954, under the Eisenhower Administration.[14] The 1949 act was designed to provide cities with money to rehabilitate their infrastructure. Urban renewal throughout the United States represented progress. It meant new technologies, new jobs, and hence, new use for lands or reclaiming land for new use. Under this program, local authorities would use federal funds to acquire slum properties, raze everything that stood on the reclaimed land to the bare ground and

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[12] Douglass S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 7.
[13] W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 2003), 39.
[14] Domhoff, *Who rules America*, 173.

prepare them for redevelopment.[15] But, in order for a city to reclaim land for new use under urban renewal, this land had to be designated as blighted.[16]

In Charlotte, Brooklyn was chosen to be the first site to be fully demolished for urban renewal. In 1966, when the city of Charlotte had completed half of the demolition of Brooklyn, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force (CITF) issued a proposal to renew four additional areas in Charlotte.[17] These neighborhoods were First Ward, Greenville, Dilworth, and Downtown (See Fig.1). In the report, CITF proposed to the city of Charlotte to tear down over 1700 slum dwellings and move more than 22,000 families from these areas. The cost of the project was $34 million dollars. The federal government paid two thirds of the cost, and the city of Charlotte paid the rest. The potential tax value of construction which would normally follow on the cleared land would exceed $100 million. This would be a direct addition to the tax base of the city and county. By including the Brooklyn neighborhood, the number of families removed between 1961 and 1973 would be more than 3,200 families. The total number of buildings demolished exceeded 3000. Very few public housing units were built to accommodate the displaced inhabitants, and the city of Charlotte, and the federal government failed to compensate the displaced black residents.[18] Instead, the city of Charlotte built government buildings and other public facilities on the areas designated for urban renewal. Former families of Brooklyn and other affected areas faced a very

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[15] Massey, *American Apartheid*, 58.
[16] Fullilove, *Root Shock,* 140.
[17] "Urban Renewal for Charlotte: A Report, a Report by the Urban Renewal Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force." 28 June, 1966. Local Documents, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Atkins Library, Local Documents, Third Floor, Charlotte, North Carolina.
[18] Stephen S. Smith, *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation, and the Development in Charlotte* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 38.

hard time finding new places to live. Most of the surrounding Charlotte suburbs were not accessible to blacks as suburban white residents organized to keep blacks out.[19] Out of the five areas slated for urban renewal in Charlotte, this paper will only focus on the Brooklyn neighborhood between 1960 and 1974.

Historiography

Houses in Brooklyn were not in good shape due to lack of city resources – as will be shown in chapter one of this paper. Former Charlotte Mayor, Stanford R. Brookshire was perhaps correct when he described Brooklyn, in 1961, as a "disgraceful, crime-and disease-ridden slums in the shadows of the uptown office buildings."[20] The same words could also describe many other inner city areas all over the U.S, in the 1950s and 60s. One wonders why only areas where blacks constituted the majority, whether in the North, the South, or the West, had been plagued by dilapidation and blight? According to Thomas Sugrue's book, *The Origins of The Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* to understand the urban crisis in the 1960s, one must consider the perspective of history.[21] Sugrue argues that one is able to reach an understanding only through a complex web of histories of race, housing, and work, as they are interdependent on each other. Accordingly, Sugrue explains the transformations of American cities, through a case study of Detroit, to three forces that occurred simultaneously. First; was the flight of well-paying jobs; second, discrimination at the workplace; and third, racial discrimination in housing. According to Sugrue, all of these

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[19] Thomas Tillman, Interviewed by Kieran W. Taylor, The Southern Oral History Program at the Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, May 22, 2008.

[20] Alex Coffin, *Brookshire & Belk: Businessmen in City Hall* (Charlotte: The university of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1994), 73.

[21] Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis*, xix.

forces, politically and economically, marginalized African Americans in the nation's urban centers.[22] Sugrue further explains how corporations and local businesses aided by state and federal policies contributed to the reorganizing of capital and workplaces. Similar to the case in Charlotte with the construction of Independence Boulevard, city planners in Detroit promised that a system of cross-city expressways would "dramatically improve the city's residential areas, as well as bolster the city's economy."[23] As it turned out, the promise was false. The new expressways caused thousands of blacks to lose their homes in order to clear the path for the super highways. Detroit city planners were careful to have the building of the new expressways cause minimal damage to white middle class areas with complete disregard to black neighborhoods, regardless of class. Sugrue points out here that Detroit City planners viewed the construction of these highways, just like many other cities, as an opportunity to clear city slums.[24] Renters who happened to be African Americans paid a heavy price as they were not able to relocate to affordable dwellings. Some of Detroit's politicians were aware of the damage blacks endured but, did not bother to make any changes in their favor. Mayor Albert Cobo, for instance, acknowledged the price blacks had to pay as a result of highway construction but, he justified it as the "price of progress."[25]

While Sugrue does a superb job in showing how the historical perspective is essential in studying the inner city crisis, Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, in their book, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, redirected the focus of public debate back to issues of race and racial segregation.

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[22] Ibid., xviii.
[23] Ibid., 47.
[24] Ibid., 47.
[25] Ibid., 48.

Furthermore, *American Apartheid* suggests that segregation, which has been missing from academia and politics – after the Civil Rights era, should be fundamental to the studies of African Americans and inner city blight.[26] While most scholars have been focusing on culture, racism, and economics and welfare as the main causes for the formation of black ghettos, segregation, instead, should be treated as the main tool. Massey and Denton trace back the history of ghetto formation throughout the 20th century. Massey and Denton constructed, and verified their analysis based on historical studies that report quantitative indices of racial segregation, which shows the percentage of blacks and whites in several cities.[27] The results of these indices, taken from the 1920s to the 1970s, show the same racial ratio. Mainly, due to various forms of segregation policies, blacks maintained an overwhelming majority in the inner cities, and a very small percentage in the suburbs. African Americans migrated in huge numbers from the South to the North between the 1930s and 1950s. Close to 1.5 million blacks made their journey from the South to the North during the 1950s to escape the harsh laws of Jim Crow, and to search for better opportunities. The percentage of blacks almost doubled in such cities as Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Detroit during the mid-twentieth century. Yet despite this massive population shift, the "white strategy of ghetto containment and tactical retreat"[28] – which was applied before 1920, remained the same in the 1960s through the use of restrictive covenants and racial zoning. [29] The only change was the size of black areas, they almost doubled in size, however, as mentioned above, the racial ratio between blacks and whites remained the same. Whereas the ratio between blacks

[26] Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid,* 7.
[27] Ibid., 20.
[28] Ibid., 45.
[29] Ibid., 45.

and whites continued unchanged, it was not the case for other ethnicities. Minorities such as the Poles and Germans who lived in their own enclaves were able to move out of their enclaves to different parts of the city. For blacks, on the other hand, the ghetto was their only choice. [30]

Amongst the cities in the South *American Apartheid* includes in the study are Greensboro, North Carolina and Atlanta.[31] It does not mention anything about Charlotte. Moreover, *American Apartheid* states that ghettos, in the early to mid-twentieth century, did not form in the South rather African Americans were interspersed throughout the city, because of Jim Crow laws.[32] Tellingly, in the South, whites were dependent on blacks to carry out their day to day menial jobs which required blacks to live in close proximity to whites. There were, however, some exceptions. In Charlotte, for example, blacks lived separately in entire blocks. The Brooklyn neighborhood – which was located in Charlotte's second ward, was a good example.

On how inner cities, where blacks constituted the majority, became dilapidated, *American Apartheid's* findings coincide with Sugrue in showing how the New Deal Federal housing programs of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and the Veterans Affairs (VA), in the 1930s and 1940s, had a major stake in preventing black access to new and improved housing, or the opportunity to rehabilitate and prosper. First, through redlining practices, African American homes - in most cases - were rated too risky for repair loans. As a result, HOLC provided loans mostly to white areas. Second, FHA and VA loans were mainly

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 64-65.
[32] Ibid., 63.

granted to whites to help them purchase homes in the suburbs. Eventually, in the late 1940s, as African Americans were unable to obtain loans to repair their existing homes, or move into new homes in the suburbs, their increasing numbers, and discriminatory housing policies made them the majority in the inner cities. Additionally, houses in the inner cities started to show signs of decay because their owners who were mostly whites did not want to invest in them anymore as white people were escaping to the suburbs.[33]

Urban Renewal, as *American Apartheid* argues, was manipulated by local white elites.[34] For example, whites associated with a variety of elite institutions, universities, libraries, hospitals, foundations, businesses, were often tied to the city with large capital investment. These people turned to the federal government for relief, to help find a solution to the dilapidated areas surrounding their properties. As a result, urban renewal was offered as a remedy.[35] In the process of urban renewal, many cities embarked on, first; removing blighted areas inhabited by blacks from threatened white areas, second; pushing black families into other black areas, far away from the white areas and closer or right into white working class areas.[36]

Manipulation by white elites is not only mentioned in *American Apartheid*, studies by many urban and labor historians in the U.S have shown that local businesses and government leaders worked hand in hand to financially profit from clearing out downtown slum areas and developing them. Local municipalities as William Domhoff illustrates in *Who Rules America Now?,* were growth machines that produced wealth

[33] Ibid., 55.
[34] Ibid., 56.
[35] Ibid., 61.
[36] Ibid., 62.

through real estate development.[37] Downtown areas with low income housing were cleared to make room for central businesses contracts and the expansion of major institutions such as universities and hospitals.[38] Domhoff lists the major players in urban renewal on the national level as the U.S. Savings and Loan League, the Mortgage Bankers Association, the National Association of Real Estate Boards, and the real estate committees of the Chambers of Commerce of the United States. This thesis will research the process of urban renewal in Charlotte and examine the relationship that might have existed between these four national groups and any local businesses or political leaders in Charlotte.

African Americans, as a result of urban renewal, were pushed into areas, where public services and businesses existed at a minimum level. New black ghettos were created or existing ones were expanded. Unemployment, violence, and crimes increased. Loic Wacquant argues in his book *Urban Outcasts*[39] that African Americans in the city of Chicago went through a process of de-civilizing. Wacquant proposes three trends that contributed to the process of de-civilizing the ghetto. First; the depacification of society and the erosion of public space as rates of crimes and violence increased in the ghettos.[40] Second was "the organizational desertification and the policy of concerted abandonment of public services in the urban territories where poor blacks are concentrated."[41] Third, "the movement of social de-differentiation and rising informalization of the economy of

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[37] Domhoff, *Who Rules America*, 173.
[38] Ibid., 174.
[39] Loic Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).
[40] Ibid., 98.
[41] Ibid.

the ghetto."[42] Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, blacks migrated heavily from the rural areas to the cities. At the same time, whites where moving from the city centers out into the suburbs. Along with this massive population shift, most public facilities; such as business centers and government public programs were also moving out of the city centers, rendering these black areas to be mostly eroded of "public space."[43] As a result of these factors, Wacquant argues that the process of de-civilizing helped in creating the under-class characterized by drug consumption, an abiding dependency on public aid, increased violence and crimes, and high unemployment.[44] Although, Wacquant does not mention urban renewal as the direct cause, but one can attribute the various policies of exclusion to the social and economic crisis African Americans experienced in these newly formed ghettos. Urban renewal, nevertheless, intensified the social and economic agonies in black communities. This is because blacks who had to relocate from areas affected by urban renewal programs had no other choice but to move into African American communities.

Addressing urban renewal's aftermath and the evolution of underclass formation, Sugrue's book, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, states that African Americans went through a process of "de-proletarianization."[45] This process took effect when a growing segment of the city's blacks had become detached from the urban market resources of jobs, services, and economic development. Furthermore, Sugrue argues that the process of de-proletarianization was exacerbated by the racial divide between blacks and whites. As a

[42] Ibid., 104.
[43] Ibid., 98.
[44] Ibid., 105.
[45] Sugrue, 262.

result, Detroit's blacks lacked "geographic mobility,"[46] as they were denied access to all the vital areas -where jobs and other services existed. For example, when jobs moved to the suburbs, blacks, unlike whites, were not able to move closer to the new job market in the suburbs.[47]

Mindy Fullilove, a professor of clinical psychiatry and public health at Columbia University addressed, in her book *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It,* the emotional and economic disadvantages African Americans had to face after being removed from their homes.[48] Fullilove asserts that the experience of losing one's roots "does not end with emergency treatment, but will stay with the individual for a lifetime."[49] Fullilove traveled to gutted communities in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Roanoke, Virginia, and recorded testimonies from displaced families on their feelings before and after urban removal. My thesis, thus, will add to Fullilove's narrative by exploring the experiences that the former residents of Brooklyn had when they were forced to leave the Brooklyn neighborhood.

As has been noted in this paper, an abundance of historiography has been produced by many scholars on the inner city crisis in relation to urban renewal and its aftermath. Most of these studies, however, have been done on cities other than Charlotte. Amongst the few books written on the history of Charlotte, one must first consider Janet Thomas Greenwood's work, *Bittersweet Legacy: the Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910*.[50] Greenwood describes how the social, economic, and political

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Fullilove, 5.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Janette T. Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: the Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

lives of blacks took a sharp turn from what could be described as a relative prosperity, harmony, and cooperation with their white counterparts around the end of the 19th century.[51] By tracing the history of the African American community in Charlotte from 1850 to 1910, the book shows how blacks at one point enjoyed an economic and social prosperity, and the way African Americans struggled to become full-fledged participants in the new Charlotte society.[52] In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Brooklyn housed Charlotte's black business and professional classes. Brooklyn was mainly built by a black upper class, known as the "better class." Through the establishment of schools and churches, the better class adopted a vision that created a progressive highly educated black race, self-reliant, and rich in character.[53] Yet, this was a short lived moment in the history of the white and black class relations as partisan politicians began charting new rules and policies against blacks in Charlotte. Mainly, a younger generation of white leaders emerged in the 1890s, which was far less sympathetic to black better class and to blacks in general.[54]

Thomas Hanchett's *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, carries Greenwood's story into the 20th century. In addition to narrating the story of how Charlotte was transformed into one of the largest and fastest-growing cities in the South by the 1970s, Hanchett devotes a good portion of his work discussing how black and white social and spatial relations were formed by tracing the city's spatial evolution over the course of a century, and by exploring the interaction of national and local forces that shaped Charlotte. More importantly, Hanchett

[51] Ibid., 3.
[52] Ibid., 10.
[53] Ibid., 140.
[54] Ibid., 187.

argues how the New Deal programs widened the racial divide between blacks and whites, and further deepened Charlotte inner city crisis.[55] For example, Hanchett describes, in 1937, a group of appraisers who arrived in Charlotte intending to analyze the city according to HOLC credit risk guidelines.[56] The intention was to map out the Charlotte's neighborhoods in order to allow investors to underwrite mortgages with full knowledge of which areas would be credit worthy or otherwise. As a result of the survey, the appraisers awarded white neighbors an excellent "A" grade, which saved white homes from demolition. Black areas, on the other hand, were accorded "D's," regardless of their income level and state of housing stock. Even the finely built areas, where blacks were found to occupy, could not avoid the racial "D" ranking from HOLC.[57] Results of HOLC were a close reflection of the desires and practices of the local real estate dealers and bankers. HOLC only lent money to "the power, prestige, support of the federal government"[58] to these local entities. Based on HOLC's rankings, local real estate agents and business groups dictated which areas were worthy of loans and investment.[59]

In addition to Hanchett and Greenwood's works on Charlotte, Mathew D. Lassiter's *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* and Stephen Samuel Smith's *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte*, concur with Hanchett's overall narrative on how unfairly Charlotte blacks were dealt with by local and national authorities. Lassiter's book goes further in drawing a comparison between Charlotte and Atlanta in the aftermath of urban renewal - in the

[55] Hanchett, 225.
[56] Ibid., 229.
[57] Hanchett, 230.
[58] Massey and Denton, 52.
[59] Hanchett, 229.

early 1970s. Moreover, Lassiter's examination provides aerial photos of what used to be black areas in Charlotte and Atlanta in the 1950s and 1970s - before and after urban renewal. Stephen Smith's, *Boom for Whom?*, incorporates the role of the black leaders such as Fred Alexander and Reginald Hawkins, in dealing with urban renewal in Charlotte. Additionally, Stephen Smith addresses the issue of public housing, and the problems Charlotte faced for failing to build public housing.[60]

Out of all of the books written on Charlotte's history, Alex Coffin's *Brookshire & Belk: Businessmen in City Hall* is the only book found, so far which does not share Hanchett's and other local and national narratives on urban development.[61] Coffin, when describing the dilapidated areas in downtown Charlotte, he does not consider the historical perspective, by not highlighting the reasons which led areas inhabited by blacks to reach a state of disrepair. Additionally, the book does not explain how and why blacks and low income areas were designated blighted before urban renewal. Coffin mentions, however, that Mayor Stanford Brookshire was handpicked by a group of high profile people from the Charlotte business community. About twenty people called a meeting with Brookshire, and they convinced Brookshire to nominate himself as a candidate for the mayor's position.[62] This fact, indirectly, proves other writers' point in which local leaders worked closely with local business leaders in determining the future of inner cities in the United States.

I have chosen the city of Charlotte as a case study because despite the size of Charlotte as one of the major metropolitan areas in the Southeast, few historians and

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[60] See Chapter two for more details on what led city officials in Charlotte to consider building public housing.
[61] Coffin, 71.
[62] Ibid., 9.

social scholars have considered it in their research. This might have been due to what is widely known about Charlotte adopting the "Charlotte Way" a tolerant city which made national news in 1971 when it began bussing students to schools outside of their neighborhoods, in an effort to desegregate. Yet, according to Hanchett, if one is to visit the different sections of the city, it would not be difficult to spot how racially divided the city has been for much of the twentieth century.[63] For tens of years, whites have heavily populated the South and Southeast areas of Charlotte, whereas West and Northwest Charlotte are mainly inhabited by African Americans, many of them were former residents of downtown Charlotte who were forced out by urban renewal. Unlike the white inhabited areas in suburban Charlotte, after the 1950s, West Charlotte did not get to enjoy the same amount of public or business expansion. In this thesis, I will closely examine the various historiographies on urban renewal, and their relevance to the history of Charlotte's urban renewal process.

The story of urban renewal was seminally discussed by Thomas Hanchett's *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975.* My work, however, differs in two ways. First, I focus on urban renewal from 1960 to 1974. Here, I reconstruct the story in detail, and I record the debate that existed on the pages of the local newspapers, the City Council, and Charlotte African American leaders. Second, by relying on the oral history of the former residents of Brooklyn, I plan to illustrate how life was in Brooklyn. I will show that, despite the negative reports given out about Brooklyn's blight, residents of Brooklyn were quite content.

[63] Hanchett, 8.

Accordingly, in order to gain an in-depth and a clear understanding of the story behind urban renewal in Charlotte, I will be relying heavily on local primary sources, specifically, three primary sources; the *Charlotte Observer, Charlotte News*, and the Charlotte City Council meeting minutes. From these sources, I will construct the story of urban renewal in Charlotte. Furthermore, I will record the debate that went on between those who supported urban renewal and those who were in disagreement. Second, I will research through the archives for Charlotte leaders who were influential on how the urban renewal process was shaped in Charlotte. Some of these people were Charlotte Mayors John Belk and Stanford Brookshire.[64] Moreover, the archives at UNC Charlotte contain papers of local African American leaders who spoke on behalf of the Charlotte black community during urban renewal. Some of these leaders were Charlotte Pro tem Mayor Fred Alexander and Dr. Reginald Hawkins. Third, I will listen to the oral history of those who lived in Brooklyn. For the oral history part, I will be relying on the "Brooklyn Oral History Project," which was conducted by graduate students from the History Department at UNC of Charlotte, May, 2010. These interviews shed light on how the original inhabitants of Brooklyn felt and experienced urban renewal. Additionally, I will be comparing their narratives to those taken from the mainstream media and Charlotte business and political leadership.

Chapter one establishes the historical background of housing discrimination against African Americans on the local and national levels. It sheds light on how de jure and de facto housing laws in the United States, locally and nationally, were

[64] Coffin. , *Brookshire & Belk.* 56.

discriminatory, especially against African Americans. This will consequently illustrate how black housing areas were allowed to reach a profound level of dilapidation.

Chapter two constructs the story of urban renewal in Charlotte. It will explore the role of the media and local leaders in the decision making. Additionally, chapter two examines the debate between those who were in favor of urban renewal and those opposing. Finally, from the oral history archive, I will compare these narratives to those belonging to the people who used to live in Brooklyn.

Chapter three evaluates the aftermath of urban renewal in light of the social and economic conditions of the displaced African Americans who were forced to leave their Brooklyn homes. From the testimonies of those who used to live in Brooklyn, I will describe how life used to be in Brooklyn. Contrary to how the local media in Charlotte portrayed life in Brooklyn, the testimonies of the Brooklyn's residents will show that despite the desegregation and neglect from the city of Charlotte, residents of Brooklyn were able to forge a close knit community full of friendship and cooperation. The reader will find out that the residents of Brooklyn were quite content with the community they had constructed during the early 20th century in Charlotte, North Carolina. Their happiness transcended the empirical measurements of scholars and governmental authorities. Former residents of Brooklyn cited the close knit community, the role of the church as the center of their activities, and self-reliance, as some of the factors that contributed to good living in Brooklyn.

Finally, chapter three will allow the reader to hear the missing voices of the people who were most affected by urban renewal and yet were not included in the debate during the process of urban renewal; their voices were simply ingonered in the main

stream debate. Therefore, I will attempt to illustrate how Maggie Sinson and other former residents of Brooklyn felt about the whole process of urban renewal, and how it affected their lives.

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CHAPTER ONE: HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA: FROM POST-RECONSTRUCTION TO THE URBAN RENEWAL ERA

"When Charlotte Mayor Stanford Brookshire, in 1961, swung a sledgehammer to mark the launching of the urban renewal program at a house in Brooklyn, the house almost literally fell on him."[65] Undoubtedly, houses in Brooklyn were not in a good shape. Brookshire was perhaps correct when he described Brooklyn as a "disgraceful, crime-and disease-ridden slums in the shadows of the uptown office buildings."[66] The same words could also describe many other inner city areas all over the United States, in the 1950s and 1960s. Brooklyn, where urban renewal first began in Charlotte, was the largest African American community in Charlotte and the center for Charlotte's black business community.[67] When Brooklyn was first created in the 1870s, it was an area where black elites, known as the "better-class," lived.[68] Yet, in a matter of 90 years, Brooklyn, along with many other black communities in Charlotte, had aged to a slum-like neighborhood, primarily not of their own doing. This chapter argues that the gradual degradation of black neighborhoods in Charlotte followed similar patterns found in other inner cities throughout the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Legislators at the national and local level created policies, or modified existing ones such as racial zoning, restrictive covenants, and red lining, in order to exclude African

[65] Coffin, 73.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Greenwood, 1.
[68] Ibid.

Americans from various public and private facilities. By drawing examples from cities throughout the United States to the laws of segregation and discrimination in housing and employment that negatively impacted blacks from 1870 to 1960, this chapter will show how such policies resulted in deepening the divide between African Americans and whites in Charlotte. Furthermore, this chapter will show how these policies of segregation, formed the basis in creating an underclass, and slum-like neighborhoods, inhabited mostly by blacks.

During slavery, blacks in the South lived in close proximity to whites.[69] According to J.B. Alexander's *The History of Mecklenburg County: From 1740 to 1900*, the best relationship that ever existed between blacks and whites was when blacks were slaves, a "great deal of personal affection existed between the races." Blacks were allowed in the same churches with whites, albeit in galleries built exclusively for slaves. Alexander describes these days as the "happiest days of the race."[70] However, with the new rights that blacks came to attain after the Civil War and the 14TH and 15th Amendments, whites began, gradually to push African Americans away from their lives. Although de jure laws of the 14th and 15th Amendments partially African Americans the rights to exercise their full citizenship, de facto laws opposed accepting them as equal partners living side by side with the white population. Therefore, in a period of forty years after emancipation, African Americans came to witness their rights of equality diminish.[71]

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[69] J. B. Alexander, *The History of Mecklenburg County: From 1740 to 1900* (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1902), 127
[70] Ibid.
[71] Greenwood, 178.

By the early years of the twentieth century African Americans in the South fell under Jim Crow Laws. Blacks were to be disenfranchised from all aspects of the system.[72] However, such repugnance of the black race did not originate in the South. The system in the North had already been practicing methods of discrimination long before the "separate but equal" status came to existence in the South, in the late nineteenth century.

While visiting the South in the mid-nineteenth century, French thinker and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville made the following observations:

> If I were called upon to predict the future, I should say that the abolition of slavery in the South will, in the common course of things, increase the repugnance of the white population for the blacks. I base this opinion upon the analogous observation I have already made in the North. I have remarked that the white inhabitants of the North avoid the Negroes with increasing care in proportion as the legal barriers of separation are removed by the legislature.[73]

Alexis de Tocqueville never saw his analogous predictions of the South come to reality, he died in 1861, however, any person who lived in the North, during the early to mid-nineteenth century, must have witnessed how cities, where blacks constituted a large percentage of the population, demonstrated the desire to segregate the races.[74]

In 1849, when African Americans were still living under slavery in Charlotte and elsewhere in the South, racial segregation was coming into existence in the North. The first case on this subject was argued and decided in 1849 and in it, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts "held the general school committee of the city of Boston had power under the constitution and the laws of the commonwealth to make provisions for the

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[72] See Page 26 for more explanation on how Jim Crow and policies of segregations emerged in the South.
[73] William H. Brown, "Access to Housing: The Role of the Real Estate Industry," *Economic Geography* 48, no. 1 (1972): 67.
[74] Ibid.

instructions of colored children in separate schools established exclusively for them."[75] In the case of *West Chester Rail-way Company v. Miles,* (1867), the State Supreme Court of Pennsylvania upheld the right of a railway company to segregate its white and black passengers.[76] This state court decision came right after the Civil War, when sentiments favoring blacks in the North were thought to be at their highest. While The State Supreme Court of Pennsylvania claimed to have maintained equality between the races, it based its decision not on "superiority or inferiority but on difference only."[77] The Supreme Court argued that blacks and whites should be separated in accordance with the laws of nature.

Not until 1896, did racial segregation become legal in the South. In the *Plessy V. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court of the United States was able to circumvent the 14th Amendment by adopting the argument of the *West Chester Rail-way Company v. Miles*, a case that occurred in the North. In the language of Mr. Justice Brown:

> The object of the Fourteenth Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social as opposed to political equality, or commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought in contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other. Federal government allowed states to issue its own legislations.[78]

Consequently, cities in the South, encouraged by the results of the Plessy case began to apply the policy of exclusion by implementing methods and mechanisms aimed at isolating and segregating blacks from the entire system. As blacks in Charlotte, were no longer subservient and wage-less laborers, whites became united across all classes in a

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[75] Author not mentioned "Racial Zoning by Private Contract," *The Virginia Law Register* 13, no. 9 (1928): 527.
[76] Ibid., 528. This case came to be known as the "original Jim Crow car case".
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 529.

new struggle to keep the old traditions of master and slave. In the meantime, blacks were relentless in pushing the boundaries of their freedom to new limits by fighting for more equality. When whites realized the impossibility of reversing the old system back, they resorted to a new strategy aimed at circumscribing the newly acquired rights that African Americans had just achieved.[79]

One of these first strategies was racial zoning, which, was not initially introduced to tackle racial issues. Its origin dates back to the era of Progressivism - from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Progressive era marked the rise of an ideological commitment to scientific rationalization. Moreover, under Progressivism, the state had a legitimate and much needed role in alleviating social inequities such as unsanitary housing and unsafe workplaces.[80] Regarding zoning, idealists and special interest groups from diverse origins looked to zoning as "a tool for social reform as well as land use control."[81] The local government's first involvement in zoning was in Washington, D.C., in 1899. The purpose of this zoning policy was not motivated by racism. Rather, it was an effort to control the type and intensity of urban land use.[82] Similarly, in 1908, Los Angeles adopted the first citywide zoning ordinance to protect the city of Los Angeles' expanding residential areas from "industrial nuisance."[83] However, despite the benign intentions of these zoning initiatives, they finally gave way to political pressures and to those who had an interest in dividing the races.

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[79] Greenwood, 178.
[80] Michael Willrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xxxviii.
[81] June M. Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf, *Urban Planning and the African Community: in the Shadows* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 23.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.,27.

The first comprehensive racial zoning ordinance in the United States appeared in Baltimore in December 1910.[84] In support of the ordinance, Baltimore's Mayor, J. Barry Mahool stated that "Blacks should be quarantined in isolated slums in order to reduce the incidents of civil disturbance, to prevent the spread of communicable disease into the nearby white neighborhoods, and to protect property value among the white majority."[85] Cities all around the United States adopted similar zoning ordinances. The United States Supreme Court on more than one occasion, ruled in favor of the city's comprehensive power over land use. The case of *Hadacheck .v Sebastian* (1915) marked the beginning of government upholding racial zoning.[86] In the case of *Village of Euclid V. Amber Reality Corporation* (1926), The U.S. Supreme Court allowed the village of Euclid to segregate itself racially and ethnically from the growing numbers of immigrant and in-migrants populations.[87] The Supreme Court upheld the ruling, and thereby sanctioned the city's police power over land use. Cities around the United States began to issue zoning ordinances to help keep undesired people from intermingling with the white inhabitants.

The city of Charlotte had informal racial zoning laws; however, their effect was clearly noticeable throughout the downtown area as blacks were gradually getting pushed out of white areas. Downtown Charlotte discouraged black storekeepers and neighbors pressured landlords to evict black tenants.[88] In 1905, the city of Charlotte aldermen

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., quoting Garret Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinance of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, (1983): 296-301.
[86] Ibid., 281.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Hanchett, 116.

issued an ordinance prohibiting blacks from entering the recently opened Independence Park.[89]

In 1917, the U.S Supreme Court ruled against racial zoning by overruling the *Buchanan V. Warly* case.[90] The court decision hardly had any noticeable effect as United States cities resorted to practices such as residential district laws, restrictive covenants and other legal devices desired to maintain racial segregation. Additionally, discriminatory ordinances in most of the southern cities remained unchallenged.[91] In some instances, local real estate boards were able to justify the legality of racial zoning by designating zoning segregation as a real estate policy or matter of the "common law" that deals with property of the individual rather than the liberty and freedom of blacks. Therefore, such zoning policies were assumed to "aid rather than interfere with the marketability and exchange of the land."[92]

Other communities in the North took the matter into their own hands. In Chicago, blacks who were brave enough to buy a house in a white community faced the reality of their homes being bombed. From July 1, 1917 to March 1921, the Chicago Race Relations Commission reported more than fifty-eight bombing incidents.[93]

Similar to racial zoning, restrictive covenants were an innovation of the early twentieth century and another racial exclusion policy. Restrictive covenants were clauses, conspicuously incorporated into deeds which had as their intention the maintenance of desirable racial and social characteristics. Amongst other restrictions, restrictive

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[89] Ibid., 118.
[90] Thomas and Ritzdorf, *Urban Planning*, 6
[91] Ibid.
[92] Racial Zoning, 540.
[93] William H. Brown, "Access to Housing: The Role of the Real Estate Industry," 68.

covenants overtly prohibited members of other racial minorities to purchase a home within a specific white neighborhood.[94]

Writing restrictive covenants was introduced to Charlotte in 1901. Every lot deed explicitly forbade ownership or residence by anyone of the "colored race."[95] For example, one deed that belonged to Piedmont Park stated that "no part of said real estate shall ever be owned or occupied by any person of the Negro race."[96] On the national level, restrictive covenants became more established when, in 1926, the U.S Supreme Court, in *Corrigan V. Buckley,* ruled in favor of restrictive covenants by "rejecting the argument that restrictive covenants denied individual liberty to buy and sell property without due process of law."[97] This ruling of the U.S Supreme Court was an example of how the legal system, on many occasions, had to either work hand in hand or kowtow to the racists desires and practices of white property owners and real estate dealers. Armed with the legal support of the federal state, and municipal government, real estate boards spearheaded the establishment of restrictive covenants in Charlotte and in every other urban center in the United States. In addition to espousing a discriminatory outlook, real estate agencies all over the nation were mainly concerned with the price value of neighborhoods.[98] Preventing persons of color from taking residence in a white neighborhood was thought of as a proper way of keeping the value of property from depreciation. Indeed, one of their codes precisely instructed the prevention of

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[94] Sugrue, 44.
[95] Hanchet, 116.
[96] Ibid., p. 151.
[97] Donald Nieman, *Promises to Keep: African Americans and the Constitutional Order, 1776 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 129.
[98] Ibid.

"infiltrations of unharmonious racial groups."[99] In 1924, The National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) published an article in its code of ethics stating that "a Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood . . . members of any race or nationality . . . whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood."[100] As a result, well-to-do blacks failed in their efforts to obtain better housing as they were not able to compete in an open housing market. Low income blacks could only rent at high rates in blighted areas. Such decisions of groups like the NAREB, widened the dividing line between black and whites.

In the 1930s, the U.S Government, under the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, introduced a set of New Deal programs aimed at assisting the development and reformation of U.S cities.[101] Although, the New Deal program was intended to alleviate the suffering of the poor by creating public housing and providing job opportunities to name a few, it did not intend to challenge existing state policies on segregation. President Roosevelt was cautious not to antagonize southern politicians by challenging their policies on segregations. Therefore, the New Deal programs tended to tolerate racial discrimination in housing.[102] Additionally, Southern politicians were willing to work with the New Deal as long as it did not conflict with the racial status quo of the South.[103]

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[99] Thomas, 64.
[100] Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid* 37, quoting Rose Helper, *Racial Politics and Practices of Real Estate Brokers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 201.
[101] James C. Cobb and Michael V. Inamorato, The New Deal and the South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 101.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 106.

New Deal funds via the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) were utilized by Charlotte's city officials to cover the needs of areas mostly inhabited by whites. Out of the five top projects, only one was dedicated to areas where blacks resided. The City of Charlotte applied for a loan through Roosevelt's Public Works agency (PWA) to remodel St. Peter's Hospital, a privately owned facility that used to serve only white patients. But, because the PWA loan would only apply to public facilities only, the city of Charlotte decided to build a new public hospital. Memorial Hospital was built next to the white and upper class areas of Dilworth and Myers Park. [104]

Another task of the New Deal's programs was to financially assist the mortgage market and in turn, to help Americans obtain home loans.[105] But in order for these federal mortgage funds to be distributed in a systematic and standardized fashion, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was chartered out by the government. HOLC's purpose was to study the credit risk factor in every community all over the United States.[106] Consequently, here in Charlotte, appraisers from HOLC arrived to the city in 1937. They toured the whole city, examined real estate records, and met with eleven leading real estate agents and bankers, but no ordinary citizens of African Americans decent. Based on the outcome of their research, HOLC produced a map that detailed the credit risk for every district in Charlotte. Areas that were deemed the least credit risk were given the letter A or B, and highlighted in blue on the map. Whereas areas HOLC deemed risky received the lower grades of C or D, and highlighted in red. Exclusively

[104] Hanchett, 229.
[105] Ibid., 228.
[106] Ibid.

white districts received the highest ranking, the letter A. Black neighborhoods, almost all the time, received the letter D. Neighborhoods ranked A or B were slated to receive federal loans. Letter D neighborhoods received no money at all.[107] According to historian Thomas Hanchett, only four areas in Charlotte received the letter A: Myers Park, Eastover, the Olmsted Portion of Dilworth and the small tract adjoining the Charlotte Country Club in the northeast, all white areas. Black residents in Charlotte received D's regardless of their income level and the condition of their housing. Not even the finely built areas where blacks were found to occupy could avoid the D ranking.[108] It is evident here that HOLC results were a close reflection of the desires and practices of the local real estate dealers and bankers. HOLC only lent "the power, prestige, support of the federal government"[109] to these local entities.

Furthermore, HOLC practices eliminated the divide between the different ethnic groups of European immigrants. Such incidents occurred mostly in the North where different ethnicities could be found sharing the same area alongside blacks. After the HOLC findings, these groups had to eventually move into a "white" only area or had to choose between either black or white areas. In other words, as George Lipsitz described in his book, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; while ethnic differences among whites became a less important dividing line in U.S culture, race became more important."[110]

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[107]Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 230.
[109]Massey and Denton, p. 52.
[110] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 7.

The transformation of Charlotte into a racially divided city, however, would not have been perfected without the contributions of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). A sister companion of the HOLC, FHA was founded in 1934 by President Roosevelt for the purpose of salvaging home building and finance industries that had collapsed during the Great Depression.[111] By using "federal money to insure mortgage banks against the possibility of default by borrowers,"[112] home buyers were able to buy a house and finance it for 20 to 30 years with a minimum down payment. Similar to the HOLC, FHA was just as significantly influenced by the real estate industry and local politicians' racial outlook and interest. In essence, the FHA rules and regulations came to merit and enforce the codes of ethics that National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) had chartered in the 1920's. In its Underwriting Manual, the FHA explicitly supported racial and social homogeneity and restrictive covenants.[113] According to sociologist Kevin Gotham, the FHA's home guiding subsidies and subdivision regulations helped to institutionalize racial residential segregation on a national scale by requiring the use of racially restrictive covenants on government-insured housing and refusing to insure mortgages for homes in predominantly minority areas of the inner cities.[114]

Thus, it is safe to argue that the FHA's goals mainly supported the economic interests of the mortgage banks. It cared little about the welfare of the cities. Consequently, ensuring new single family houses, versus building or renovating existing

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[111] Kevin Fox Gotham, "Radicalization and the State: The Housing Act of 1934 and the Creation of the Federal Housing Administration," *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 43. no. 2 (2000): 292.
[112] Hanchet, p. 232.
[113] Thomas and Ritzdorf, *Urban Planning*, 282.
[114] Gotham, 292.

multi-family units in the inner city made more sense economically. As a result, mostly middle class whites, in the 1940s and 50s, moved out of the inner cities en masse to the newly built suburban houses on the east and north east side of Charlotte. Blacks who were able to afford a new house could only move to segregated suburbs on the northwest side of Charlotte. The newly built suburb tripled the size of Charlotte as it had increased from barely twenty square miles to more than sixty-five square miles in the 1960s.[115]

Just as has been shown earlier, U.S Supreme Court decisions enforced exclusion policies, the FHA and HOLC established the legal foundation for the policy of expulsion in blacks' areas. Blacks who were collectively forced to inhabit fully segregated areas witnessed their communities becoming more isolated from city facilities and businesses. When the federal government became involved in urban development, blacks were excluded from any federal grants intended to redevelop their areas or from the opportunity to own a house in the suburbs.

Out of all the New Deal's programs created in the 1930s, only one federal program catered to the needs of the inner city poor. Created as a recovery measure during the Depression, Roosevelt's public housing program was launched in 1934. Although, slums in Charlotte existed from the 1910s, local politicians never acted on behalf of their residents. This was because most slum dwellers were blacks. Under Jim Crow laws, poll tax and illiteracy, voting laws prevented blacks from casting their votes. Hence, blacks lacked political representation. In 1916, V.S Woodward, leader of Charlotte's Private Associated Charities, spoke about the stark slums conditions in an effort to rally support for the slums' residents. In one of his speeches, Woodard described how most houses in

[115] Hanchet, 234.

these slum neighborhoods lacked basic housing necessities such as running water, toilets and bathrooms. Woodard's call of help to the white audience went totally unheeded, however, when the federal government decided to fund projects, under the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937, which aimed to clear slums and build public housing as an alternative for the poor, many local politicians, had a change of heart. The lure of federal money that required no private investment prompted city officials to seriously consider federal assistance for public housing. This decision, however, was met with great opposition from the real estate dealers in Charlotte who saw public housing as a threat to their privately owned rental units.[116]

If public housing was justly and objectively implemented as stated by the federal government, it would have solved the housing problem for many poor blacks. But, because the program, like all other federal programs, was handled locally by white politicians and business men, it never attained full fruition. For example, in the late 1960s, the Charlotte Housing Authority, a composition of mostly wealthy whites, who was assigned the handling of public housing in Charlotte, used the program to further promote its sectoral vision of the city. Out of 4,500 units found to be in need of urgent help and repair, only 452 units were built for blacks in Fairview and 352 units in Belmont for whites. Blacks were relocated near an all-black area, two miles away from downtown Charlotte and beyond job opportunities. In addition, the city built shopping centers in each area. As result, black shoppers were confined to segregated shopping centers.[117]

In general, the public housing program was never fulfilled. The private sector led by local real estate dealers who – in the 1966, conducted a strong lobbying campaign in

[116] Hanchet, 154.
[117] Hanchet, 238.

Washington, D.C, vehemently opposed this program. On the local level, real estate agencies supported candidates who rejected federal housing aid and encouraged neighborhood groups to resist public housing in their areas.[118] All in all, the city of Charlotte built less than five public housing units before the late 1960s.[119] On the national level, 440,000 public housing units were built, about less than one-tenth of the number needed to meet housing requirements for the urban poor.[120] In most cities, because of the strong opposition from white subdivision owners to having public housing in close proximity to their homes, public housing was placed in the slums or near them. Thus, public housing perpetuated poor and black segregation.[121]

Federal Highway Aid

In 1944, Washington created the Federal Highway Act, a program designed to widen city thoroughfares and provide new connections to the newly built suburbs surrounding every city.[122] Becoming aware of the money that usually accompanied federal projects, Charlotte's Mayor Herbert Baxter delightfully seized the opportunity. Mayor Baxter, who was a resident of Myer's Park and president of the Myer's Park Country Club, summoned Charlotte's civic leaders to his office, and began working on an inter-city highway plan. In 1946, Charlotte leaders endorsed the building of Independence Boulevard with a $2 million federal grant. The newly built highway would link Charlotte's east side to its west side. Black communities such as Brooklyn, however, were slated to pay the price of this federal project. When approaching the downtown, the

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[118] Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1975), 200.
[119] Hanchet, 244.
[120] Gelfand, 200.
[121] Ibid., 203.
[122] Hanchet, 241.

newly built highway changed direction upward, going north then shifted almost at a 90 degree angle westward in order to avoid the wealthy white areas of Eastover and Myers Park (See Fig. 4). It then went westward through the heart of the heavily black neighborhood of Brooklyn. black residents of Brooklyn, were at a great loss. They saw this highway project as further exacerbation to their housing problem. Because, many of the houses in Brooklyn were demolished in order to make room for the highway.

Encouraged by the ability to have access to federal funds to build highways, shopping centers, and public housing, Charlotte leaders realized that in order to bring more funds from Washington, they would have to prepare studies to prove that money was needed and produce plans to show how it would be spent.[123] In 1944, Mayor Baxter appointed the first Charlotte Planning Commission (CPC). Myers Park real estate broker Frank Thies and banker-contractor Beaumert Whitton were appointed as chairman and vice-chairman to the commission respectively.[124] In an attempt to comply with the FHA's guidelines for the need to create zoning in federally financed subdivisions, in 1946, the Charlotte Planning Commission approved a subdivision regulation law. The commission utilized this law to specify minimum street widths and lot sizes for new developments.[125] In 1947, the commission created Charlotte's first zoning ordinance accompanied by a zoning map in which it designated five different levels of land use. White areas and affluent areas, such as Myers Park and Eastover, received the highest ranking and were listed as "residential used only," whereas, black areas such as West Charlotte and Brooklyn, received the lowest ranking, and their neighborhoods were listed

[123] Hanchet, 245.
[124] Ibid., 246.
[125] Ibid.

as industrial. The industrial designation provided the city of Charlotte with legal justification to construct any structure on nonresidential land.

At one point, Mayor Baxter attempted to reconsider receipt of federal funds for public housing. The Charlotte Real Estate Board working earnestly to bring Charlotte up to the FHA's guidelines, succeeded in dissuading the mayor by proposing a slum clearance program instead. The Real Estate Board then established a standard housing ordinance in 1946. This housing ordinance promised to enhance poor areas by dictating that for every house had to have indoor toilets and sinks. The Board also set the standards for minimum room sizes and other residential home standards.[126] In 1949, more than 2000 houses were brought up to city standards. Charlotte was locally and nationally applauded for its success.[127]

By the end of the 1940s, the amount of dilapidation in most of Charlotte's inner city black communities had finally taken its toll. After tens of years of direct or indirect city segregation and exclusion, many black communities in downtown Charlotte had become overcrowded, and began to show old age. Many black and other community activists thought that embarking on a rehabilitation program to these areas would have been, morally, the right thing to do. To city commissioners and real estate dealers, such a program would not have been economically profitable. Furthermore, the close proximity of black areas to downtown business areas and the exposure of black Brooklyn, made by the building of Independence Boulevard through the center of the neighborhood, had forced city officials to think of a more permanent solution.

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[126] Ibid., 248.
[127] Ibid.

In 1949, the federal government introduced the Urban Renewal Act. The purpose was to provide "federal funds to local authorities to acquire slum properties, assemble them into large parcels, clear them of existing structures, and prepare them for "redevelopment."[128] Real estate dealers would, in turn, buy the cleared land at a low price and invest in building affordable homes. Both city commissioners and real estate dealers were exalted at the new opportunity as the program would only cost cities one-third of the whole expenditure, and real estate dealers would have a chance to generate profit with minimal capital investment of their own. The same program, however, promised to devote the entire rebuilding allocation for low income housing dramatically changed. By 1959, the federal renewal program had changed its conditions. Urban renewal became a federal program that allowed local politicians to do whatever they deemed a "better use."[129]

In general, the Urban Renewal Act of 1949 and its 1954 extension mainly "called on cities to create comprehensive plans for rehabilitation, conservation, and demolition."[130] However, this program descended disproportionately on African-Americans. In 1961, for example, African Americans constituted about 10% of the US population, but 66% of residents of areas slated for urban renewal.[131] The city of Charlotte designated the Brooklyn community as a "blighted" area and, therefore, called for its removal.

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[128] Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid,* 55.
[129] Hanchet, 249.
[130] Thomas and Ritzdorf, *Urban Panning*, 187.
[131] Ibid., 23.

Segregation in Employment

Blacks were also segregated in employment. Restrictions on housing under Jim Crow also applied to employment. African Americans in Charlotte were not allowed to work in the same jobs as whites. Black Charlotteans could only work in menial low-skilled jobs. As a result, blacks' earnings were a lot less than their white counterparts. The largest Charlotte employer was in the mills and furniture industries. At some instances, blacks were totally barred from being in the same work place whites were employed. In 1915, South Carolina passed the Segregation Act prohibiting blacks from being employed as operatives or working together in the same room with whites.[132] In this act, blacks were only allowed to work in "Boiler rooms, truckmen, or floor scrubbers and those persons employed in keeping in proper condition lavatories and toilets."[133]

Therefore, blacks worked in the mills under precarious conditions. The few blacks who were granted mill employment worked jobs that were deemed intolerable and unbearable for whites. Thus, in many mills, the dirtiest and heaviest work went to black men. They labored in the "yard," moving bales of cotton and loading box-cars and wagons with finished goods. They also worked in the opening and picker rooms. As a former mill worker in North Carolina, Noise Crockett, who throughout his life time work at the mills remembered there "wasn't nothing in the picker room but the colored. The onliest white man in there was the boss man."[134]

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[132] Ibid., 61, quoting South Carolina, Act, 1915, No. 69, 1916, No.391 as quoted by Herbert J. Lahne, *The Cotton Mill Worker* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1944), 82.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Jacquelyn D. Hall et al, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World: The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 200), 66.

Another testimony of where blacks were only allowed to work comes from T.B. Fitzgerald, president of Riverside Mills in Danville, he stated his company's policy "as regards colored people, we only employ them as sweepers, scourers, truck drivers, and in the dye house and picker rooms: we do not have them in the mills proper, except in the above-mentioned menial capacities."[135]

The very few blacks employed in the mills found it almost impossible to be promoted. Baxter Holman, a black mill worker who first started work scrubbing mill floors in the 1920s was moved, after few years, to unloading cotton. After ten years in the same position of unloading cotton, he was finally moved into the picker room. While on the other hand, white workers moved up the ladder quite easily.[136]

Restrictions on black women's work in the mills were worse than black men. Black women's main job opportunities were to serve as domestics in white workers' houses, often, against their will. According to Mary Thomson, a former white mill worker, black women who worked for her did so as a condition for receiving county welfare assistance:

> There was always plenty of help in Greenville because there was lots of colored people and lots of them were on welfare. I went to the welfare office lots of times and asked for somebody to do the housework and keep my child. They would tell them that they'd have to work or they'd be taken off the welfare.[137]

Billie Douglas, a black woman who worked at the same mill in Greenville, South Carolina, lamented the injustices administered on her and other black women who had to leave their own children unattended while having to serve as housekeepers. Billie Douglas resented working hard for very little money. Often times she would walk

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[135] Ibid., 67.
[136] Ibid., 73.
[137] Ibid., 157.

through the mill and think that "If I was in there, if I could bring a check like that home. You know, they would probably pay us a week for what they made in a day, and sometimes less, and of course we resented it. But that was what we was used to and we did what we had to do."[138]

Black families, in most cases, lived on the outskirts of mill communities or in some segregated areas. Estelle Waddell, an African American lady who worked at McAdenville Mill, McAdenville, North Carolina from 1960 to 1989, stated that blacks were not allowed to live in the mill houses. The homes were built to house white mill workers only.[139] The Hanes mill in Winston Salem, for example, maintained houses for blacks on a long street known as the "colored Row". [140] Cramerton Mills in Cramerton, North Carolina, designated separate areas for blacks that "housed the negro street cleaners and common laborers"[141]

Conclusion

As African Americans made their transition from slavery to freedom, they were severely discriminated against in housing. Whether in what was presumed as the "liberal" North or the Jim Crow South, local governmental officials coalesced with real estate agencies to exact various measures aimed at keeping the African American race segregated and totally isolated. When the U.S Government intervened, rules and regulations were exploited by local officials to serve their racial desires. On the other hand, African Americans, unable to cast their votes had no legal representation.

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Estelle Wadel, interview by author, February, 24, 2007, Charlotte, North Carolina.
[140] Ibid., 158; Stewart Cramer,"the Average Southern Cotton Mill Community", *Cramerton Mills*, Cramerton Mills Inc., Cramerton, North Carolina, 1925, no page number, 5th page in the book
[141] Stewart Cramer, 17th page in the book.

Additionally, with very little education and economic background, African Americans were clearly at the bottom of the social strata. Yet, instead of addressing these needs by the national and local systems to help blacks recuperate from the days of slavery, the opposite was administered upon them. It is difficult to capture or estimate the total amount of destruction that came to highlight the life of blacks, as a result of housing segregation as it left its impact upon all other life aspects. As a result of such racial discrimination in housing, important fields such as education and job opportunities were seriously affected. Access to schools and jobs became more challenging as African Americans were pushed away from the city centers and suburbs.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DEBATE OVER URBAN RENEWAL IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA: 1960-1965

If one is to walk today through the streets of Second Ward, in downtown Charlotte, North Carolina, one sees only parks, hotels, governmental and civic buildings, which were mostly built in the 1960s. The concrete walls of the buildings, the trees in the parks and on the sides of the roads, cannot speak of how they came to replace the Brooklyn neighborhood. Nor will the books written on urban renewal, narrate the story of how Brooklyn was entirely demolished through the program of urban renewal the city of Charlotte had undertaken in the 1960s.[142] The pages of this chapter; however, will reconstruct the story of urban renewal in the Brooklyn neighborhood during the years of 1958-1965. The 228-acre site that once housed more than 900 African American families was the first choice for Charlotte's local authorities to completely demolish and redevelop, as it was deemed blighted by Charlotte city officials. The main people who were affected by this clearance project, almost entirely African Americans, their voices were the least to be heard. Instead, groups such as members of the Charlotte Board of Realtors and supporters of private enterprise were the most vocal. This chapter will shine the light on how and why these groups reacted to urban renewal by relying on primary sources from the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Charlotte News*, the local minutes of Charlotte City Council, and oral interviews of the former inhabitants of Brooklyn.

[142] As of the date this paper was written, no books, or papers have been written solely on the experience of Brooklyn during urban removal.

In 1957, Charlotte City Council formed the Charlotte Urban Redevelopment Commission[143] (CURC), in order to look for areas suitable for redevelopment under the federal government's Urban Renewal Plan. In 1958, CURC was able to find a suitable urban renewal site, the neighborhood of Brooklyn. This black neighborhood was deemed to have met the legal specifications of North Carolina Redevelopment Law as a blighted area.[144] CURC based its conclusions on five ideas. First, 67.7 percent of Brooklyn's buildings were found to be in a state of dilapidation and deterioration. Second, more than 50 percent of the neighborhood's buildings lacked adequate provisions for ventilations, light, and air. Third, 77.1 percent of the buildings could be characterized as blighted. Fourth, the entire area had more than average the number of tuberculosis and infant mortality cases. Fifth, most of Brooklyn's houses were overcrowded, and the streets incredibly narrow constituting a fire hazard. Additionally, the report found that out of the 1,689 buildings surveyed, 2,289 units were used for family dwelling units.[145]

The aforementioned reasons were the ones used by CURC to prove its case to the state of North Carolina and the federal government that Brooklyn was blighted. In order to rally support from the Charlotte community, however, to get behind urban renewal, CURC revealed additional reasons for demolitions. According to Vernon Sawyer, director of CURC, the city of Charlotte was going to benefit from the project by increasing its tax revenue. When Sawyer was asked by one of the *Charlotte Observer's*

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[143] Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes, *Minute Book 39*, January, 18, 1960, 216. Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Public Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.
[144] *Minute Book 39*, 217.
[145] *Minute Book 39*, 218

reporters as to why the Redevelopment Commission selected this "negro" area first for the project, he stated that:

> Fifty or more housing units are built directly over the creek or in close Proximity which makes them more prone to flooding, rat signs and food supplies were observed throughout the area, 90 percent of the houses are in very bad state of repair, vacant buildings beyond repairs are used for smoke parties and beer drinking.[146]

Also, Sawyer quoted a health department report showing that the infant mortality rate was twice as high as the average rate in Charlotte and the number of active tuberculosis cases were two and a half more than that of the city as a whole.[147] Mainly though, Charlotte officials viewed Brooklyn as a hindrance to their expansion plans and as "an economic drain on the city treasury." This was true geographically because Brooklyn was sandwiched between the downtown area and the upper class white communities of Myers Park and Dilworth. Finally, Brooklyn was the only area available to expend for urban planning (See Fig.2).

Right after the findings of the Redevelopment Commission were publicly announced, the main local papers began to publish reports and articles either mirroring the findings of CURC or adding more supportive evidence. One article claimed that venereal diseases in Brooklyn accounted for 20 to 30 per cent of the total number in the city and fifteen percent of the total arrests in the city for criminal acts. Another article in the *Charlotte Observer* stated that Brooklyn produced only $52,570 in tax revenue annually, a relatively small amount when compared to the services that the city spent maintaining the community. The article, also, indicated, fifteen per cent of the city's

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[146] Roy Covington, "Brooklyn Renewal Will Pay for Itself," *Charlotte Observer*, March 6, 1959.
[147] Covington.

arrests are made in the area.[148] On another note, the same article predicted a brighter future for the children of Brooklyn as they will have better opportunities in their new places.[149] Similarly, other local articles in the local papers highlighted the benefits that urban renewal would bring to Brooklyn residents. For example, the *Observer* wrote that the aim of urban renewal was to "dig the city out of its slums. To cauterize the sore of unplanned urban sprawl and to face squarely the crying human need for decent shelter for 2,260 forgotten families."[150]

In May 1958, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission unanimously approved the Brooklyn area as blighted. The next step was for CURC to officially request City Council approval for a redevelopment program in Brooklyn and to subsequently request from the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) financial assistance in funding the renewal project.[151] CURC recommended the redevelopment of a 31 acre of tract of land, the portion of Brooklyn, bounded by South Brevard Street, the Sugar Creek, East Fourth Street, and the land near East Morehead Street. Additionally, CURC recommended the hiring of a full-time consultant to perform house-to-house visits in Brooklyn empowered to decide which house needed to be cleared and which should be rehabilitated, and how many separate projects the ten year plan should be divided. Based on the survey findings, CURC decided to carry out the urban removal project in five phases over a ten year period. The main idea behind the project was that the Urban Commission of Charlotte City Council will be tasked to buy the land. After clearing it, the land would be sold to private developers. The difference between the total project

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[148] *Charlotte Observer,* "Renewal Costs Need Comparison," April 6, 1959.
[149] Ibid.
[150] *Charlotte Observer,* "Urban Renewal: No Obituaries, Please," September 25, 1959.
[151] Porter Munn, "Clearance of Area is Next," *Charlotte Observer,* April 4, 1958.

cost and the proceeds from the sale of the land was called the "net cost." The federal government would then pay two thirds of the cost, and the city of Charlotte would pay the remaining one third. Charlotte would then recoup its cost share and make a profit from the increased tax value on the newly developed land and from the reduction of city services.[152]

During the summer of 1958, and while CURC was in the process of submitting its report to the City Council, the United States House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., approved $1,350,000 for the national urban renewal program. This was perceived as good fortune by the city of Charlotte. However, the good news would not last long when President Eisenhower vetoed the $1.3 billion dollar housing bill.[153] This decision was going to bring the whole urban project to a complete halt had the Senate not reacted in a timely manner in passing a $630 million dollar bill that included urban renewal funds in August of the same year. CURC contacted all members of the House and the Senate, and urged them to support the bill.[154] The bill was finally approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. It must be noted, here that the money allotted to urban renewal had been reduced by half. Charlotte, like all other cities benefiting from this program, was affected by the dramatic reduction.[155]

One of the most important tasks that CURC had to accomplish in order to secure the success of the project was to obtain the backing and complete support of the Charlotte community. With this in mind, the Redevelopment Commission launched a campaign

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[152] *Charlotte Observer,* "Urban Renewal: No Obituaries, Please," September 2, 1959.
[153] Bob Blough, "Brooklyn's Future Lies in Congress," *Charlotte News*, July 9, 1959.
[154] *Charlotte Observer,* "Bill's Ok By Senate is Hailed," "Urban Renewal Nears Reality," August 19, 1959.
[155] Ibid.

aimed at "getting city-wide support for urban renewal."[156] Consequently, in March of 1959, the Redevelopment Commission held its first campaign meeting at the Charlotte Realtors Club. More than 300 people were invited to the meeting. The list of attendees included Charlotte Mayor James Smith, all members of the City Council, and media staff members. No members of the Brooklyn community were invited.[157] The Redevelopment Commission's selection of its opening bid for community support at the realtors' site was to show how much this Commission valued the Board of Realtors presence Commission. When asked of why choosing to meet with the realtors first in their publicity campaign, CURC Chairman James Glenn responded that "no one group is more important."[158] Glenn, during the first meeting, thoroughly went over all the aspects of urban renewal in Charlotte. He urged all the members to support the project. In the next two years, Vernon Sawyer, director of the commission would speak in over one hundred events in an attempt to rally support for the project. The primary local papers, the *Observer* and *News*, would publish many articles lending their power of support in the following years. One article described the project as "a dramatic story" for this 228-acre neighborhood with its utter poverty and squalor to be only a street away from government buildings, and where "houses huddle over stagnant creeks." Moreover the papers continued addressing the financial drain theme that made Brooklyn a tax liability. This was done in conjunction with the presentation of crime and venereal disease stories concerning Brooklyn. On the other hand, the local papers depicted the work of the Urban Renewal Commission along

[156] Bill Hughes, "Support is Sought For Urban Renewal," *Charlotte Observer*, March 19, 1959.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Hughes.

with the City Council as a noble endeavor in "wiping out this shameful slum and to redevelop it for practical, profitable use."[159]

The Charlotte community, pressured by the publicity campaign launched by the Redevelopment Commission - and abetted by the local media had to respond in an accepting manner. This was evident in the lack of opposing community views published in the local papers. On the other hand, this was not the case for the Charlotte Board of Realtors. They were the least enthused; notwithstanding, the special attention given to them by CURC. The first incident that would make the conflict of interest publically surface was when the Redevelopment Commission conducted a survey of the Brooklyn area, in May 1959. The commission found that a fourth of the families earned less than $100 a month and another fourth less than $175 a month. The report also, found more than half of Brooklyn's black population was paying higher rents - $50.00 or more. The realtors in Charlotte protested the report's findings, and launched their own survey. Their main objection was that "the $50 figure was unrealistic and tends to hold up the owners of the Negro row houses as charging rents that are too high."[160] The Charlotte Board of Realtors was speaking on behalf of the owners, or landlords, of the houses in Brooklyn. Most of these people, mainly whites, were concerned about the fate of their Brooklyn properties.

Next to the Redevelopment Commission's huge publicity campaign was a focus on how to attract investors in the urban renewal project. The Commission's initial goal was to lure public, semi-public, and private investors. Local colleges, schools, police departments, and hospitals were the ideal candidates. For example, right before the city of

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[159] *Charlotte News*, "In the Center of a City, A Sin," March 20, 1959.
[160] *Charlotte Observer*, "Realtors Protest Survey of Rentals," August 19, 1959.

Charlotte began to demolish Brooklyn, it arranged for a meeting of these investment candidates at the Charlotte Main Public Library inviting members of Charlotte's civic, cultural, and social welfare organizations to hear about the proposed government-civic center intended to replace the Brooklyn slum and asked if they would be interested in having office space.[161] Moreover, CURC invited experts on urban redevelopment from Atlanta and Washington, D.C., in order to provide the Commission with advice on how to market cleared land to local investors.

African Americans Voices

Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans in Charlotte, were limited in their ability to stand up for their legal and civil rights. Southern de Jure Jim Crow Laws prevented Charlotte African Americans from enjoying equal access to housing, education, and employment. Blacks were segregated from all public facilities. According to Calvin Brown, a former African American Lawyer in Charlotte,

> back in the '60s, the courtrooms were separate. Blacks sat on one side, and in the back. Whites sat on the other side and up front …. The policeman was white and the defendant was black. And, obviously jurors and everybody else, jurors and other people were not of color, and had a different view point about a defendant who was sitting there - black, being charged with something, and being testified against by a white police officer.[162]

Moreover, African American leadership such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was occupied with fighting segregation in public places, voter registration, school integration, and other issues that took precedence.

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[161]Loye Miller, "Agency Folk Hear Civic Center Pans," *Charlotte Observer*, May 16, 1958.
[162] Calvin Brown, interviewed with Tosha Pearson, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina, April 24, 2007.

Additionally, from a legal prospective, urban renewal in Brooklyn was about home relocation and demolition, not race because the majority of these homes belonged to whites who were regarded as absentee landlords, only concerned with the tax values of their properties. Black tenants residing in these rental properties did not have a say so on what happened to the property. Lastly, there were very few African American lawyers in Charlotte in the late 1950s. According to Calvin Brown, in 1961, Charlotte had only five lawyers serving the entire black metropolitan population. Evidently, these five lawyers were overwhelmed with the day-to-day cases. It would have been very difficult, given the lack of time, to redirect their attention to civil rights cases. Most of the buildings African Americans owned in Brooklyn were churches and houses of worship. In this case, black Lawyers, such as Calvin Brown, were hired to negotiate the value of the church properties for the redevelopment Commission.[163]

Defining the Brooklyn Area

Downtown Charlotte today, amid the towering skyscrapers that dot Charlotte's central business district is Grace African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church and the Mecklenburg Investment Company. They are the only two buildings left from what used to be called the Brooklyn neighborhood.[164] In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Brooklyn housed Charlotte's black business and professional classes. In the 1890s, South Brevard was the heart of Brooklyn neighborhood in the Second Ward which was a "fashionable address."[165] The black upper class established schools and founded

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[163] Ibid.
[164] Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy,* 1.
[165] Ibid., 140.

churches, making their vision of creating a vision of a progressive black race that was highly educated, self-reliant, and rich in character.[166]

Throughout the first part of the 20th century as was mentioned in chapter one, Brooklyn began to suffer white exclusion and neglect practices administered by Charlotte's officials.[167] Nevertheless, during the twentieth century's segregation era, African American businessmen benefited from the new segregation laws as their numbers multiplied, and an exclusive black clientele defined their economic foundations. Segregation made black self-reliance a highly visible part of Brooklyn.[168] Brooklyn had over fifteen churches, three schools – one of which was a high school, a vocational school, two pharmacies, and tens of other businesses, all owned by blacks. The community was centered on churches and schools.[169]

Brooklyn was bounded by South Brevard Street, the Sugar Creek, East Fourth Street and East Morehead Street. By the late 1950s, there were many reasons of why Brooklyn's infrastructure was in poor physical condition. During the 1930s', FHA loans became available to downtown's white residents. The FHA loans enabled them to move out to the suburbs, where they purchased newly built homes. They either sold their Brooklyn houses or rented them out to low income black families. As Douglas Massey et al mention in *American Apartheid* that Blacks could not exercise freedom of movement like other races or ethnicities who utilized their freedom of mobility to escape the city for the suburbs after World War II.[170] Brooklyn's black residents, however, could only move

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Hanchett, 229.
[168] James Black, interviewed by Jennifer Payne, Brooklyn Oral History Project. March 26, 2007.
[169] See Chapter three for an in-depth view on the life in Brooklyn.
[170] Massey, American Apartheid, 39.

into spaces available within their designated areas. To whites who owned most of the houses in Brooklyn, and who were now living in the suburbs, Brooklyn's rental properties became a good source of income. These white property owners and landlords took advantage of lax housing codes and regulations by not having to repair their Brooklyn properties when a crisis occurred. They generated profits easily from leasing their houses to low income blacks but, did not repair, and keep the properties up to housing code standards. As a result, throughout the 20th century, Brooklyn became dilapidated.

Additionally, Charlotte city officials viewed Brooklyn in 1949 as an undesirable area that had to be eliminated. To achieve this goal, Charlotte City Council zoned Brooklyn industrial hoping to bring industries to the area and by doing so; the people of that area would be forced to move out.[171] Brooklyn residents lived, and acted upon a difficult vision. They viewed Brooklyn as their home, a place they intended to remain, and a place where their numbers multiplied partially because landlords built more shacks in the backyards of their properties, and partly because Brooklyn constituted community for its black residents.[172]

As one would imagine, Brooklyn in the late 1950s was a heavily congested neighborhood. People who could not buy homes elsewhere in Charlotte moved to Brooklyn to rent.[173] Landlords kept building tiny shacks and "shotgun" homes in every available spot, regardless of the size. Over time, and with the lack of attention, Brooklyn was reduced to "broken, decayed or missing siding, sagging windows and gapping doors

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[171] Hanchet, 246.
[172] L. M. Wright JR, "City's Slums are Growing Because Of Our Lax Codes," *Charlotte Observer*, March 10, 1959.
[173] Ibid.

leave the inhabitants vulnerable to wind and water."[174] During the first years of Charlotte's urban renewal project, very few people, from the Commission and City Council bothered to check with the residents of Brooklyn, to ask about their feelings and opinions about the eminent demolition of Brooklyn. One reporter from the *Charlotte News* visited the community in August of 1959. "Yo'all gone tear it down." was what most of the people who she interviewed had to say. Brooklyn's black residents were, somehow, oblivious to what was going to happen. They knew, however, for sure that their days in Brooklyn were numbered. They were not sure how it was going to happen or where there were going to go.[175] When black Brooklyn residents met with city officials to discuss the fate of their community, they felt the decision had already been made. There was nothing to discuss.[176]

Actual Beginning of Phase one of the Urban Project

On Jan, 2, 1960, as the people of Charlotte, North Carolina, had just finished celebrating the beginning of a new decade, an article in the *Charlotte Observer*, predicted that after ten years, one will not recognize the city of Charlotte, North Carolina because, as the article reported, Charlotte "will experience the most significant face-lifting in its history." Urban renewal or slum removal, as the newspaper referred to it was one of the most important components of this face-lifting. By January 1960, the Redevelopment Commission had progressed in making their urban renewal dream a reality. They had already obtained the approval to receive their first urban renewal grant that funded phase one of the project. CURC was, by now ready to publically announce their clearance

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[174] Ann Sawyer, "Misery Multiplies Fast in Charlotte Slums," *Charlotte News*, September 1, 1959.
[175] "Is a Moving Day Coming for 9000?," *Charlotte News*, August 31, 1959.
[176] Calvin Davis, interviewed by Kathryn Wells, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, March 25, 2004.

project plans for phase I. On January 18, 1960, the City Council held a meeting with CURC members and other local Charlotte leaders. Thomas Creasy, Attorney for the Urban Redevelopment Commission requested City Council's permission to apply for $44,000.00 in federal funds, through the Housing and Home Finance Administration (HHFA), to pay for the cost of survey and the redevelopment plans for 33 acres in Brooklyn. These 33 acres constituted the first phase of the urban redevelopment program. Most importantly, Creasy wanted to obtain City Council's solid confirmation and full agreement with the project before the Commission placed its funding request.[177]

One project opponent was present at the meeting, Martin Waters, from Waters Insurance & Realty Company.[178] Waters questioned the legality of urban renewal especially in use of eminent domain to justify the demolishing of Brooklyn. He expressed his objections by first, stating that the clearing of Brooklyn's real estate would deprive many white "widows," whose sole income comes from leasing properties. These women will not be able to invest anywhere else with similar results. Second, he dismissed the claim that urban renewal would end crimes, and improve health. Instead, Waters argued that the Brooklyn project was only moving the crimes and health problems. Moreover, Waters stated that redeveloping the 33 acres in phase I will result in an "increased degeneration" for the rest of Brooklyn. Waters proposed to renew instead of redeveloping. He suggested the following steps as an alternative. First, construct good streets in the Brooklyn area. Second, extend 3rd street through or put Caldwell Street through to bisect the area. Third, the emphasis should be placed on analyzing Brooklyn's housing standards, and find a legal device to mastermind attacking real estate titles,

[177] *Minute Book 39*, 216.
[178] *Minutes Book 39*, 217.

whereby titles may be made good. Most importantly, Waters suggested that private enterprise would then take over and accomplish the desired results without the use of federal funds.[179] It is worth noting here that Water's concerns echoed the national views of liberal conservatives, mainly Republicans, who supported private enterprise while being staunch opponents to government intervention. Waters and similar minded members of these groups linked economic success with individual freedom and free enterprise.[180]

Similar comments came from Charles P. Freeman, Jr, who expressed his utmost opposition against the urban renewal project. He claimed that urban renewal "deprives the property owner from the rightful use of his property" [181] and that the "Federal Courts say that urban redevelopment is a police matter to confiscate property." [182]Freeman claimed that in "many states the program has been declared legal by the power of lobbyists and because of that many cities have suffered tremendous losses."[183] Moreover, Freeman equated the program to a "Hitler–like form of tyranny, sponsored by a clique of self-styled civic leaders."[184] He also accused the Charlotte newspaper of being complicit by distorting the facts which had made it difficult for the citizens of Charlotte to discern the truth. He finally suggested that private industry should be the one chosen to develop Brooklyn. Councilman Myers along with councilman Bobcock made similar remarks. They claimed that Urban Renewal "violates the basic and fundamental right of an

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[179] Ibid.
[180] Elizabeth A. fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago, The University of Illinois Press, 1994), 5.
[181] *Minutes Book 39*.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., 218.

individual to own property and to use it in whatever lawful manner he chooses."[185] The two councilmen were the only two members to vote against Urban Renewal. Thus, the meeting was concluded with the City Council approving the first phase of urban renewal.[186]

After City Council had approved phase I, the Commission then had to wrestle with how to relocate the Brooklyn's black families in standard housing at rents within their means.[187] There were two possibilities for the Commission to choose from. The first one was to utilize Section 221(d)(4) of the FHA. Under this section, the government would provide 100 % loans for houses costing up to 9,000 dollars. Buyers would be allowed to pay in 40 years. And they only had to pay 200 dollars for closing fees. The second option was to build public housing for the displaced Brooklyn residents. Yet, when African Americans met with CURC, they were told that no plans had been approved. This was because construction of section 221 units was up to private builders and public housing was vehemently rejected by the real estate agents of Charlotte.[188] Real estate builders and agents opposed public housing because it would reduce the value of their white clients' properties, if public housing were to be erected in close proximity.[189]

The Choice of Public Housing

African American leaders were concerned about the fate of Brooklyn's residents. However, their voices were hardly noticeable. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the early part of the 1960s, blacks in Charlotte lived under Jim Crow laws. They were

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[185] *Charlotte Observer*, "Slum Clearers Await Final City Okay to Start Brooklyn Project," February 23, 1960
[186] Ibid.
[187] Julian Scheer, "Commission Reveals Survey of City Area," *Charlotte News*, May 19, 1959.
[188] "New Housing for Negroes is Discussed," *Charlotte News*, January 29, 1960
[189] Gelfand, *A nation of Cities,* 200.

segregated in housing, education, and employment. In addition, they were not represented at all in the local politics of Charlotte. African American activists at the time were engaged in fighting for their very basic civil rights, to be treated as equal human beings. Following the examples of Greensboro, North Carolina, Charlotte blacks' activists were, for the first time, challenging the system by holding sit-ins in restaurants that segregated blacks and whites. Moreover, African Americans were the most poverty stricken of all the residents in Charlotte. Few of them owned their own homes, and most of them were employed in menial or unskilled jobs that paid very little.[190] Blacks were not allowed the same jobs as whites in the mills which were very prevalent in and around Charlotte. Their work in the mills was limited to janitorial and other unskilled jobs.[191]

Realizing this, black leaders knew the choices their people had. If they were to move out and look for another place to rent, areas populated by whites were not an option. Simply, they were not allowed. Moreover, renting a home anywhere outside Brooklyn would cost a lot more money. So, the only other option for them was to look for low income housing, or risk moving into another slum-like areas, which would perpetuate already miserable conditions. For this reason, African American leaders realized that the only feasible option was public housing. In January 1960, the only voice, regarding urban renewal in Brooklyn, came in the form of a letter from the state and local presidents of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[192] The NAACP leadership urged the Redevelopment Commission to allow parts of Brooklyn to "be left open for residential use."[193] Kelly Alexander, NAACP

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[190] Jacquelyn D. Hall et al., *Like a Family,* 165.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Joe Doster, "Brooklyn Housing is Urged," *Charlotte Observer*, January 5, 1960.
[193] Ibid.

President and U.S. Brooks, local president, stated that they were not in "disagreement with the general philosophy of urban renewal," but, worried about the relocation of Brooklyn's African American residents.[194] Additionally, the letter requested that African Americans have more representation on the various commissions involved with the clearance project. At that time, only two African leaders, Councilman Fred Alexander and Arthur Grier, were members of a 10-member citizens committee for Urban Renewal appointed by Mayor James S. Smith,[195] their appointment might have been more symbolic than real. The letter ended with the request for a meeting between the Redevelopment Commission and leaders of the African American community. The request for the meeting was unanimously approved by CURC.[196]

It must be noted here that HHFA had made it clear that local residents slated for the clearance project must be consulted. It is for this reason, CURC rushed to meet with leaders of the local African American community. When the meeting was held, Commission Chairman, James H. Glenn assured the group that the "purpose of this whole program is to improve the living and social conditions of the people living in Brooklyn. " If we fail in that," he stated, "there is no reason for the program."[197] It is difficult here to truly believe the words of Glenn because until that time, CURC had not spoken of any real steps aimed at improving the lives of Brooklyn residents. When former residents of Brooklyn were asked in their meetings with CURC and other city officials, one interviewee stated that "they [City Officials] were not honest, and upfront with the

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[194] Doster.
[195] *Charlotte News,* "Negroes to Meet With Urban Group," January 21, 1960.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Joe Dostor, "Brooklyn Session Hailed," *Charlotte Observer*, January 29, 1960.

people. They mislead the people."[198] Other former Brooklyn residents recalled that no matter what Brooklyn residents demanded, it was to no avail as they sensed the matter had already been decided. The meeting was only a formality. At any rate, the NAACP kept applying more pressure on the Redevelopment Commission to build public housing because black leaders solidly believed that relocating African Americans to private housing was out of the question. Jack E. Wood from the NAACP, New York, said that relocating Brooklyn families to private housing was a joke. Kelly Alexander stated that public housing will be necessary because "of the low earning power of the black families about to be relocated" He was afraid that Brooklyn families would be relocated to inferior homes, and thereby create another slum. Also, according to Jack E. Woods, this would encourage private builders to build slum housing.

During the first two years of 1960s, discussions on how, and where to relocate residents of Brooklyn remained at the top of Charlotte officials' agenda. CURC's main concern, however, was not focused on relocation of residents. It was more interested on making progress on the clearance project first. CURC had managed, for instance, to hold a public referendum on the phase one plan, and pass it. CURC declared a second area in Brooklyn a slum, while obtaining approval from Charlotte's City Council.[199] On August 1961, one Brooklyn family was relocated.[200] Other families were evicted soon after, but, many landlords refused to surrender their houses to the City of Charlotte. Landlords disagreed with the price value the city was going to offer and some were against the city's violation of their private domains. In order to overcome this obstacle, the

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[198] Olaf Abraham, interviewed by Dawn Funk, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, April 11, 2007.
[199] *Charlotte Observer*, "Second Area Declared a Slum," October 4, 1961.
[200] Taylor Blackwell, "Mrs. Steele Starts Exodus From Slums," *Charlotte News*, August 21, 1961.

Redevelopment Commission applied the lever of condemnation to "pry loose" properties that belonged to slum owners who refused to relinquish their properties.[201] This Commission accomplished this by filing a petition condemning the properties. This process, although legal, proved to be cumbersome, lengthy, and it delayed the completion urban renewal project.[202]

Problems with URA over public housing

In the meantime, the Redevelopment Commission kept moving families out of the area slated for phase I. The city then realized that most of Brooklyn's residents "either cannot afford or cannot be placed in privately owned housing." Members of NAACP and Welfare insisted that public housing was a must for the project. As an alternative to private housing, the City Council asked the Board of Realtors to find houses for displaced Brooklyn families and to submit a list of vacant homes every month to the Commission of Urban Redevelopment.[203]

Dr. Reginald. A. Hawkins, founder of the Mecklenburg Organization on Political Affairs (MOPA), was one of the leading voices for civil rights. In September 1962, he along with Rev. Ezra Moore sent a letter to William H. Harrison of Atlanta, Federal urban renewal administrator for the Charlotte region. Their letter requested that the Federal Government pressure Charlotte to build public housing for the displaced residents of Brooklyn. In their letter, Hawkins and Moore stated "there exists in our city an open and hostile opposition to public housing." And "this opposition seeks to use the urban renewal program as a stratagem to continue a pattern of discrimination and

[201] Jerry Shinn, "Steps Taken to Condemn Slum Land," *Charlotte Observer*, April 14, 1962.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Bill Hughes "Realtors Offer Slum Rebuttal," *Charlotte Observer*, December 2, 1961.

segregation in housing, while others seek profit rather than promote fully the spirit of the program."[204] Moreover, Hawkins and Moore questioned why "Negro citizens have purposefully been excluded from the policy planning committee of the Charlotte Urban Renewal Commission."[205] The Charlotte Board of Realtors was one of the leading groups opposing public housing. On 9/20/62, the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency assured Charlotte's black leaders, who were led by Reginald Hawkins, that it would not approve urban renewal plans which would transfer people from one slum to another. HHFA's regional administrator McClellan Ratchford provided this assurance. Ratchford also, undercut his assurance when he reminded Hawkins and Moore that the Redevelopment Commission was fully legal because state and municipal law certified City Council's support. Federal regulations did not apply.[206]

What ignited this battle in Charlotte between the black leaders and the commission, were the 240 families slated to be moved out for phase II in 1963. These families were but a small portion of the more than 1,200 families who were going to be forced out. Moreover, these displaced families would have to compete in finding cheap housing against rural farmers constantly moving into Charlotte from the surrounding areas. Brooklyn, finally, was not the only area that was going to cause displaced families to seek new housing, other slum clearance projects were commencing with highway and expressway projects. Collectively, urban renewal and highway construction displaced more and more black people. It is for this reason that the URA sought, and required assurance that the displaced had access to housing.

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[204] Douglas Connah JR "They Hope to Block U.S Funds," *Charlotte Observer*, September 16, 1962.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Connah, "Negroes Reassured On Housing Project," *Charlotte Observer,* September 21, 1962

One narrative from private enterprise explained the issue. Charles C. Ervin, president of Ervin Construction Company stated that the problem rested on the fact that only one out of four families is approved a FHA loan. Out of the 22,000 families in Brooklyn, less than 5% would be approved by the FHA. This caused a problem in selling these homes, as these families could not afford the mortgage payment. The only other alternative then was public housing, "which would reluctantly be approved by some, not all."[207]

Moreover, Dr. Reginald Hawkins' MOPA group conducted a survey in Brooklyn and found that more than 400 families with six or more persons in each who qualified for public housing.[208] Dr. Hawkins letter accused local urban renewal officials of turning their backs on this need to appease opponents of public housing. One article in the *Charlotte Observer* appeared on September 18, 1962, criticized Dr. Hawkins letter and accused him of "shooting from hip" for speaking out against the Brooklyn project. It further accused him of not having blacks on the commission of being "specious." Instead the paper suggested that members of the Commission should be chosen based on their leadership abilities, not by "sex, religion or race."[209]

Nevertheless, Dr. Hawkins claims regarding public housing were legitimate. When compared to other cities in the South, Charlotte had a very small number of public housing units. During the 1950s, many major Southeastern cities had been building low-rent public housing.[210] Charlotte began building public housing units after the U.S.

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[207] Connah, "Private Enterprise Limited in low Cost Housing," *Charlotte Observer*, October 15, 1962.
[208] *Charlotte Observer*, "Negro Group Charges 'Bias' In Local Urban Renewal Unit," September 16, 1962.
[209] *Charlotte Observer*, "Housing Remarks Are Ill-Timed," September 18, 1962.
[210] Connah, "Other Southeastern Cities Building Units At a Faster Rate," *Charlotte Observer*, October 1, 1962.

Housing Act of 1937. Eight hundred and twenty apartments were built by 1942. Under the 1949 Housing Act, Charlotte built 600 more units, a lot less than what other Southern cities. For instance, Greensboro had built 1026 units by 1958. In 1961, Greensboro was authorized to build an additional 450 more units. The city of Charlotte never seriously thought about building public housing before it embraced urban renewal in Brooklyn. For this reason, URA said in 1962, the city of Charlotte is not realistically "planning ways to relocate the slum families."[211] Mobile, Alabama, whose population was comparable to Charlotte, had 5,948 units and was planning another 2,180 public housing apartments. Jacksonville, Florida, with a population slightly smaller than Charlotte, had 1,827 and 68 more on the drawing board.

Because of this, URA held up the city's application for federal funds for the second project.[212] In essence, URA doubted Charlotte's ability to relocate phase II residents without committing to the construction of additional public housing. The agency's action in holding up the application prompted the City Council to ask North Carolina Congressmen to intervene on the city's behalf.

With the help of North Carolina's politicians, the city of Charlotte went "over Atlanta's head"[213] to the federal Urban Renewal Administration in Washington, D.C. Congressmen Alvin. Paul Kitchen; a Democrat[214] and Charles R. Jonas; a Republican[215] took the matter to Washington after the City Council formally requested their assistance. William Slayton, a housing consultant at URA, assured Representatives Kitchen and

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[211] Ibid.
[212] Hughes, "Public Housing Used Sparingly in Clearance," *Charlotte News*, October 12, 1962.
[213] Hughes, "UEA Considering Slum Funds Plea," *Charlotte News*, October 11, 1962.
[214] Congressman A. Paul Kitchen was a Democrat. He served in the Congress from 1957 to 1963.
[215] Congressman Charles R. Jonas was a Republican. He served in the congress from 1953-1973.

Jonas that he "will make careful review which coming forward from Atlanta and will give careful consideration" to Charlotte's proposal. Mainly, Charlotte proposed to relocate slum inhabitants to private housing, possibly with subsidized rent. Federal officials in Atlanta, on the other hand, told Charlotte that they had never seen "a feasible relocation plan without public housing."

As a result of URA's stand on urban renewal in Charlotte, City Council convened on October 15, 1962, to discuss the necessity of public housing in Charlotte. Mayor Stanford R. Brookshire declared his approval of public housing before the meeting started. At the end though, City Council decided to first have the housing authority to "make a careful analysis of the low rental housing market in Charlotte, and then recommend to the Council a course of action."[216] Members from real estate groups were present at the meeting. The article welcomed their presence and stated "we expect of them something more than the shopworn label of socialism if the council finally decides that additional public projects are an essential part of the solution."[217] Mayor Brookshire, despite being a supporter of free enterprise, realized that there was no alternative to public housing. He challenged the housing authority and real estate board to come up with "a specific alternate workable solution that will satisfy the HHFA and permit us to proceed with dispatch in our Brooklyn slum clearance program."[218] Most of the members of the City Council were surprised at Brookshire's public housing remarks. The pressure, however, to build public housing was mounting. This was due to the increasing housing

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[216] *Charlotte Observer*, "Council Takes Right Step in Public Housing Debate," October 17, 1962.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Hughes, "Brookshire Supports More Public Housing," *Charlotte News*, October 16, 1962.

demands forced by the construction of other projects, such as building expressways, which required demolition of Charlotte's slums across the city.

Right after the Council's meeting, criticism of the Mayor's decision began to resonate in the local papers, who strangely supported free enterprise in lieu of public housing. The main opposition came from real estate groups who accused Brookshire of offering no "substantiating evidence"[219] to his claim and that "no one can say whether Charlotte should or should not add to its public housing units."[220] In actuality, the Charlotte Board of Realtors did not want public housing because it was expecting to take advantage of white areas – adjacent to Brooklyn, where blacks were beginning to move into. Their presence would "change from white occupancy to "Negro" occupancy during the next two years" as whites would flee their city homes out to the suburbs or other white areas. This would then "add substantially to the number of standard housing units available for "Negroes,""[221] and generate more profit for real estate agents, as a result of having to build more homes for the fleeing white families.

By December 1962, the URA approved the phase two project. This change in their decision came after learning that Charlotte was going to consider public housing. Precisely, this came after the city of Charlotte had requested a market survey of low income housing needs to see if more public housing would have to be built. Eventually City Council approved public housing. But, it was designated only for the elderly. Very few displaced African Americans would benefit from public housing.

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[219] "The Question of Public Housing is Beclouded by Lack of Facts," *Charlotte News*, October 18, 1962.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

After succeeding in vacating the houses and purchasing the land, the Redevelopment Commission now faced the most difficult decision of what to do with the land, and how to sell it. Building had proven to be more difficult than tearing down. The commission faced an obstacle in attempting to convince investors to buy and build in the recently demolished Brooklyn. The YWCA was one such an example. It chose to build three miles away on Park Road.[222] The Red Cross chose to build in the suburbs. Decisions such as these forced the Redevelopment Commission to turn to outside investors claiming that "Land in the redevelopment project will be attractive to sophisticated out-of town buyers."[223] Frederick M. Babcock authored these words. He was a Washington Consultant invited by the Redevelopment Commission to assist in appraising Brooklyn's cleared land. In July 1963, CURC prepared an advertising brochure about Brooklyn's newly cleared land. The brochure was sent to over 2,000 prospective buyers. The brochure targeted large corporations, banks, real estate developers and other land development agencies that would be in touch with prospective buyers of commercial property.[224] On October 1963, Mayor Stanford Brookshire appointed 25 top community leaders to serve on a committee to promote the selling of the cleared Brooklyn parcels.

During the next two years, 1963 and 1964, opposition to the urban project gradually waned. This was because a good portion of Brooklyn had already been cleared. Life as it used to be had lost its meaning. By 1964, Charlotte was building an expressway that would go through the heart of Brooklyn. Therefore, those who were against the

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[222] Connah, "Council Worried by YWCA Decision to Build in Suburbs," *Charlotte Observer*, January 1, 1963.
[223] Bill Hughes, "Expert Says Slum Buyers Where You Find Them, *Charlotte News*, January 10, 1963.
[224] Bill Hughes, "Brochures Mean 'Get Set' on Sale of Brooklyn Land," *Charlotte News*, July 24, 1963.

project had realized that the battle had been lost as many families from the Brooklyn area were moving out on their own. On March 25, 1963, City Council approved the project's third phase. This area was bounded on the east by the Sugar Creek, on the north by Fourth Street, on the South by Independence Blvd, and in the west by McDowell Street (see fig. 2). This time the vote to redevelop was unanimous by all Council members, including Fred Alexander.[225] This serves as a good indication of how those who supported free enterprise had finally given their consent. By 1965, phase I had been completely cleared and consequently, all of its former residents had been forced to move out but, were not relocated. The city was in the middle of clearing phase II, and the process of forcing Brooklyn's residents' evacuation. The rest of Brooklyn's inhabitants were slated to move out during Phases, III, IV, and V which would begin in 1970.[226] Blacks had to move to Fairview homes, Brook Hill Village, the Cherry neighborhood, Double Oaks, Greenville, and Greer Town. These were not public housing, They were the only areas blacks were allowed to reside in because they were already inhabited by blacks Charlotteans.

Conclusion

Urban Renewal brought financial profit to the city of Charlotte by demolishing areas deemed as "blighted," When these areas were re-developed, the tax value on them increased, bringing more revenue to the city. Charlotte's City Council along with other groups, which were involved in the project, did not face any noticeable criticism from the local media. From the beginning of the urban renewal project, all the reports and articles published in the local papers fully supported the argument adopted by Charlotte city

[225] Bill Hughes, "Third Slum Clearing Project Okayed," *Charlotte News*, March 26, 1963.
[226] James K. Batten, "Mayor's Stroke Began Exodus," *Charlotte Observer*, April 11, 1965.

officials. The only voices that spoke against, or in criticism, of the project, came from a tiny number of African American leaders, such as Dr. Reginald Hawkins, Fred alexander, and Kelly Alexander. From Charlotte's white leaders, the only ones who spoke against the project came from some of the republican members of Charlotte City Council. This is because these individuals were opposed to working with the federal government, instead, they were in favor of having urban renewal sponsored by private enterprise. Other opposing voices came from some of the real estate agents who were attempting to save properties owned by whites in Brooklyn. Therefore, throughout the process of urban renewal, the voices of African Americans who were mostly impacted, were hardly heard.

CHAPTER THREE: BROOKLYN: THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS FORMER RESIDENTS.

From the late 19th century to the early 1970s, Brooklyn served as the pride for black people in Charlotte. Brooklyn could be distinguished from other black neighborhoods in and around Charlotte in many ways. Mainly, Brooklyn was self-reliant in all life aspects. Throughout the harsh years of Jim Crow, when blacks were forbidden from accessing many of the facilities the city of Charlotte provided for its white inhabitants, Brooklyn – through the efforts of its people, grew to become self-sufficient. African Americans in Brooklyn did not need to leave the neighborhood to support themselves. This chapter will relay some of the stories of its former residents, and will illustrate how despite the many difficulties, its residents strived to bring about, and maintain a normal living for their families. Finally, this chapter will illustrate the hardships the people of Brooklyn had to undergo when searching for new housing after urban renewal destroyed Brooklyn.

Contrary to what the media reported about Brooklyn as crime and disease ridden, its former residents stated otherwise. Olaf Abraham who was born at Charlotte's Good Samaritan Hospital, Charlotte's solitary African American hospital during the Jim Crow era and twentieth century, grew up in a shotgun house located at 1100 East Hill Street. Abraham remembers Brooklyn as a safe and "a close knit Community."[227] Mr. Abraham attended Myers Street Elementary, Morgan Middle School in the Cherry neighborhood,

[227] Olaf Abraham, interview.

and Second Ward High School in Brooklyn. In the early 1950s, Mr. Abraham and his family moved out of Brooklyn to the Southside community in Charlotte. He returned to Brooklyn to finish school at Second Ward High, and graduated in 1957. During his high school years, Abraham worked at Queen City Pharmacy on Second Street. After graduating high school, Mr. Abraham joined the military. He heard about urban renewal and that the Brooklyn was being torn down from friends and family. In his interview with Dawn Funk, a graduate student of public history at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Mr. Abraham described life in Brooklyn as being safe. "People looked out for each other, and worked together. They played together, they went to church together …this is because they were confined to one area. Now, as they have been spread out, people lost contact of each other."[228]

Kelly Alexander Jr., who was born, and raised in Brooklyn, expressed how Brooklyn was "a community in the real sense. It had rich, middle class people; it had businesses, schools, churches. It was not a ghetto."[229] Margaret Alexander, Kelly's mother asserted that despite the negative reports by the newspapers, Brooklyn was safe, and people respected each other. She also remarked how life in Brooklyn was convenient because "everybody knew everybody else. And, you were not afraid to walk around. Everything was close-by." The churches, local businesses, and downtown Charlotte were all within walking distance. Moreover, Margaret Alexander described the house she lived in from 1947 to 1962 as being an eight room house with large hallways, and a porch that stretched across the whole front. Ms. Alexander's house was not the only large house

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[228] Olaf Abraham, interview.

[229] Kelly Alexander Jr, interview by Nicole Glinski, Brooklyn Oral History Project, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, March 3, 2007, http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/alexanderk.htm

in Brooklyn, other houses, albeit few in number, were of similar size. Kelly's father had a 23 room house. Rose L. Love, a former schoolteacher who was born near the turn of the 20th century, and grew up in Brooklyn, provided a similar narrative on how life was in Brooklyn. In her book, *Plum Thickets & Field Plums*, Love described the people of Brooklyn as differing greatly in their training.[230] "Ministers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, railroad men, teachers, artisans, servants and common laborers all lived in the one community of Brooklyn."[231]

Many of the interviewees for the Brooklyn Oral History Project corroborated Ms. Alexander's description of how Brooklyn was safe and fit for living. James Black – an accomplished and professional golfer, was born in Brooklyn in 1942, and lived in the community until 1952. He was part of an extended family who continued to live in Brooklyn. Black had similar remarks. He even went further in describing Brooklyn to have been one of the cleanest communities, because his family, like all other families, used to sweep, and water down the front and back of their house.[232]

Additionally, people in Brooklyn relied on each other, and trusted each other. Perhaps, the racial segregationist policies during the first part of the 20th century, which were detrimental to blacks in general throughout the South, had conversely served in strengthening the sense of community in Brooklyn. For many generations, blacks were sequestered into one geographical area. This type of experience strengthened the desire

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[230] "Rose L. Love Papers," Charlotte Mecklenburg Library: the Charlotte – Mecklenburg Story, August, 15, 2014, http//www.cmstory.org/people/papersLove.pdf
[231] Ibid.
[232] James Black, interviewed by Jennifer Payne, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, March 26, 2007, http//www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/submissions/jamesblack/blackj_trans.htm

for Brooklyn's residents to rely on each other. Mr. Black, for instance, spoke about the acre and a half community garden, Brooklyn residents owned. "In harvest time, the garden would feed the entire community," Black recalled. In conjunction with a community garden for all of Brooklyn's residents, almost everyone had a garden behind their house or a potato and greens patches over the hills, which provided much of the food for the summer.[233] Housewives also helped each other as they canned fruits, and vegetables in jars to be used when the planting and harvesting season was over.[234]

In many instances, residents of Brooklyn bartered their services. In lieu of money clients who received medical treatments from the local doctors provided services or goods. Diane Wyche, a former resident of Brooklyn, and the daughter of Dr. J. Wyche, a physician who had his family practice at Dr. Thomas Watkins medical building –which was located on Brevard Street offered more stories on how patients bartered with her father. On one occasion, Dr. Wyche performed surgery on a resident from Brooklyn, the person did not have money to pay for the surgery. So, instead, he brought vegetables to the Wyche family from his garden for the next five years.[235]

Bartering, and growing food in a community garden served as examples of how Brooklyn residents searched for alternatives as they coped with the daily challenges of segregation. Moreover, community members were tolerant and supportive of each other. As Margaret Alexander narrates, there were many activities centered on raising funds for the poor, and in renovating private homes and community buildings – such as churches and libraries.

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[233] Rose L love, p. 41.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Diane Wyche interview.

When speaking of community support, churches in Brooklyn played a leading role in providing aid to community residents. Out of the many churches that existed in Brooklyn, the House of Prayer was perhaps an important assistance center for help. Margaret Alexander remarked how the House of Prayers offered different types of services seven days a week.[236] According to Mr. Black, The House of Prayer had many activities for all ages. It provided such summer programs as football and swimming. The House of Prayer also served as a business center. It was like a strip mall with beauty salons and restaurants providing job opportunities for Brooklyn residents. According to Mr. Black, "this church was the only one that had stuff like that. This made it much easier for the community.[237]" Students who participated in musical activities at the House of Prayer did not have to borrow musical instruments as they were hand made by members of the church. Mr. Black noted that the House of Prayer was the only church amongst black churches in Charlotte that had its own musical instruments. To Arthur Williams, who spent considerable amounts of time in Brooklyn, the House of Prayer was "nothing but Joy."[238]

The House of Prayer owes its existence to Bishop C.M. Grace, known to his followers as Sweet Daddy Grace. He was born in the Cape Verde Islands, Portugal in 1884. He came to America in 1903, and settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts. To his followers he was a spiritual leader, counselor, and father, and was affectionately called, "Daddy." Later in 1919, he built the first House of Prayer by hand in West Wareham,

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[236] Margaret Alexander interview.
[237] James Black, interviewed by Jennifer Payne, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, March 26, 2007, http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/submissions/jamesblack/blackj_trans.htm
[238] Arthur Williams interview.

Massachusetts. Sweet Daddy Grace was an effective evangelist who preached revival in a Pentecostal tradition that included brass "shout bands" and public baptisms. Diane Wyche, who grew up in Brooklyn, and the daughter of Dr. Wyche, described Bishop Grace as a spiritual father to the community, he helped Brooklyn's residents by lending them money to pay for their cars, houses, and small projects. People in the community appreciated this financial help because they could not easily obtain loans from outside Brooklyn.[239] Arthur Williams described Bishop Grace as "a man who took the lowest of the black and made them into somebody. He gave them voice, and he made them show themselves to be the best."[240]

The House of Prayer used to hold a yearly convocation parade every September. Arthur Williams recalled how residents of the community used to "dress up in all of their best and everything would be uniformed, it was like regalia or something that they just got up there and said to the world look at us, we are somebody."[241] During the parade, the city of Charlotte would stop traffic in the streets where the parade was held. The buses and all street cars would have had to take a different route because Daddy Grace "wanted to show his people."[242] And, "he gave black people, really something to latch on."[243] Another yearly event held at Brooklyn, not related to the church, however, was called Queen City Classic, which was a football game between Second Ward High School's Tigers and West Charlotte High School's Lions. It was held

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[239] Diane Grace, interviewed by Tosha McLean Pearson, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, April 28, 2007, http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/wyche.htm.
[240] Arthur Williams, interviewed by Dawn Funk, Brooklyn Oral History Project, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, April 28, 2007, http://www.history.uncc.edu/publichistory/pages/oralhist/brooklyn/williams.htm.
[241] Arthur Williams Interview.
[242] Arthur William Interview.
[243] Ibid.

at Memorial Stadium in the fall. In this event, people dressed up with "the school colors," and went to the game.[244]

While the House of Prayer was of Brooklyn's most prominent church. it was, by far, not the only one. There were over twenty churches in Brooklyn representing most denominations and size from the large church to small storefront. Ms. Love suggested the reason behind this dense concentration in a confined space was the "markedly religious" traditions blacks maintained from slavery to present, and to the spiritual and secular support churches provided to their attendants especially during the difficult years of Jim Crow, [245] This was when blacks were barred from any public assistance outside their community. Despite their utter destitution – when compared economically to whites in Charlotte, Brooklyn residents devised ingenious methods in erecting new church buildings, or in financially supporting existing ones. Women, no doubt, took the lead in raising the needed funds. For example, as Ms. Love recalled in her memoir, women in Brooklyn used their wash- pots to fry fish, and sell to people in the community. Money raised helped cover church expenses. On other occasions, women from the neighborhood, made ice cream, and sold it at church entertainments.[246]

Women were, also, self-reliant in supporting their families. Many of them had their own businesses. Mr. Black's mother, for instance, was a cook, and seamstress designer, where she made clothes for other members in the community. Many of the women helped support their families by canning fruits grown in their own gardens, and selling them on Second Street, or by peddling in Brooklyn's alleys. Additionally, because

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[244] Thomas Tillman Interview, Interviewer: Kieran W. Taylor, May 22, 2008, Charlotte, North Carolina.
[245] Love, p. 151.
[246] Ibid., p. 152.

of Brooklyn's close proximity to Charlotte's white neighborhoods, many of the women in Brooklyn took jobs in white Myer's Park, for example. Where they cooked, cleaned, and looked after white children.[247]

Women held other activities aimed at supporting, and enhancing African American lives outside Brooklyn community. Margaret Alexander, for example, volunteered as the advisor for the Junior Youth Council (JYC), under the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[248] This program, built around the major objectives of the NAACP, provided for national periodic youth activities that were supported through monthly youth programs addressing local needs. Other programs, Margaret Alexander recalled, were called punch hours, where money was raised to help send kids on trips to Raleigh to meet speakers at statewide NAACP events. On some occasions, kids were sent on a trip to Washington, D.C. for the national NAACP convention. Some of the kids who made it to Washington, D.C., got a chance to meet important personalities such as Robert Kennedy. Black children, also, assisted by selling candy to raise funds for trip fares. It is important here to note that the presence of an important political figure such as Kelly Alexander, who in 1948, became president of NACCP in North Carolina, had made it possible for such programs to materialize, and gave Brooklyn more privileges other black communities did not have.[249] There were also, social clubs for women, such as the Links and the Moles. The latter was a social party club, where a group of women got together once a month, to have dinner, and entertain.

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[247] Thomas Tillman Interview, Interviewed by Kieran W. Taylor, The Southern Oral History Program at the Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Libarary, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, May 22, 2008, http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cgi-bin/showfile.exe?CISOROOT=/sohp&CISOPTR=5716&filename=

[248] Margaret Alexander interview. Brooklyn Oral History Project.

[249] Ibid.

The Links, on the other hand, was more of a civic organization, where they raised money in support of educational art programs, and to help children in school. Members who hailed from well to do families, had their own meetings and activities. Diana Wyche and her sister, for example, participated in cotillions, and were members of Charlotte's Jack and Jill chapter, where they had the opportunity to travel to other cities in the U.S to meet members from the national Jack and Jill chapter.[250]

All in all, Brooklyn was a major attraction for African Americans who lived there and for those who lived elsewhere in the city of Charlotte. Moreover, blacks who were traveling from outside Charlotte, could only go to Brooklyn to eat, shop, and entertain as most other facilities in Charlotte were reserved for whites only. Amongst the most popular spots in Brooklyn was Second Street. It was the home of the Lincoln Theater and the YMCA. It was also the busiest black business block in the city of Charlotte. It had a medical compound with offices and pharmacies. There were several cafes including Ames Ingram; who later opened up "El Chiccodown" on Brevard. The Green Willow Garden, which was a nightlife place, was also located on Second Street. The Green Willow Garden had bands, and had a dance floor platform set up with a piccolo in the corner. According to Arthur Williams, when the nightclub hosted a musical group or band the piccolo was covered up, and the band took the stage. "There was so many people down through there it used to be like Times Square in New York", Mr. Williams recalled.[251] Second Street was the business hub for all of Charlotte's African American population. Former resident Calvin Davis likened Second Street to Fifth Avenue, New York, on Easter Sunday morning, where people would stroll down Second Street on

[250] Diane Wyche interview.
[251] Arthur Williams Interview.

Sunday morning to show off, "to be seen and to see."[252] "Second Street was the place to go. That's where business deals were made … It was a fascinating place back in those days, very fascinating."

Life in Brooklyn, on the other hand, had its difficulties. Due to the city's neglect in repairing the streets and the overall infrastructure, there were visible signs of dilapidation. Residents had to be careful crossing some of its decayed roads and alleys. Arthur Williams described the bridge that crossed over the Sugar Creek, which connected Brooklyn to Cherry as old. It would swing when people walked on it. When it rained, water covered the bridge. One day, the bridge collapsed while people were on it. As a result, nine African Americans from Brooklyn and the surrounding communities drowned. Without traversing the bridge, people from Brooklyn had to walk a long distance to reach Cherry. Rose L. Love described walking through the narrow and unpaved alleys as cumbersome, and sometimes risky, during the rainy days. As rain poured, the narrow and unpaved alleys turned to mud and clay. Pedestrians' shoes stuck in the mud, and traversing the mud proved to be a challenge in staying upright without falling on their backs.[253] When Independence Boulevard was built through Brooklyn, it cut through the heart of the neighborhood, and split it into two sides (See Fig. 4). Daily activities for residents became more difficult as they risked being hit by a car when they tried to cross Independence Boulevard. One tragic incident occurred when a relative of Ms. Alexander was hit by a car, and died as a result. So, while Independence Boulevard

[252] Calvin interview.
[253] Rose L love, p. 45.

may have sped whites from place to place, the highway, ironically, reduced black communication with each other like before.[254]

Urban renewal caused African Americans in Brooklyn and other areas in Charlotte to lose their homes. This was an agonizing experience on its own, however, the agony of urban renewal did not stop there as African Americans evicted from their neighborhoods had to look for other affordable places. Most housing areas in Charlotte were not a welcoming place for blacks. Whites were not happy to see African Americans moving into their neighborhoods. As was mentioned in Chapter two, blacks faced problems moving freely into other areas in Charlotte. In general, when blacks moved into a non-black Charlotte neighborhood, whites first attempted to discourage blacks. Several scare tactics were used. In one instance, as described by Priscilla Rankin, a longtime resident of Charlotte, recalled that when a black family moved to an apartment complex near Kilborne Street, whites from the neighboring houses burned a cross in front of the black couples' apartment unit.[255]

White anti-black violence not only targeted African Americans who dared to move into "white only" neighborhoods, real estate agents who sold former white owned houses to blacks were also targeted. In 1968, real estate agent Evelyn Sullivan filed a police report against Kenneth Harding, a former white resident of the white Hidden Valley neighborhood of.[256] In the report, Ms. Sullivan complained that Mr. Harding had been sending her threatening letters for selling a house to a black family in Hidden Valley

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[254] Margaret Alexander Interview.

[255] "Relocation Won't Solve the Problmes," The Charlotte Observer, October 29, 1965, Fredrick D Alexander Papers, 1908, 1931-1998, Mss 91 box 55, folder 1, "Clippings," University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

[256] "Blockbusting in Civil Rights Era Charlotte." Charlotte Mayoral Collections. Accessed May 18, 2014. http://charlottemayoralcollections.wordpress.com/.

neighborhood. In one Harding's letters to Sullivan, he expressed his dismay at blacks moving into Hidden Valley, and chastised the real estate agent for "stooping so low," and committing "injustice" against his "nice neighborhood."[257] Mr. Harding ended his letter with a clear warning stating that "if I were the family that moves into this house, I would put steel bars on all the windows."[258] Many years later, Hidden Valley would turn into a completely black neighborhood as most whites did not want to live in racially mixed neighborhoods.[259]

On November 8, 1965, the *Charlotte Observer* published an article entitled "Housing Letter Well Distributed."[260] The article addressed a letter which was virally circulated in the Wesley Heights and Seversville neighborhoods. This letter was sent to two tenants residing on Westbrook Drive by Brookshire Reality and Management Company requesting the tenants to evacuate the duplex because it had been rented to African American families. The letter was written on August 25, 1965. On September 20th, a resident who lived nearby sent the company a duplicate of the letter. On the bottom of the letter, the person sending the letter, wrote the following: "This is an all-white neighborhood and we want to keep it that way. We have 1,000 copies of this letter ready to distribute the day you put Negroes in the duplex."[261] Right afterwards, the name and address in the letter were blanked out, and the letter was distributed, by an unknown person, to over 1000 residents. According to the article in the *Charlotte Observer*, days

[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] "Housing Letter Well Distributed," The Charlotte Observer, November, 6, 1965.
[261] Ibid.

after the Black families had moved in, at least two real estate agents were seen in the area attempting to buy white properties telling white owners; "Negroes are moving in."[262]

The story closely matches a tactic practiced by real estate agents, known as "blockbusting," where unscrupulous real estate agents first, would introduce African American home owners into an all-white neighborhood in order to spark rapid white flight.[263] Real estate agents would then start visiting houses, and forewarn the white residents that the price of their houses are going to rapidly depreciate. The objective here was to buy their houses at a significantly discounted price. The more whites flee their homes, the lower the price of homes would reach. Real estate agents would then turn around, and sell these houses to African Americans at higher rates. According to Thomas Tillman, a former Brooklyn resident tried to purchase a home in the Cherry neighborhood, the realtors in response "would jack up the price. Whereas a white friend of Mr. Tillman was offered a lower price for the same type of home. [264] Real estate agents, in this case were the only winners as they stood to profit from the difference between what African Americans and white urbanites paid for housing.[265]

James Ross, an African American resident of Charlotte, testified to blockbusting's negative impact in Charlotte, North Carolina. According to Ross, block-busting was not an issue in Charlotte until urban renewal. Areas such as Smallwood, Seversville, Clanton Park, and Hidden Valley, used to be inhabited entirely by whites. A few years after the

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[262] Ibid.
[263] Sugrue, 194.
[264] Thomas Tillman, Interview.

[265] Amanda Irene Seligman, "Apologies to Dracula, Werewolf, Frankenstein'': White Homeowners and Blockbusters in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 94, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, on behalf of the Illinois State Historical Society Spring, 2001), 70-95.

demolition of Brooklyn, however, all these aforementioned areas became populated mostly by blacks.[266]

During the 1960s, blockbusting was practiced by many unscrupulous real estate agents in cities throughout the United States. In Detroit, for instance, real estate agents would pay a black woman to walk her son in an all-white neighborhood or list a displayed house for sale to a black family to create suspicion of black "take-over."[267] Blockbusters would then wait for a day, and proceed to flood the neighborhood with flyers and phone calls, informing them blacks are about to take over.[268]

Residents of neighborhoods adjacent to Brooklyn were gradually becoming aware of realtors' blockbusting attempts. A constant flow of realtors were seen walking through the streets of these neighborhoods, and stressing fear that the area is changing. In 1965 and 1966, the *Charlotte Observer* published more than one report addressing residents' concerns and complaints about realtor's visits to their homes urging them to sell their houses. "They tell us our property is declining all the time," stated Mrs. C. J Dellinger of 422 Woodvale Place to local reporter Paul Jablow.[269] The report in the paper reported similar incidents occurring to other residents of the same neighborhood. Mrs. Collins, another resident in Wesley Heights, reported that realtors Nathen Wegodosky and John Kenton told her that she is "going to have to sell because colored people are taking over."[270]

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[266] "Capturing memories of uptown's Brooklyn," from the Charlotte cultural History Project, held on January, 30, 2013. http://www.tueforumclt.org/newspages/07Q1NewsPages/Ross1.htm
[267] Sugrue, 195.
[268] Ibid.
[269] "Residents Say They Won't Move," by Paul Jablow, The Charlotte Observer, January 8, 1966.
[270] Ibid.

Charlotte City Council – headed by Mayor Stanford Brookshire, however, was not quick to respond, and address the issue of blockbusting – excluding council members; Fred Alexander, Milton Short, and James B. Whittington, who were vocal against blockbusting. In the early months of 1965, Councilmen Alexander, and Whittington urged City Council members to unite, and "throw its weight" against blockbusting.[271] Moreover, the councilmen urged City Council to hold a meeting between city officials and the Charlotte Board of Realtors, and to have council members meet with residents of areas targeted by blockbusters to "inform them of their rights, and suggest ways to combat blockbusting."[272] But, not until an article written in the *Charlotte Observer* criticizing the council and Mayor Brookshire for lack of involvement did the Council begin to act upon the issue. The editorial which was published on November 3, 1965, asked why City Council and Mayor Brookshire refused to publically go on record against blockbusting, and why the calls of Councilman Alexander, Whittington, and Short went unheeded by the council.[273] The editorial suggested to learn from other cities, such as New York City, Detroit, and Chicago, who had been afflicted by blockbusting. Finally, the report called on white owners not to panic on hearing the first purchase by a black family so, the chances of sustaining home values would be greatly improved.[274] Soon after the editorial in the paper, the Charlotte Board of Realtors through its president T. R. Lawing, asked the Charlotte City Council to adopt an ordinance against blockbusting.

In 1966, a Charlotte realtor David Kinney was charged with violating Charlotte's year-old anti – blockbusting ordinance. The *Charlotte Observer* reported that Realtor

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[271] "City Council Urged," The Charlotte Observer, January, 15, 1965.
[272] Ibid.
[273] "Elected Officials Can Help Turn Back the Blockbuster," the Charlotte Observer, November, 3, 1966.
[274] Ibid.

David Kinney approached a white homeowner, Mrs. Howard Bowen on November, 5th, and attempted to buy her property. The warrant charged that Kinney told Mrs. Bowen "colored tenants were moving into the neighborhood and property values would drop."[275] Kinney urged Mrs. Bowen to sell her home while she could to get a reasonable price. A few months after the adoption of the ordinance against blockbusting was approved, realtor David Kinney became the first man to be convicted of blockbusting. On January 9, 1967, Mr. Kinney was found guilty by judge Harold M. Edwards. The new ordinance, adopted in 1966, prohibited a real estate agent from "using scare tactics to acquire property or to encourage people to sell their property."[276] Mrs. Bowen testified to the court that Mr. Kinney came to her house on the night of November 5, 1966, and asked if he could help in selling her house. According to Mrs. Bowen, Mr. Kinney said that black people were moving into the neighborhood, and "it was lowering the value, and that it would be wiser to sell."[277] Though, the ordinance adopted by the city of Charlotte helped curb some of the practices, and made the public aware of blockbusting, whites continued to flee from neighborhoods blacks had just moved.

In 1968, in a report prepared for Councilman and pro-tem Mayor Fred Alexander by Surv-Anaylsis of Charlotte titled: "Reason for 1960-68 Tract Changes in Non-White Population."[278] The report, consisted of two parts. First, it analyzed the tracts in the city of Charlotte documenting changes in the city's racial composition. For example, tracts

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[275] "Attempted blockbusting charged to N.C. realtor," The Afro American, Dec, 17, 1966, http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19661217&id=ZdMmAAAAIBAJ&sjid=jgIGAAAAIBAJ&pg=4360,5194313.

[276] "Blockbusting Law Upheld," by Marion Ellis, the *Charlotte Observer*, January, 18, 1967.

[277] Ibid.

[278] "Reason for 1960-68 Tract Changes in Non-White Population," Report by W. E. Mcintyre, Surv-analysis of Charlotte, 1968, Fredrick D. alexander Papers, 1908, 1931-1998, Mss 91 box 1, folder 15, City Council, Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina.

five, seven, eight, and nine – which used to be populated heavily by whites, increased from 29.0 to 75 percent; 2.1 to 82.0 percent, 1.5 to 84.0 percent; and 0.07 percent to 43 percent respectively. These four tracts were inhabited by low income whites, where rents were low. Based on the report, these areas were subjected to "block busting." Note here that tracts south and south-east of Brooklyn did not experience any noticeable shifts. These areas –inhabited by the upper class community of Charlotte -are the Myers Park, Dilworth, and Eastover neighborhoods.

Also in this category were tracts 38 and 52, whose non-white populations increased from 4.7 to 30.0 percent and 25.5 percent to 52.1 per cent respectively. Tracts 41 and 54 had increases of 1.1 percent to 48 per cent and 5.0 to 33.0 per cent respectively. Tract 41 was a low income white rental area which had a spillover of 87.0 per cent blacks in 1960.

The second part of the report was an estimation of these trends for the next five years (1968 - 1973). Based on the statistical analysis from 1960 – 1968, the report suggested that the same trends appeared to continue unchanged (See Fig. 7). Accordingly, the report predicted tracts 7, 8, and 9 to be 100% non-white. This was due to the relative low rents which would attract many low income families from Brooklyn. Tracts 36, 41, and 52 would increase to 60.0, 70.0, and 90.0 percent respectively. The report also predicted tracts 11, 13, and 14 which were located farther east and north-east of Brooklyn, and which had less than 5 percent non-white in 1968 to become 40 percent non-white by 1973. On the other hand, tracts 24, 25, 34, and 35, where the affluent white neighborhoods of Eastover and Dilworth existed – and still exist in the same condition to this day, not to have any major shift in population.

With the exception of tracts 11 and 13, which remained white in the majority, by 1980, all the tracts predicted in the report turned to be true (See Fig. 8). By the 1980s and afterwards, Charlotte's racial distribution had changed a great deal, it was no longer integrated. Instead, areas of non-whites and low income families were now geographically separated from white and upper-income areas.

Conclusion

Despite the reports in the media about Brooklyn being classified as "blighted," when listening to the voices of Brooklyn's former residents, one forms a different opinion. Though, Brooklyn was segregated, with minimum public facilities, its residents - when compared to other black neighborhoods in and around Charlotte, were able lead a healthy life. African Americans, most of Charlotte and its surroundings lived on the outskirts of white neighborhoods, and their jobs consisted mainly of cleaning, and maintaining whites' homes and businesses. Brooklyn, was a different case, as many of its residents held professional jobs such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists. Its residents enjoyed living in a safe community with extended family members. People walked throughout the community in relative safety, without having to worry about being assaulted as all members of the Brooklyn respected the good values that were preached in churches, and enforced by family members and schools. People helped each other on the economical and emotional sides. All of these community advantages seized to exist when Brooklyn along with its people were forcibly removed. Their lives after urban removal would never be the same, as they became scattered throughout Charlotte.

Final Conclusion

By 1980, all of Brooklyn had been removed, and new governmental buildings erected in its place. The people of Brooklyn, as has been shown in this chapter, were forced to move out of the homes they lived in for many generations. While Brooklyn was not in the best of shape during the initial stages of urban renewal in Charlotte, it undeniably had a vibrant close-knit community. Blacks from all walks of life and varied backgrounds were able to lead a peaceful existence. Most importantly, residents of Brooklyn relied upon themselves in maintaining their daily needs. All of these community advantages were lost forever. Extended families which used to live in very close proximity of each other had become geographically divided from each other. Merchants and entrepreneurs who once prospered along Second Street found it difficult to start a new business elsewhere in Charlotte. All in all, former residents of Brooklyn suffered in all life aspects as a result of their forced dispersal from Brooklyn. While it is possible to measure the loss from an economic prospective, the emotional loss is incalculable. The pain of losing one's place of birth, school and church friends can never vanish from one's memory, and would linger in the minds and hearts of Brooklyn's former residents forever.

While urban renewal proved to be detrimental to the lives of African Americans, it must be noted that it was not unique in terms of its negative results. As have been seen in this paper, inequality in housing was administered against African Americans through other policies which began long before urban renewal, such as segregation and restrictive covenants. The experience African Americans encountered through urban renewal, in this case, could be considered as a continuation to other types of injustices administered

against African Americans vis-a-vis housing. What is unique here is that blacks were unfairly dealt with despite the Civil Rights successes introduced to end inequality.

One can perhaps attribute the dilemma of urban renewal into three factors; racism, greed, and the inability of African Americans to freely voice their concerns. Because of racism, African Americans struggled to find a new home to live. Throughout the first part of the 20th century, African Americans were forcibly sequestered in separate and secluded areas. In the second half of the 20th century – and as a result of urban renewal, African Americans struggled to find a new home as whites, either did not welcome them in their neighborhoods, or left the newly racially mixed neighborhoods. As a result, for the most part, areas where blacks moved in had transitioned to mostly African Americans. As for greed, unscrupulous real estate agents took advantage of African American home owners by raising home prices through the use of blockbusting. In other cases, African Americans homes and residences were appropriated for other city or state usage, such as the building of highways. For the city of Charlotte – as has been illustrated in this paper, the building of Independence Blvd in the 1940s was one example of this process. Finally, the absence of African American voices throughout most of the 20th century allowed those who perpetrated injustices in housing against blacks to go unnoticed or without questioning and accountability. In the end, while overt racist practices in housing against African Americans ended officially in the early 1960s, urban renewal served as a cover up for covert racial practices to continue throughout the second part of the 20th century.

listening to the testimonies of former Brooklyn residents, exploring the debate over urban renewal in the local papers, and considering the historical prospective of housing policies in Charlotte, it is not difficult to see how African Americans, whether

rich or poor, were treated in an unjust manner. After all, W.E.B Du Bois' forewarning words in 1903, that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, would unescapably strike resonance in the city of Charlotte.

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APPENDIX: FIGURES

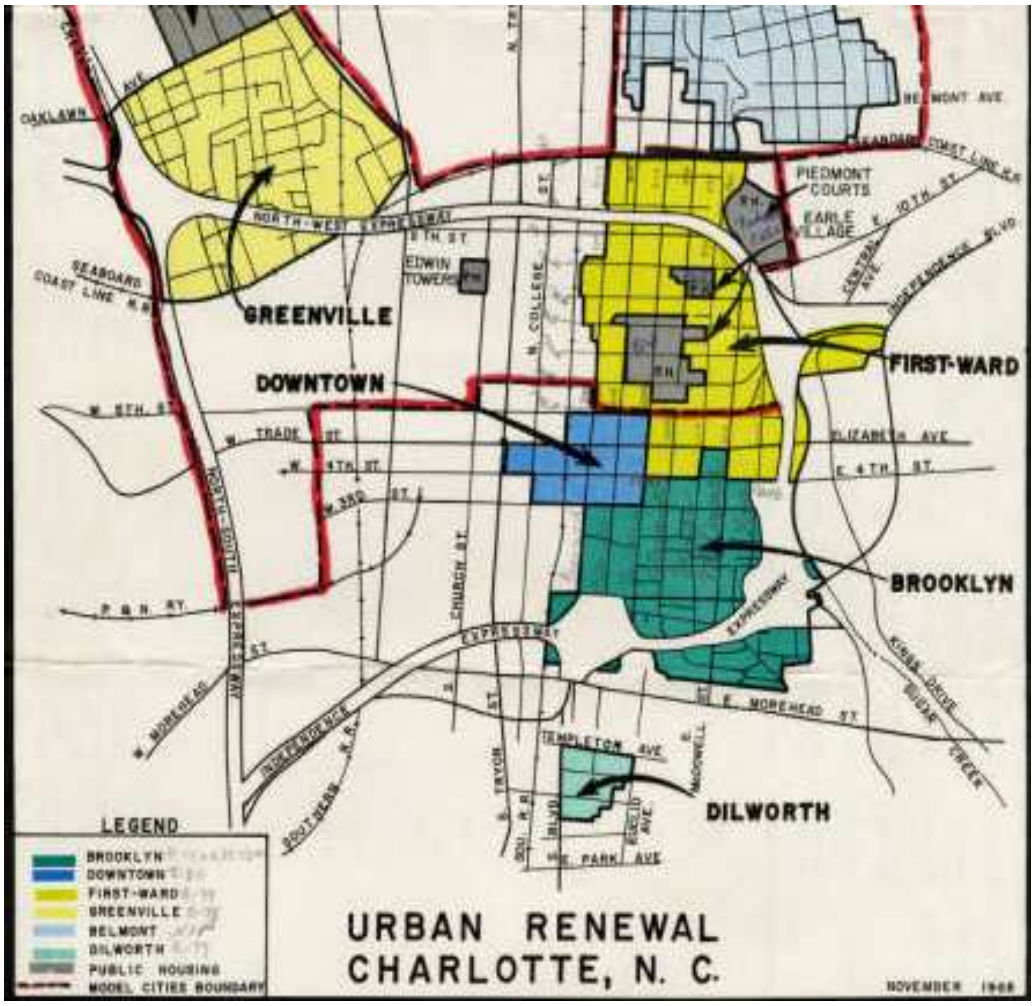

Figure 1: Areas slated for redevelopment in downtown Charlotte. Brooklyn is highlighted in green.[279]

[279] Source: "Urban Renwal for Charlotte: A Report, a Report by the Urban Renewal Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force." 28 June, 1966. Local Documents, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Atkins Library, Local Documents, Third Floor.

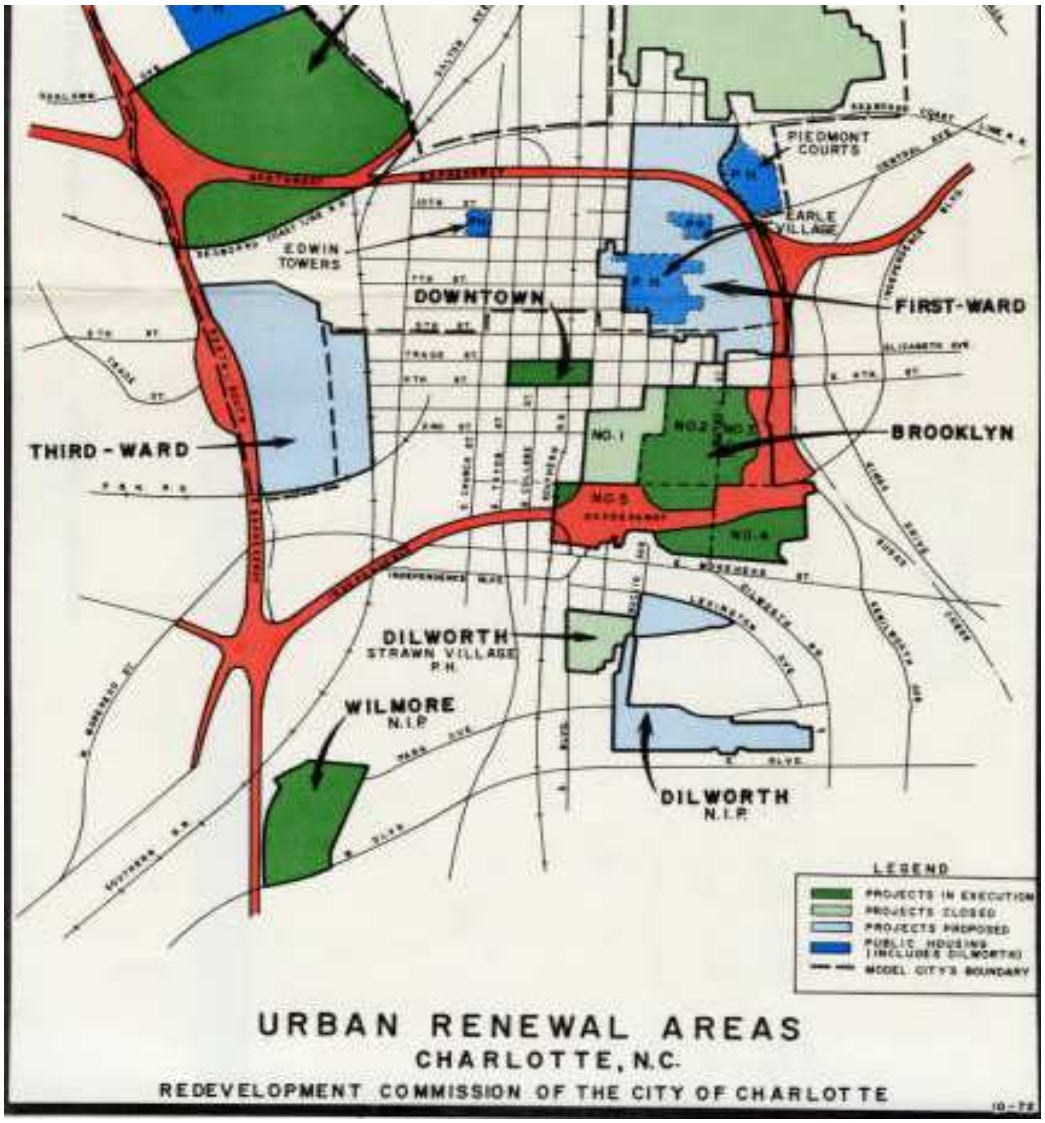

Figure 2: Independence Blvd. cutting through Brooklyn[280]

[280] Source: Urban Renewal for Charlotte: A Report, a Report by the Urban Renewal Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force." 28 June, 1966. Local Documents, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Atkins Library, Local Documents, Third Floor

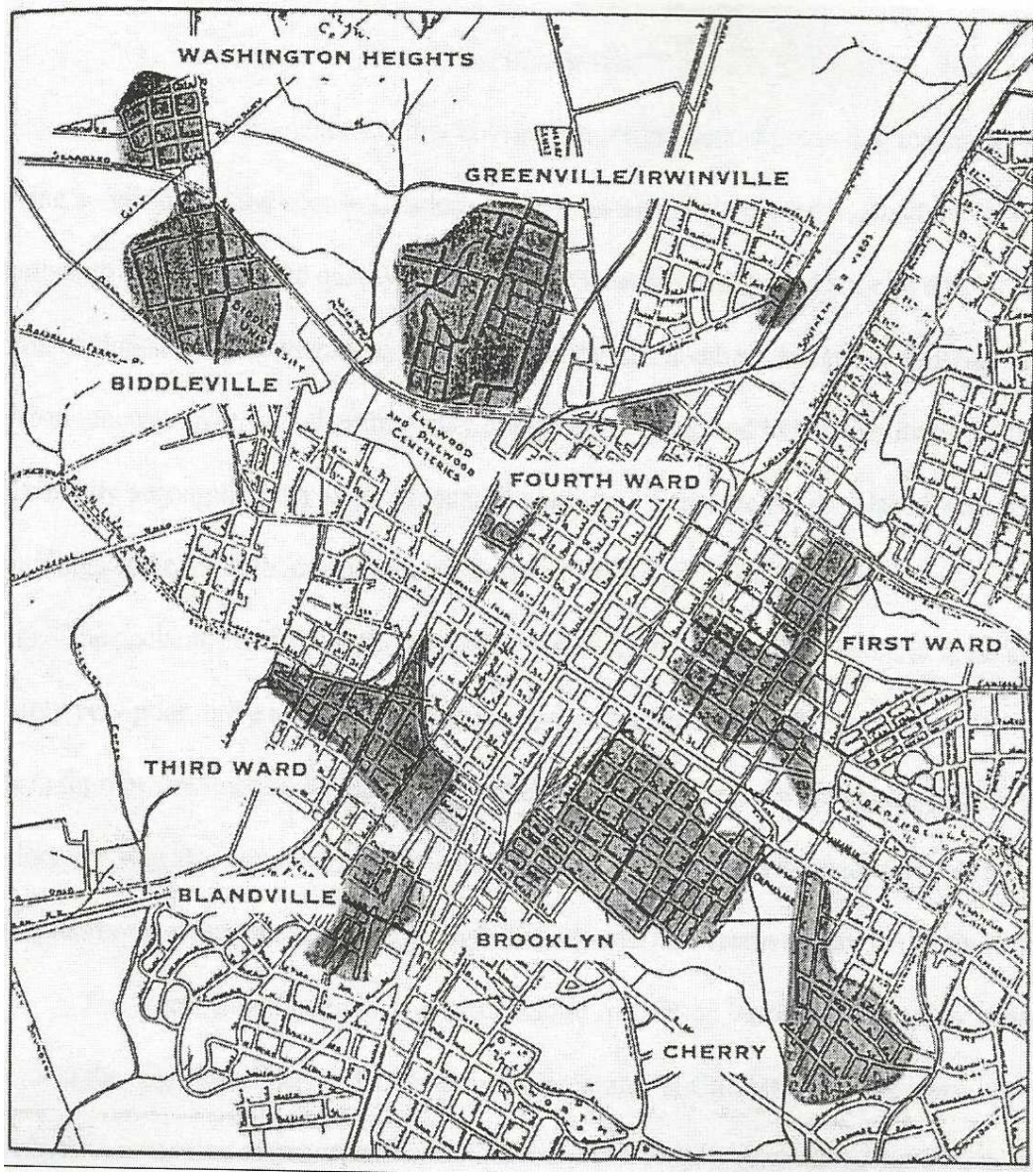

Figure 3: African American Areas in Charlotte, in 1917.[281]

[281] Source: Hanchet, 117.

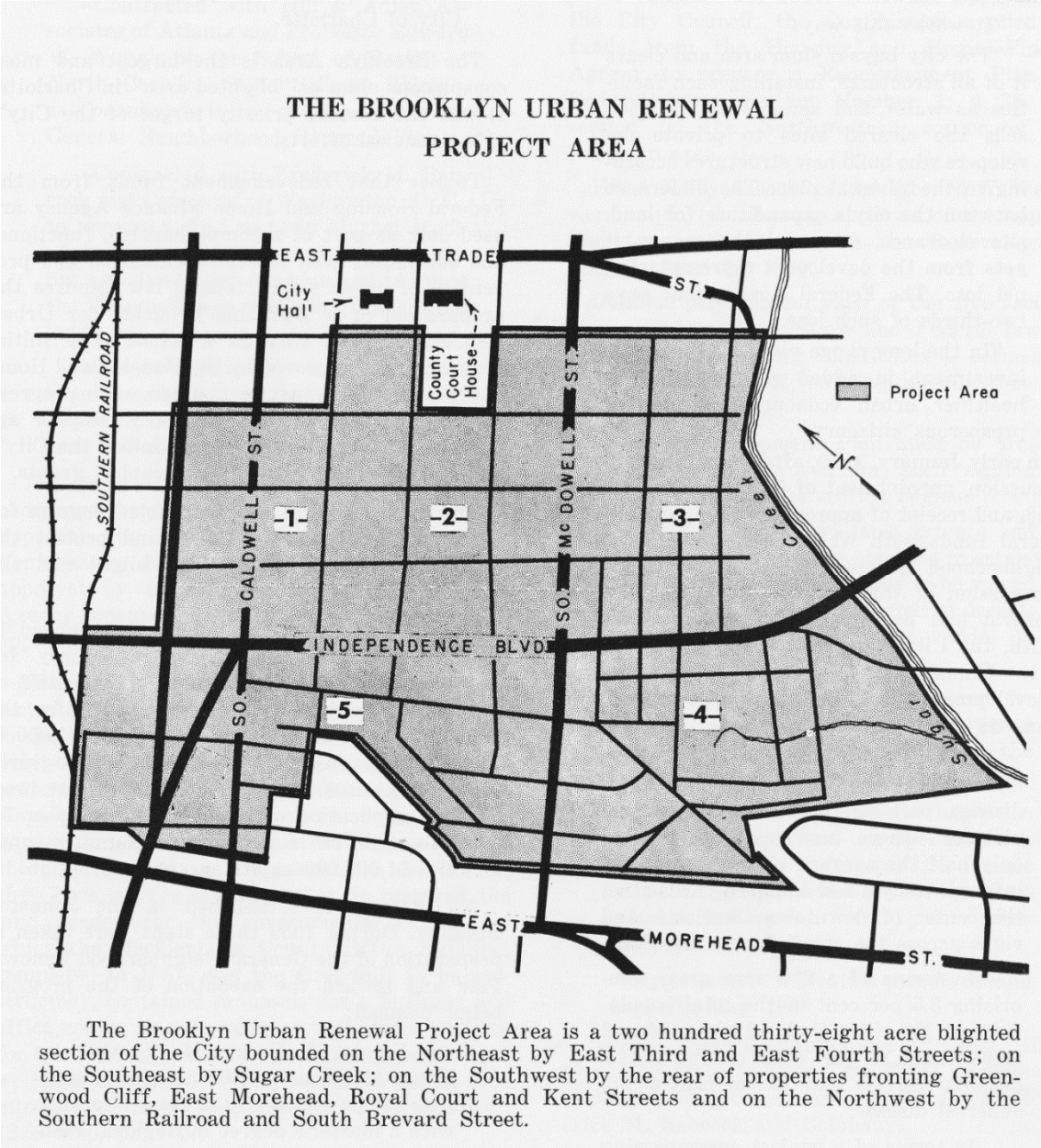

Figure 4: Brooklyn Areas with five phases of the redevelopment project defined[282]

[282] Source: Urban Renewal for Charlotte: A Report, a Report by the Urban Renewal Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Inter-Governmental Task Force." 28 June, 1966. Local Documents, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Atkins Library, Local Documents, Third Floor

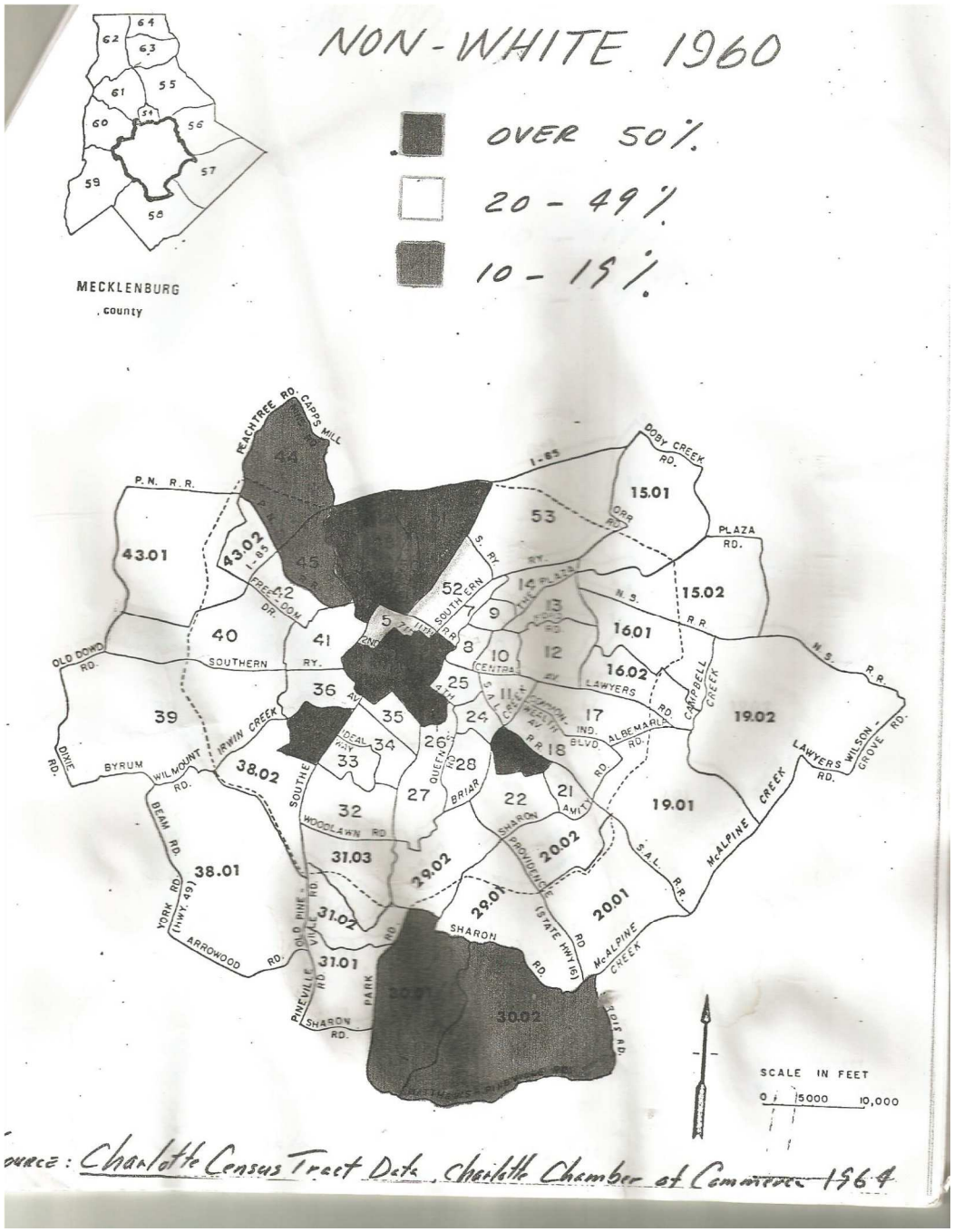

Figure 5: Charlotte Census Tract Data in 1960.[283]

[283] Source: "Reason for 1960-68 Tract Changes in Non-White Population," Report by W. E. Mcintyre, Surv-analysis of Charlotte, 1968, Fredrick D. alexander Papers, 1908, 1931-1998, Mss 91 box 1, folder 15, City Council, Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina.

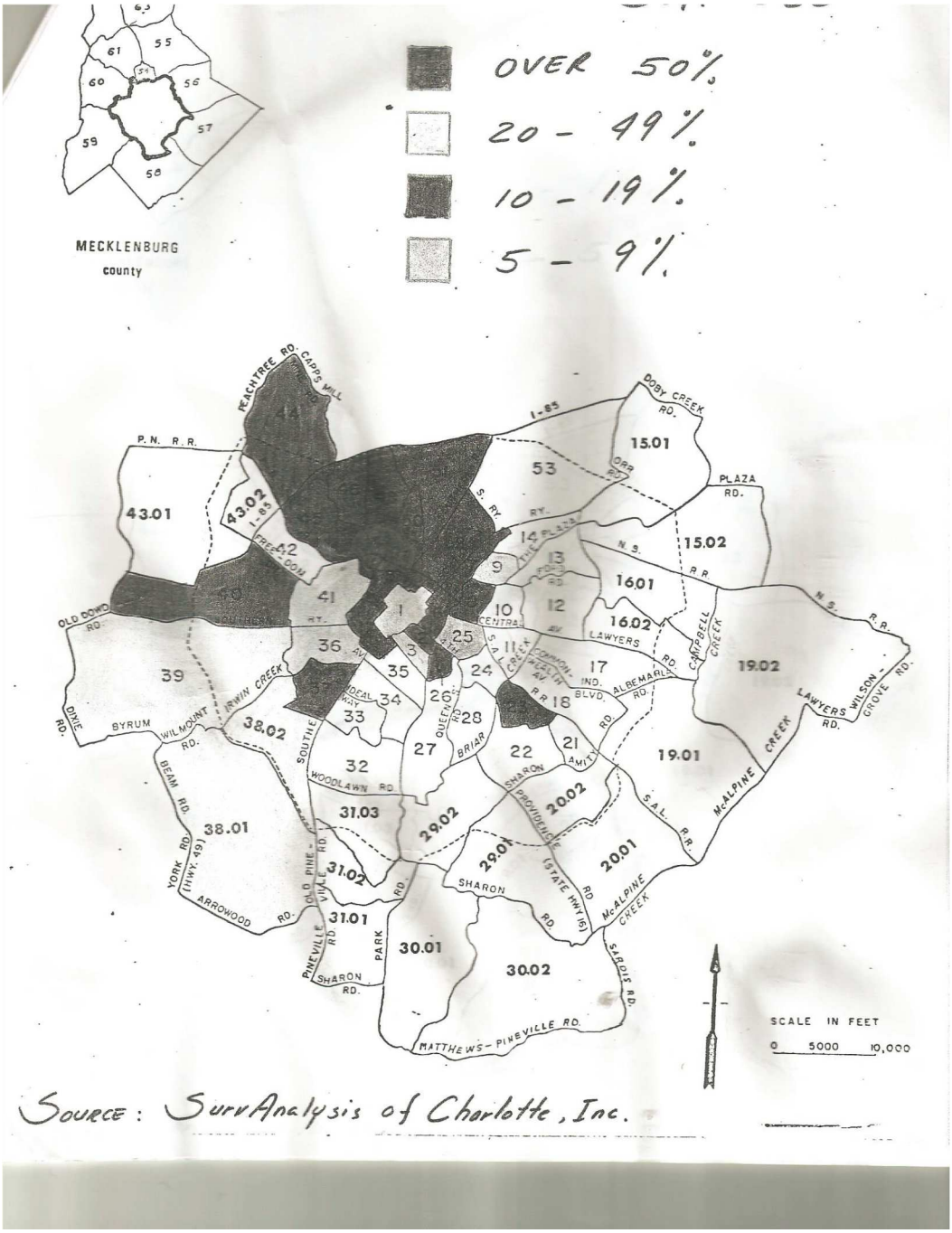

Figure 6: Charlotte Census Tract Data in 1968.[284]

[284] Source: Ibid.

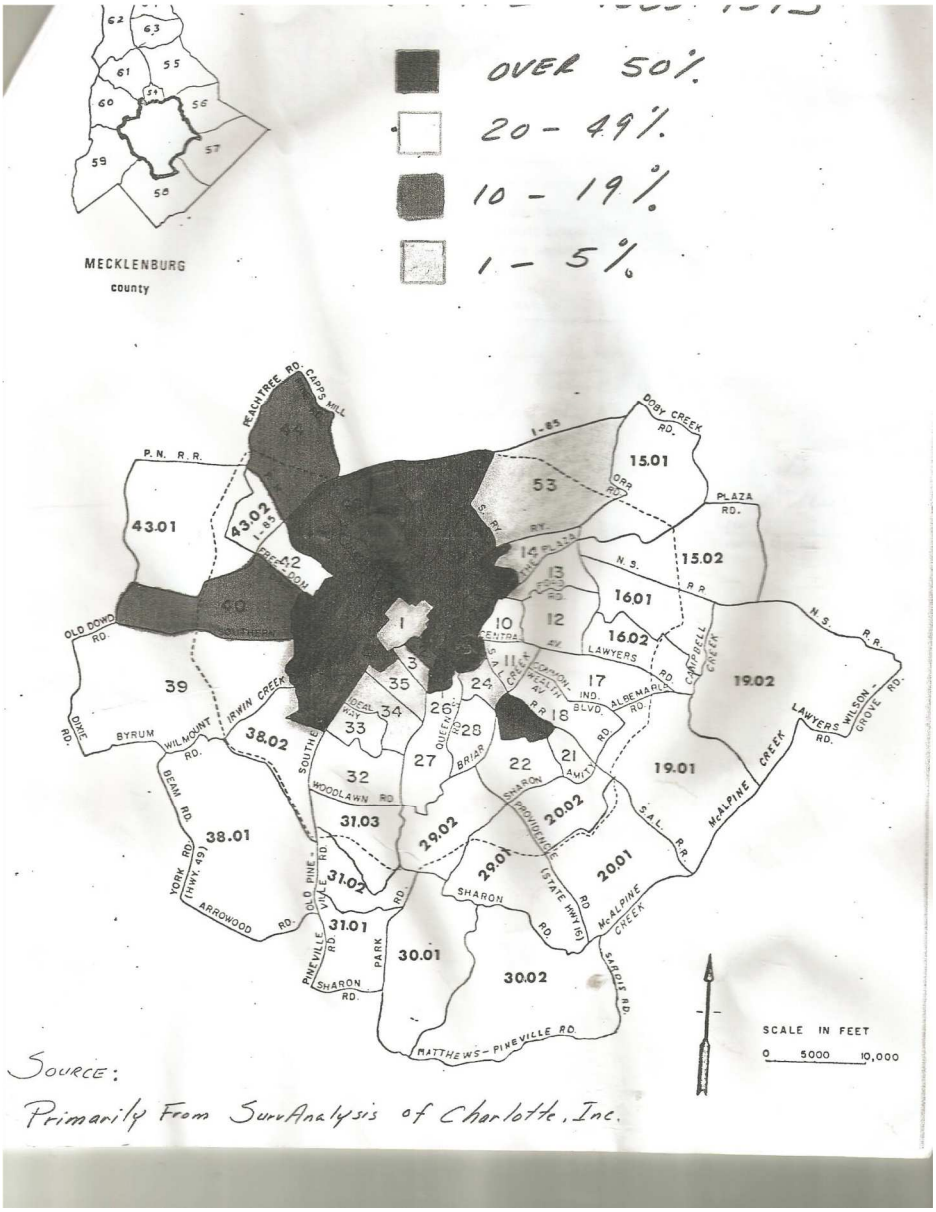

Figure 7: Predicted Non-White Distrubtion in 1973 by Surv-analysis.[285]

[285] Source: Ibid.

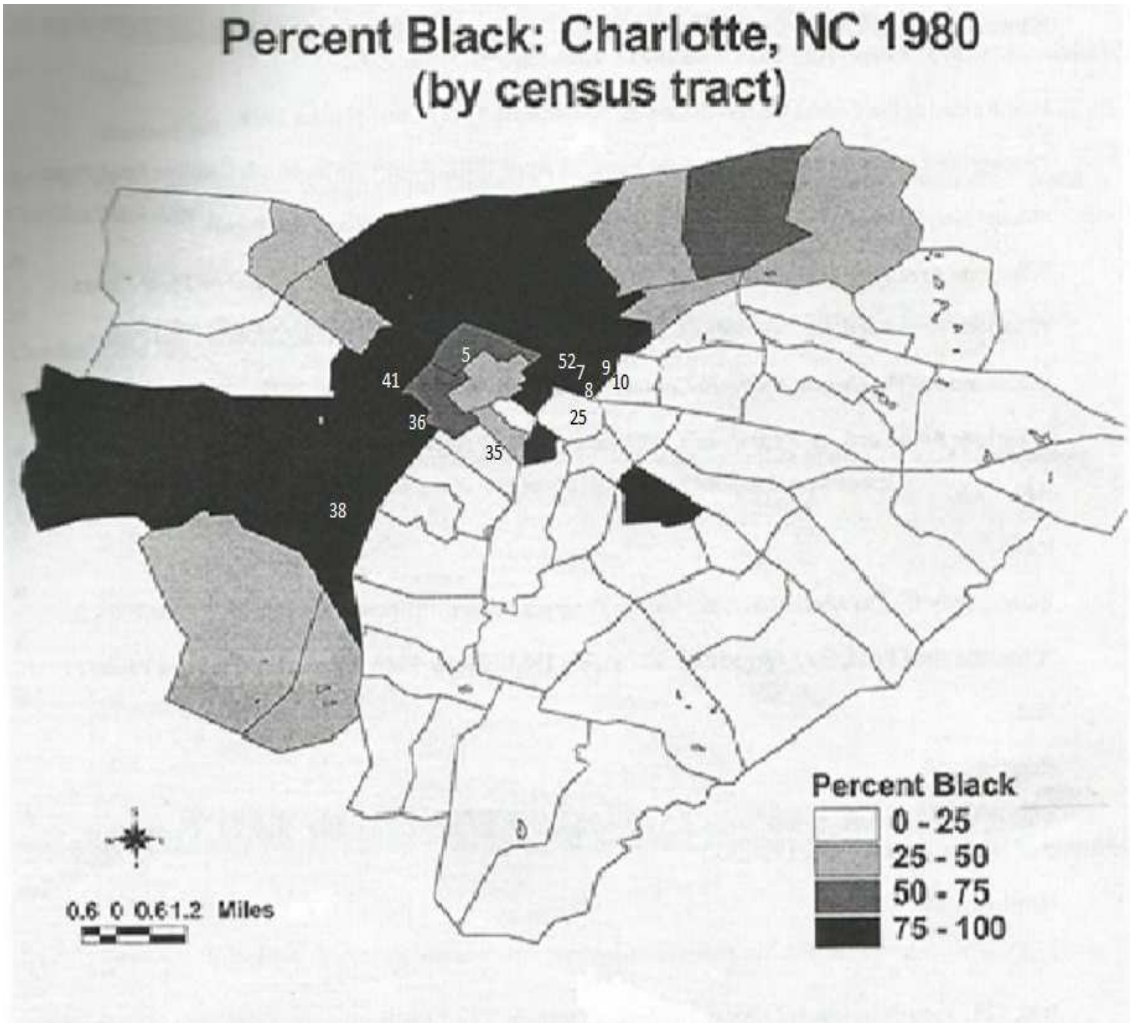

Figure 8: Percent Black Population in Charlotte, N.C 1980.[286]

[286] Source: U.S Census Data