

# Baltimore's long history of racist redlining

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Protesters rally in Baltimore after the 2015 death of Freddie Gray, a Black man who died from a spinal cord injury after being brutalized by police.

On May 15, 1911, Baltimore became the first city in the United States to codify

urban racial segregation into law. This policy, enacted by Baltimore Mayor J. Barry Mahool, enforced segregation in Baltimore block by block according to racial lines.

Although this act was deemed unconstitutional, the practice continued with full support from the dominating white population and all levels of government. During the 1920s, the city government entrenched and expanded this practice by standing up the Committee on Segregation and appointing the city solicitor as its chair.

The Committee utilized building inspectors, health investigators, the city's real estate board, and community organizations to enforce this apartheid. As the Second World War came and went, the influx of European immigrants pushed the native Black population deeper and deeper into what are known as the red-lined zones. These zones had no access to capital and saw disinvestment from all levels of government, the banks, and industry. Also within these areas, due to the poor infrastructure, health defects like heart and lung disease, lead poisoning, asthma, and cancer were rampant.

In the 1930s, the map that marked areas in the city into Green, Blue, Yellow, and Red zones was created. And since its enactment, the city government and its wealthy backers have been enforcing this status quo through economic manipulation and brutal police occupation.

During the 1950s and '60s, the Federal Urban Renewal policy, joined by the city's own Urban Renewal plans, was responsible for uprooting over 10,000 Black households. This practice was designed to push out the remaining Black communities near downtown and the city's economic heart into the outskirts and redlined zones.

Utilizing the expansion of universities and hospitals along with the creation of highways, the government uprooted and forcefully displaced Black communities, pushing them into areas that did not have enough housing to accommodate the

sheer number of people who now had nowhere else to go. To quote the 1950 Analysis of Redevelopment projects 1-A and 3-A:

“1,671 Negro families will be displaced by the redevelopment projects and Housing authority. The city’s known facility for rehousing is a 500 unit project to be built in Cherry Hill. The Redevelopment Commission and the Housing Authority of Baltimore will be building at the same time. Hence, each will be evicting tenants simultaneously. ... It is readily apparent that additional overcrowding in other blighted areas is the only solution. Also these two projects require the City Council to give official approval to segregation in the name of redevelopment.”

This forced concentration and uprooting of Black families continues. The communities around Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland (UMD) here in the city have been driven out to make way for wealthier, whiter communities. Looking at a map of the city marked with demographics of neighborhoods, you will find that the zones containing majority Black communities are still left with no access to capital or investment. These zones today make up the Black Butterfly and are systematically plagued by the same issues from the 1900s. This Black Butterfly is juxtaposed by the “white L,” which contains areas ripe with fresh investments, access to capital, and more permanent infrastructure.

The Black connection to the land has been under constant attack, predating slavery. Black bodies were stolen from Mother Africa and had their entire ways of life from before the shackles beaten or burned out of them. Black bodies were put in cages on display at zoos, all for the entertainment of white people. Black bodies were used as science experiments. It was Black bodies that worked the fields and factories that produced the immense wealth of this nation, and it was Black bodies that built the seats of power that this country’s ruling class uses to continue to oppress and kill us.

Self-sustaining Black communities had their residents massacred and the locations

bombed or burned off the map. All of the musical styles originating from Black communities along the Mississippi Delta were plundered by white musicians and repackaged to erase any connection to the Black population. Black families can never live comfortably due to the threats of kidnapping and locking away of Black parents and the murder of Black children by the police.

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