

## Excavating Atlanta, Episode 3- Housing

Below the producer has curated some materials that serve to supplement some of the concepts introduced in the discussion. There are time stamps to help you navigate which part of the discussion the materials pertain to.

### 2:30: Redevelopment as “Slum Clearance”

As a general pattern, when cities developed in the early 20th century, and automobiles became popularized, middle and upper class people started moving away from cities, leaving the poor in the inner-city where property values decreased and so did housing conditions. Advocates for public housing during the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations determined that people should not have to live in “slum conditions.” However, public housing advocates were not the only ones who advocated for slum clearance:

*“City officials, downtown businessmen, and owners of large urban real estate holdings worried that the slums were spreading and might take the cities down with them. The long-standing tendency of the wealthier classes to migrate from the cities to the suburbs accelerated in the 1920s, and as a result, affluent residential areas and downtown commercial districts had begun to decline in value. Urban experts and leaders decried the phenomenon of “urban blight,” the economic decline of an area, which presaged further decline into slum conditions. If the loss of tax revenues from spreading blight and slums continued, reasoned urban leaders, it would threaten the economic survival of America’s cities (Beauregard 1993; Teaford 1990). To retain middle- and upper-income residents and reverse the spread of blight and slums, the defenders of the American city called for “urban redevelopment.” In cities across the nation, they campaigned to clear the slums; replace aging building stock; improve the infrastructure such as streets, sewers, and schools; and promote new downtown development.”*

Source: von Hoffman, Alexander. *A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949*. pp. 303. [https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hpd\\_1102\\_hoffman.pdf](https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hpd_1102_hoffman.pdf)

### 2:45: Highways Used for Slum Clearance

In their report, [Opportunity Deferred](#), the Partnership for Southern Equity explains how Federal Highway Construction intersected with “slum clearance” plans:

*The Lochner Report’s highway system was also designed to barricade downtown from neighborhoods the downtown business elite considered undesirable, continuing a tradition of using transportation infrastructure and policy to encourage segregation. The elevated Downtown Connector freeway would remove and separate low-income Blacks from areas near the central*

*business district. They felt that the presence of this group would hamper downtown growth. Later plans contained similar ideas about freeway construction and displacement. The 1952 Up Ahead plan created by the Metropolitan Planning Commission (the precursor organization to the Atlanta Regional Commission) described enhancing the central business district by removing the nearby Black residential district using urban renewal funding. Specifically, Up Ahead proposed clearing "slum areas" like Auburn Avenue and surrounding neighborhoods, calling them "a definite menace to the health of the downtown area." Black civic leaders were able to convince the Metropolitan Planning Commission to delete any reference to clearing the Auburn Avenue district from its urban renewal plans in 1952, but the Downtown Connector was ultimately completed in the early 1960s. The facility split the Sweet Auburn business district in two, destroying historic buildings, introducing noisy, high-speed traffic to the neighborhood, and completing its intentional separation from downtown. Ultimately, the construction of the interstates in Atlanta, combined with the application of federal urban renewal dollars decimated Black and low-income white communities that fell in their paths. Some estimates place the displacement at approximately 70,000 people, approximately 95% of whom were Black. Replacement housing was generally not provided although it was required by federal law. (p. 12-13)*

You can find these original planning documents *Up Ahead* and the *Lochner Report* [online](#).

### **3:10 Racial Zoning in Atlanta**

Atlanta first attempted to pass a racial zoning ordinance in 1915, which would make it illegal for particular races to live in the areas that had been zoned for another race. However, when these laws were declared Unconstitutional by the 1917 Supreme Court Case, [Buchanan v. Warley](#), Atlanta lawmakers found new ways to force neighborhood segregation:

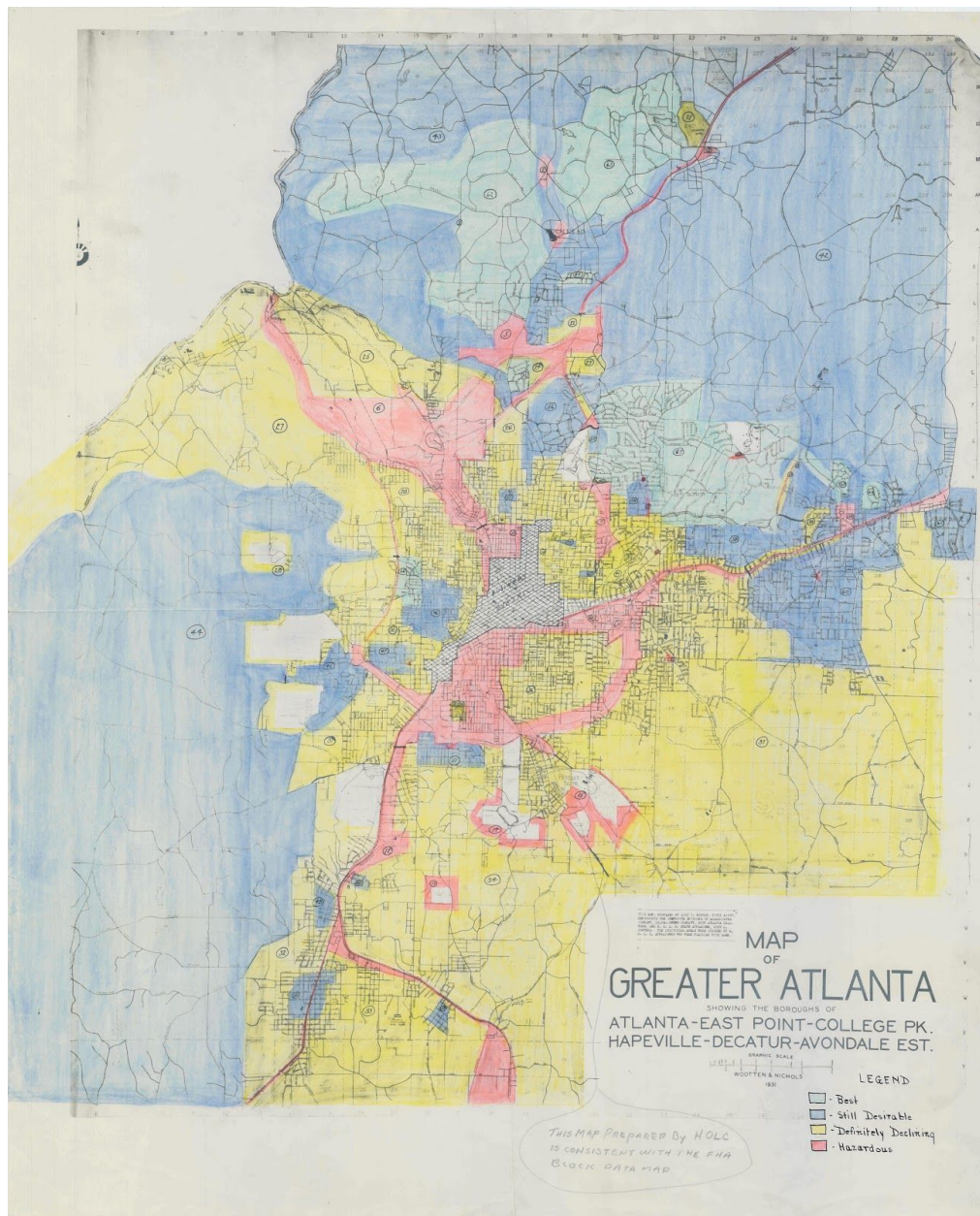
*Robert Whitten's Atlanta Zoning Plan of 1922 was a prominent post-Buchanan attempt to link legalized residential segregation to comprehensive planning. Actually, what Whitten proposed differed little from the City's original "unconstitutional" racial zoning scheme, except that it employed the nomenclature of conventional zoning along with racial designations such as: R1-White district; R2-colored district; and R-3-undetermined. Whitten defended racial zoning on the grounds that the Atlanta plan allowed "adequate areas for the growth of the colored population," that residential separation would instill in Blacks "a more intelligent and responsible citizenship," and that racially homogeneous neighborhoods promoted social stability. Even in its new guise, Atlanta's racial zoning plan failed to survive its initial court challenge. This renewed attempt to institute racial zoning took place within the context of a major metropolitan planning initiative, under the guidance of planning consultant Warren Manning, to make Atlanta "a beautiful, orderly place, the wonder city of the southeast." Even though the explicit racial designations in the city's zoning ordinance had to be excised, Atlanta still pursued the "controlled segregation" objective of race-based planning over the ensuing decades... (p. 8)*

Source: Silver, Christopher. *THE RACIAL ORIGINS OF ZONING IN AMERICAN CITIES*. From: Manning Thomas, June and Marsha Ritzdorf eds. *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.

<https://www.asu.edu/courses/aph294/total-readings/silver%20--%20racialoriginsofzoning.pdf>

### 5:30 Redlining in Atlanta

This map is a “Residential Security Map” used by the Federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, available in the [National Archives](#).



## 7:45 Subsidizing White Flight

The following quote from [Opportunity Deferred](#), elaborates on how the subsidizing of suburban white flight continues to disadvantage the black community:

*The policies effectively meant that the Black homeownership rates would never approach those of whites... some historians have called the federal government's subsidy of white homeownership a "\$120 billion" headstart for white families., which created substantial wealth through homeownership that could be passed on to subsequent generations. Since Black families could not get loans and had to secure housing through leases and land contracts, they didn't share in wealth building. The effects have lasted for generations (p. 10)*

## 8:55 Criminalizing Lending Discrimination

Professor Immergluck is referring to the passage of the Civil Rights Act (AKA the [Fair Housing Act](#)) in 1968, which was further amended in 1988 to increase enforcement of non-discrimination.

## 9:15 Clarence Stone et al

Many have written about this concept of a political coalition that left the poor black community behind, in favor of business and development. I recommend checking out:

Clarence Stone, [Governing Atlanta: Regime Politics 1946-1988](#)

Larry Keating, [Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion](#)

Maurice Hobson, [Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta](#)

## 10:50 Urban Renewal Legislation

[Housing Act of 1949](#)

[Housing Act of 1954](#)

## 11:25 Techwood Homes

Public Housing Projects coming out of the New Deal, like [Techwood Homes](#), were designed to clear slum areas, and often only provided housing to whites.

### 15:35 Continuing Lending Discrimination

The Atlanta Journal & Constitution published a series of articles from 1988-89 called, [The Color of Money](#), which revealed home loan racial discrimination.

### 17:00 Community Land Trusts

*Community land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land. Community land trusts can be used for many types of development (including commercial and retail), but are primarily used to ensure long-term housing affordability. To do so, the trust acquires land and maintains ownership of it permanently. With prospective homeowners, it enters into a long-term, renewable lease instead of a traditional sale. When the homeowner sells, the family earns only a portion of the increased property value. The remainder is kept by the trust, preserving the affordability for future low- to moderate-income families.*

From: [community-wealth.org](http://community-wealth.org).

Land Trusts have become an innovative buffer to preserve the housing costs of low-income neighborhoods near The Beltline. These housing costs have begun to rise as redevelopment occurs near the new transportation mode. The [Atlanta Land Trust Collaborative](#) was formulated in 2009 to help facilitate the process of maintaining affordability. The [Westside Future Fund](#) is similarly acquiring property to maintain affordability, as re-development continues on the West Side.

### 20:11 'Evicted'

Below is an excerpt from Matthew Desmond's book, [Evicted](#).

*"The rent was \$550 a month, utilities not included, the going rate in 2008 for a two-bedroom unit in one of the worst neighborhoods in America's fourth-poorest city. Arleen couldn't find a cheaper place, at least not one fit for human habitation, and most landlords wouldn't rent her a smaller one on account of her boys. The rent would take 88 percent of Arleen's \$628-a-month welfare check. Maybe she could make it work. Maybe they could at least stay through winter, until crocuses and tulips stabbed through the thawed ground of spring, Arleen's favorite season."*

Similar to this podcast, Desmond provides [reading guides](#) (including one for first-year college students) on his website to supplement and think critically about the information he presents.

### **21:30 [Problems with Beltline Expansion](#)**

In September 2016, Board Members Nathaniel Smith and Ryan Gravel stepped down from the Atlanta Beltline Partnership, citing the organization's lack of commitment to creating the green spaces and 5,600 affordable housing units that it committed to. Though, they say that the Beltline has the tools to do better as far as equity is concerned, and hope they will be more committed to promoting housing affordability.

### **23:40 Housing As a Human Right**

Housing has been included as a fundamental human right in the International community since 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expanded upon this foundation.

You can find out more about how other countries handle the right to housing in the:

[United Nations Fact Sheet No.21, The Human Right to Adequate Housing](#)