The 1968 Riots and the History of Public Housing Segregation in Baltimore

Baltimore 68: Riots and Rebirth - April 4, 2008
Barbara Samuels, ACLU of Maryland
“What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?”

- July 1967 President Johnson appoints National Advisory Comm’n on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission) to explain the 1967 riots.
- “This is our basic conclusion: Our Nation is moving towards two societies, one black, one white---separate and unequal.”

President Johnson signing the executive order that created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) on 29 July 1967. Photo: Yaichi R. Okamoto, Lyndon Baynes Johnson Library Collections.
“What white Americans have never fully understood---but what the Negro can never forget---is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” (Kerner Commission)
The Roots Of Baltimore’s Ghetto

• Prior to 1900, Baltimore did not have a geographic racial “ghetto.”
• Public policies played a major role in creating a segregated housing market and spatial separation.
• Enacted first “racial zoning” ordinance in US in 1910
• In 1918 Mayor Preston appointed a Commission on Segregation to
• City promoted use of racially restrictive covenants.
• Used public projects to clear black “slum” areas and harden boundaries
After the Supreme Court struck down racial zoning, the City promoted the use of racial covenants to protect white neighborhoods.
Reflecting white opinion in 1918 the Baltimore Sun endorsed a “fair and permanent [segregation] policy” under which conditions in “colored” areas would be improved, while blacks would “respect… the sensibilities and prejudices of the white people.”
By the 1930’s distinct “ghetto” neighborhoods had emerged west and east of downtown with small enclaves in other parts of the City. African Americans comprised 20% of the population but were confined to 2% of the City’s land area.
Selection of sites for slum clearance and housing projects used to reinforce residential segregation

- McCulloh Homes: First “Negro” housing project, was planned to “offer a splendid barrier against the encroachment of colored” into an adjacent “good white residential neighborhood.” (Bolton Hill)

- Perkins Homes: “This area…from a point of view of City wide balance of racial areas should be occupied by white families, probably largely foreign born. It is not naturally a negro area but has…been partly repopulated with Negroes…The Negro inhabitants which would be evacuated from this area should form part of a similar development in a more desirable location.”

- Cherry Hill Homes: After white opposition to every proposed site, the isolated Cherry Hill peninsula was deemed the only site outside the ghetto that was “politically acceptable” for the introduction of permanent Negro war housing.
Public Housing and Areas of Minority Concentration, 1940

Project Racial Designation, 1945

Family Projects
- Negro Projects
  2  McCulloh
  4  Poe
  5  Douglass
  6  Gilmor
  10  Somerset
  11  Cherry Hill

- White Projects
  1  Latrobe
  3  Perkins
  9  O'Donnell Hts.
  20  Fairfield
  21  Brooklyn
  22  Westport

Census Tract % Negro, 1940
- 90% - 100%
- 50% - 89.9%
- 10% - 49.9%
- 0% - 9.9%
In 1943, clergy and elected officials led opposition to construction of housing for “colored” war workers in the Herring Run area of NE Baltimore, claiming it was a white community. Protesters recommended alternate sites in Cherry Hill and Turners Station. The Negro war housing was built there over objections by the NAACP, Urban League and CPHA.
Post-War Housing Boom

- 1950’s: FHA fueled a boom in rental housing and homeownership…for whites.
- FHA market reports note a plentiful supply of land in Baltimore and its suburbs for development of housing for white occupancy.
- But “a very definite shortage of land for non-white occupancy…”
- “Opposition to changing land use…makes it difficult to secure sufficient land to meet the needs of the rapidly growing non-white population.”
Controversy erupts in 1950 over plans to build public housing on three vacant land sites:

* Little controversy over plans to build another “Negro” project in Cherry Hill (Cherry Hill Extension I).

* Virulent opposition to sites for white projects in Violetville and Belair-Edison.

* Those locations are quickly abandoned in favor of sites next to existing white projects, Westport Homes (Westport Extension) and Armistead Gardens (Claremont Homes).
CPHA and other “housers” pushed for City Council adoption of the plan.
This time, opposition was framed in less racial terms. Opponents claimed public housing would lower property values and said it should be confined to “slum areas.” CPHA and civil rights groups contended slum clearance projects destroyed more housing than were rebuilt and that access to undeveloped land was needed to make a dent in the post-war housing shortage, especially acute for African Americans.
The racial nature of the controversy was made clear as rumors spread that Negroes would be allowed in to the Claremont Homes project on Sinclair Lane and Westport Extension.
The 1950 compromise

- With the Mayor’s assurance that Claremont Homes would be open to whites only, the City Council approved an ordinance that allowed the three “vacant land” projects to proceed.
- But all future public housing would require City Council approval, giving the Council a veto over HABC site selection…
- And all future public housing would be limited to “slum sites.”
- This ordinance remained in place in 1968 and is still in effect today.
Public Housing and Areas of Minority Concentration, 1950

Project Racial Designation, 1954

Family Projects

- **Negro Projects**
  2. McCulloh
  4. Poe
  5. Douglass
  6. Gilmor
  10. Somerset
  11. Cherry Hill
  12. Cherry Hill Ext. 1
  20. Fairfield

- **White Projects**
  1. Latrobe
  3. Perkins
  14. Claremont
  21. Brooklyn
  22. Westport

Census Tract % Negro, 1950

- 90% - 100%
- 50% - 89.9%
- 10% - 49.9%
- 0% - 9.9%
1950: Baltimore City Council approves first urban renewal projects in the nation over African American objections

- Urban League objects that Hopkins-Broadway and Waverly projects “...give official sanction to segregation in the name of redevelopment.”

- Federal Racial Relations Office warns the Baltimore urban renewal projects will effect a “triple threat:"

  1) Negro clearance,

  2) conversion of a racially flexible area to one of racial exclusion;

  3) reduction of land areas available to Negro residence.
Clarence Mitchell and the national NAACP asked the federal urban renewal agency to withdraw federal funds from the City because the Baltimore “slum clearance and redevelopment program ... places the full strength of the Federal government behind a policy of rigid segregation in that city....”
Displacement and Loss of Housing

- 1950-1964: 25,000 Baltimoreans are displaced by urban renewal, public-housing construction and school construction.
- 90% of those displaced are African-American.
- Officials contend that displaced households moved to better housing but admit that their housing costs increased.
- Officials also admit that fewer housing units open to black occupancy are built than are torn down.
The plan to clear slums and build high density public housing to contain “slum dwellers” was first announced in HABC’s 1945 report “Effects of the Post-war program on Negro housing.”

In the 1950’s, public housing became a major source of relocation housing for the poorest of those displaced by urban renewal.
High rise public housing

» Part of HABC’s “Post-war Negro Housing Plan”
» Plan intended to arrest “racial and group movements within the city” and to prevent “very violent neighborhood resistance to any in-migration of Negroes.”
» Called for razing black areas and building higher density public housing
» Sites chosen pre-1954 were adjacent to existing de jure segregated projects
» Projects opened after “desegregation” but with same occupancy as planned pre-Brown.
HUD urged higher densities in projects such as Murphy Homes:

• To lower the cost per unit of building on slum clearance sites, more expensive than building on vacant land;

• To answer criticisms that federal programs were destroying more housing than they created in the midst of a housing crisis, while still avoiding the need to build public housing on vacant land in white residential areas.
James Baldwin coined the term “Negro removal” to describe urban renewal. The Sun examined the benefits of urban renewal as balanced against the hardships imposed on low income displacees, almost always African Americans.
Displaced families were forced into a highly segregated housing market. In 1963, rental ads designated housing as “colored” or “white.”
Public Housing and Areas of Minority Concentration, 1960

Project % Negro, 1964

Family Projects

- **90% - 100%**
  - 2 McCullough
  - 4 Poe
  - 5 Douglass
  - 6 Gilmor
  - 10 Somerset
  - 11 Cherry Hill
  - 12 Cherry Hill Ext. 1
  - 13 Westport Ext.
  - 15 Lafayette Cts.
  - 17 Cherry Hill Ext. 2
  - 18 Murphy
  - 19 Lexington Terr.
  - 20 Fairfield
  - 22 Westport

- **50% - 89.9%**
  - 1 Latrobe
  - 3 Perkins
  - 16 Flag House Cts.

- **10% - 49.9%**

- **0% - 9.9%**
  - 9 O'Donnell Hts.
  - 14 Claremont
  - 21 Brooklyn

Project Type
- ○ Family, Opened 1940 - 1954
- ○ Family, Opened 1955 - 1964

Census Tract % Negro, 1960

- 90% - 100%
- 50% - 89.9%
- 10% - 49.9%
- 0% - 9.9%
Protest and Persuasion

During the 1960’s, African American leaders and civil rights groups put increasing pressure on Baltimore officials to end segregation and discriminatory housing policies and practices.

Mural at 1904 McCulloh Street, by Lyle Kissack (2001)
In 1963 most Baltimore schools remained either 90% black or 90% white. Juanita Jackson Mitchell and the NAACP, along with attorney Melvin Sykes, called for effective integration of the schools. Because of segregated housing patterns, they said, Baltimore’s desegregation plan, based on “freedom of choice” and preference for neighborhood residents, was not legally sufficient to comply with Brown.
The Afro-American newspaper published claims that BURHA:

- Was still operating all black and all white public housing 12 years after it declared a policy of desegregation;
- Employed few African Americans except in laborer positions;
- Refused to assign black managers to any project with more than 1% white residents.
In 1966 The Activists for Fair Housing, lead by Walter P. Carter, filed a scathing complaint with HUD alleging that Baltimore was operating a segregated and discriminatory housing program.
The Activists for Fair Housing

- “BURHA must recognize that ghetto housing is inadequate housing, ghetto environments are inadequate environments, and a ghetto housing market is a drastically limited housing market.” They called on local and federal housing officials:
  - To integrate 3 outer-city public housing projects that remained all-white 12 years after desegregation had been announced;
  - To locate future housing programs to promote integration and to end Baltimore’s policy of limiting the operation of housing programs to urban renewal areas;
  - To operate housing programs on a metropolitan-wide, non-discriminatory basis;
  - To pass fair housing legislation to combat discrimination in the private market.
In 1967, African American homeowners displaced by construction of the McCulloh Extension housing project fought against condemnation of their homes.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed a complaint with HUD alleging that Baltimore relocation officials were referring the displaced families to housing units in the “Negro listings” that were neither affordable nor in standard condition.
1967: Baltimore Sun reports that prospects for fair housing laws look bleak…

- By 1967, state fair housing law defeated by referendum and replaced by a weak law.
- Attempts to pass a Baltimore City fair housing law met with vehement opposition.
- Among Maryland counties, only Montgomery County has a fair housing law.
- “Meanwhile, Negroes living in Baltimore’s ghettos are eying Baltimore County more and more strongly. They want to follow the path to the suburbs that has been worn bare by whites in the last 20 years.”
Montgomery's Strong Law Seen Unlikely

The following article is a commentary about the efforts of local governments to prevent housing discrimination in the metropolitan area. The author discusses the proposed legislation and its impact on the housing market.

In Montgomery County, a strong law to prevent housing discrimination has been proposed. The legislation would ban discrimination in housing, including in the areas of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, and disability.

The law would also require landlords and real estate agents to provide written notification of any complaints or investigations of discrimination. If a complaint is filed, the law would require the landlord to provide a written response and the possibility of legal action.

The Montgomery County Council is expected to vote on the legislation later this month. The council has received strong support from local residents and community leaders who have been advocating for a strong housing discrimination law.

In neighboring counties, such as Anne Arundel and Baltimore, similar legislation has been proposed and passed. The laws have been successful in reducing discrimination in housing and promoting equal opportunity for all residents.

The Montgomery County law is seen as a strong step towards ensuring equal housing opportunities for all residents. The legislation is expected to face opposition from some property owners and real estate agents who have opposed similar laws in the past.

Overall, the Montgomery County law is a significant step towards ensuring equal housing opportunities for all residents. The legislation is expected to be successful in reducing discrimination in housing and promoting equal opportunity for all residents.
Baltimore
Model Cities
Neighborhood

Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a Grant to Plan a Comprehensive City Demonstration Program by
The City of Baltimore, Maryland

City of Baltimore, Maryland

PL 030011
508
Baltimore’s Model Cities Application - April 1967: A window on the city before the riots…

- De-centralization of jobs and white population to the suburbs already well underway…
- While the black population of Baltimore County has actually decreased.
- Within inner-city Model Cities neighborhoods: High poverty, high unemployment, high infant mortality, 70% of the labor force is unskilled and under-educated, crime is twice the city average…
- Describes increasing concentration of blacks living in substandard housing and in public housing projects.
- “Neighborhood residents are forced to choose from an obsolescent and deteriorating supply of housing within and at the fringes of the ghetto. Segregated housing patterns cause segregated school patterns.”
“Without relieving the intense pressure on Inner City housing by increasing the supply of housing available on a open occupancy basis, the problem of spreading slums...will continue to be beyond the capabilities of housing improvement programs.”

“Making the slum more habitable for Negroes does not solve slum problems.”

“Housing choice in the metropolitan area is the key to determining whether the City becomes virtually a homogenous Negro and largely lower class ghetto.”
Then as now, resignation to the path of least resistance...

- “Efforts to bring white middle class families back to the city are not matched by efforts to enable Negro families to move outside of the Inner City or outside of the City itself.”

- “For the foreseeable future, the opportunities to improve housing opportunities in the Neighborhood Areas and surrounding areas will be much greater than opportunities to expand housing opportunities outside of the Inner City.”
On the eve of the riots, in March 1968, the Mayor and City leaders called for regional action on housing, schools and jobs.
Baltimore County
Officials Sympathetic
But Offer Little Help

By Helen Miller

Baltimore County officials are full of sympathy and good office for the city in relocating Negroes. But they offer little concrete evidence of willingness to help underHarry Geary, executive director of the Community Action Agency, who said he's just not willing to help if it means spending money to find solutions to root problems.

"We're going to cost a lot more to fix up a slum area than to do some problem-solving and paying money to find solutions to root problems," he said. He added that it would not be hard to sell.

"If the county will contribute," he said, "I'll be very glad, but understand that's not politically popular, and may not happen."

Dale Anderson, county executive, has repeatedly said that the county will contribute to Baltimore City's efforts to help. He added, "We've handled the problem as a program and have been helped by the state, and will be helped by the state constitutionally, providing we have funds to help."

The county, he added, is ready to answer "a considerable contribution" through taxes that are expected to be devoted to Baltimore City.

Public Promise Of Help

Leaders understand county could provide help—except when their sympathy will be put to the test of helping the city's biggest problems:

1. SCHOOLS—Nearly 90% of the Baltimore County schools are Negro, and the county has no plans to relocate children to suburban schools.

2. CITY SERVICES—Mr. Anderson, in his role as county executive, said he could not contribute to city services without a request from the city.

3. PUBLIC HEALTH—The county, he said, "is ready to make a considerable contribution" through taxes that are expected to be devoted to Baltimore City.

4. PUBLIC HOUSING—Mr. Anderson, in his role as county executive, said he could not contribute to city housing without a request from the city.

5. REHABILITATION—Mr. Butcher, in his role as county executive, said he could not contribute to city rehabilitation without a request from the city.

T. BAYARD WILLIAMS

"Any rehabilitation has to be public, not private."
• Parren Mitchell: Describes the attitudes in the counties as “discrimination and segregation” and says “…because they failed to act, the counties’ colored population has moved into the city. The city already has a dramatic housing shortage and this movement has only increased the problem.”

• Mitchell calls exchange between city and county schools “imperative.”

• But Mayor D’Alesandro says it is not politically realistic to expect direct help such as opening county schools to inner-city residents. Once the housing market is opened up, the education and employment problems will be eased.

• Mayor D’Alesandro: “We definitely have to open up the boundaries to all people to spread the population and end the polarization that is now apparent.”
Kerner Commission --- Recommendations and Warnings Unheeded

• Recommends a large scale low and moderate income building program while warning....

• “... If the effort is not to be counterproductive, its main thrust must be in non-ghetto areas, particularly those outside the central city.”

• “Non-ghetto areas, particularly suburbs, have ... have restricted the use of these programs outside the ghetto.”

• “Enactment of a national fair housing law will eliminate the most obvious barrier...but it will not deal with an equally impenetrable barrier, the unavailability of low and moderate income housing in non-ghetto areas.”
• The Fair Housing Act was passed on April 11, 1968, just days after Dr. King’s assassination touched off riots in Baltimore and other cities.

• The Act goes beyond a mere prohibition of discrimination.

• Echoing the Kerner Commission report, it requires HUD --- and all federal agencies --- to administer their programs and activities related to housing and urban development in a manner that *affirmatively* furthers fair housing. 42 U.S.C. 3608(d) and (e).
• At the end of 1969, one year after the Kerner Commission’s report and passage of the Fair Housing Act, 95% of low and moderate income rental housing financed by HUD and FHA was located in Baltimore City.

• By 1990 little had changed. 90% of the public housing, and over 70% of all HUD assisted housing in the Baltimore region, was located in the City.

• As the following maps show, the pattern continues to the present time.
Public Housing and Areas of Minority Concentration, 1970

**Project % Negro, 1970**

**Family Projects**
- 90% - 100%
  1. Latrobe
  2. McCulloh
  3. Poe
  4. Douglass
  5. Gilmor
  6. Somerset
  7. Cherry Hill
  8. Cherry Hill Ext. 1
  10. Lafayette Cts.
  11. Flag House Cts.
  12. Cherry Hill Ext. 2
  13. Murphy
  15. Fairfield
  16. Westport
  17. Mt. Winans
  18. Oswego Mall
- 50% - 89.9%
  2. Perkins
- 10% - 49.9%
  14. Claremont
- 0% - 9.9%
  21. Brooklyn

**Project Type**
- Family, Opened 1940 - 1964
- Family, Opened 1965 - 1970
- Elderly, Opened 1970
- Scattered Site, Opened 1967-1974

**Census Tract % Negro, 1970**
- 90% - 100%
- 50% - 89.9%
- 10% - 49.9%
- 0% - 9.9%
“Baltimore City should not be viewed as an island reservation for use as a container for all of the poor of a contiguous region.”

- In 2005, a federal court ruled that HUD failed to affirmatively further fair housing in the administration of its programs in the Baltimore region. *Thompson v. HUD*

- “[T]he failure adequately to take a regional approach to the desegregation of public housing in the region that included Baltimore City violated the Fair Housing Act and requires consideration of appropriate remedial action by the Court.”
“We have in effect held up a mirror to the Baltimore area. In it you have seen things of which perhaps you were not aware and which I am sure you are not all that proud.”

- The U.S. Civil Rights Commission held a three day hearing on suburban development in Baltimore County August 17-19, 1970. In his statement at the close of the hearing, Commission Chair Father Theodore Hesburg reflected on what he had seen and heard, and issued a prescient warning to the Baltimore region.

- “If we are to rely on the testimony we have heard for 3 long days no one is doing anything wrong. No one is deliberately attempting to keep housing, employment or education all-white or all-black depending on where it is. All I can say is that the situation would not be as it is today here or throughout the country if everyone were practicing virtue to the extent they profess they are.”

- “When we speak of open housing, we strike a particularly sensitive nerve but unless we do face up to problems such as these, unless we do make every effort to assure that equality of opportunity really does exist, we are creating a whirlwind that succeeding generations, if not our own, will reap.”