Roads to Destruction: Postwar Urban Redevelopment and North Dallas Freedman's Town

by Cynthia Lewis

Like most American cities following World War II, Dallas entered a period of economic prosperity, and city leaders, like their counterparts throughout the nation, sought to maximize that prosperity through various urban renewal initiatives.[1] Black urban communities across the country, branded as blighted areas, fell victim to the onslaught of postwar urban redevelopment as city leaders initiated massive renewal projects aimed at both bolstering the appeal and accessibility of the urban center and clearing out large sections of urban black neighborhoods. Between the years 1943 and 1983, Dallas city officials directed a series of massive redevelopment projects that decimated each of the city's black communities, displacing thousands and leaving these communities in a state of disarray.[2] This paper, which focuses on the historically black Dallas community of North Dallas, argues that residential segregation, which forced the growth and evolution of North Dallas, ultimately led to the development of slum conditions that made North Dallas a target for postwar slum clearance projects which only served to exacerbate blight within the community.

Founded in 1869 by former slaves, North Dallas, formerly known as Freedman's Town, is one of the oldest black neighborhoods in Dallas.[3] Located just northeast of downtown and bounded by four cemeteries to the north and white-owned homes to the south, east, and west, the area became the largest and most densely populated black settlement in the city. Residential segregation played a pivotal role in the establishment and evolution of North Dallas, as it did with most black urban communities across the country.[4] Racial segregation in Dallas, with its roots in antebellum, began to take

---

[1] For an in-depth analysis of the United States' postwar economy, see *Postwar Urban America: Demography, Economics, and Social Policies* by John F. McDonald (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[2] After World War II, black Dallasites lived and worked primarily within eight communities. These included North Dallas, the Tenth Street neighborhood, Little Egypt, Deep Ellum, Stringtown, Elm Thicket, Bon Ton, and the Fair Park neighborhood. For more information on the history of these communities as well as the impacts of postwar urban renewal, see "Under Asphalt and Concrete: Postwar Urban Redevelopment in Dallas and its Impact on Black Communities, 1943-1983," (2019) a Master's Thesis written by Cynthia Lewis.

[3] Marsha Prior and Robert V. Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown: Community Transformation and Gentrification in Dallas, Texas," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development, Communities Old and New in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area*, Vol. 34, No. 2/3 (2005), 179.

[4] Nancy A. Denton and Douglass S. Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 30. Massey and Denton explain that over the course of the 20th century, blacks became "increasingly divided from whites by a hardening color line in employment, education, and especially housing" and found themselves confined to small residential pockets scattered throughout the city.

tangible shape following emancipation. Upon gaining freedom, blacks from across the county and beyond migrated to the city in search of better opportunities.[5] The influx of blacks roused fear and hostility among white Dallasites whose racially discriminatory policies and attitudes effectively limited where blacks could live and work.

Motivated by notions that blackness "equaled savagery, license, and irresponsibility" and that "[a]malgamation, of the white with the black race, inevitably [led] to disease, decline, and death," Dallas city officials passed laws to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods and establishments.[6] To limit the voting power of black citizens, Dallas city leaders initiated a poll tax in 1902 that left black Dallasites with little political recourse when the city began instituting discriminatory housing codes.[7] In 1907, city officials amended the city charter to effectively impose racial segregation in "schools, churches, and public amusement venues."[8]

Firmly established by World War I, racial segregation in Dallas increased dramatically during the 1920s and 1930s as more blacks moved to the city and faced exclusion from both new and old predominately white neighborhoods.[9] In 1921, Dallas city leaders passed a law that allowed residents to formally request their neighborhood be designated for use by only one race.[10] Similarly, deed restrictions, which prevented whites from selling to blacks, confined black Dallasites to existing black neighborhoods.[11] In some instances, whites resorted to violence to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods.[12] In 1927 and again in 1929, white Dallasites "enforced segregation

---

[5] George Jackson, *Sixty Years in Texas*, (Dallas: Wilkinson Printing Co. Publishers, 1908), 231. In 1859, the population of Dallas County consisted of 7,729 whites and 1,080 blacks. The black population of the county had increased by several hundred since 1850.; Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of* African *Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 40. Freed blacks were drawn to cities due to "greater religious, social, and educational opportunities" and because cities allowed them to "secure better protection to their persons."; Donald Payton, "Timeline A Concise History: Black Dallas Since 1842," *D Magazine*, June 1998. By 1870, the black population of Dallas had grown to 2,109 and to 4,947 by 1880.

[6] Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 12, 20.

[7] Harvey J. Graff, *The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 169.; Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 113. By 1928, fewer than 3,000 out of a potential 10,000 black Dallasites were registered to vote.

[8] Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 63-64.

[9] Donald Payton, "Timeline A Concise History: Black Dallas Since 1842," *D Magazine*, June 1998. Between 1920 and 1930, Dallas' black population grew from 24,355 to 50,407, an increase of nearly 30,000 over the course of a single decade.

[10] Philips, *White Metropolis*, 63-64. City leaders passed the 1921 segregation law after the Texas Supreme Court struck down a similar city law, passed by referendum in 1916, which allowed for residential segregation by officially designating Dallas neighborhoods as white, black, or open. In turn, "neighborhoods already occupied by one race would be closed to others."; Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 63-64. Once an official designation was in place, it could only be overturned following a written request signed by at least three-fourths of the neighborhood residents.

[11] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 186.

[12] *The Dallas Express*, Vol. 26, No. 13, Ed. 1, January 11, 1919, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas. *The Dallas Express*, the city's most prominent black newspaper, warned readers that "the white man" would go to great lengths to "prevent you from living on a front street, even if it takes force—brute force—to stop you."

by bombing and burning the homes of blacks moving into marginal all-white neighborhoods."[13] As the city's black population continued to grow exponentially, existing black communities, already beginning to experience overcrowding, served as the only housing options available to new arrivals.[14]

Despite the rigid confines of pervasive racism, North Dallas residents, along with their counterparts across the city, managed to build thriving, self-sufficient, self-contained communities and create a "counterculture that valued blackness."[15] Shortly after founding the community, a group of North Dallas freedmen purchased two acres of land on the northeast edge of North Dallas from former slave owners William and Elizabeth Bowles and established a community cemetery, known today as the North Dallas Freedmen's Cemetery.[16] The arrival of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad (H&TC) in 1872 spurred the growth of Freedman's Town which, at the time, had more than five hundred residents.[17] In the late 1880s, the original settlement of Freedman's Town, located to the west of the tracks, absorbed a smaller black settlement that had grown up on the east, thereby increasing the size and population of the community.[18] In 1884, North Dallas became home to the city's second school for black children, the Strother's Colored School, and in 1892 the first brick school building for black children was built in the area.[19]

By the 1900s, North Dallas had become well established, featuring grocery stores, meat markets, a millinery, dress makers, shoe repair shops, and several churches including New Hope Baptist, Evening Chapel, St. Paul Methodist Episcopal, St. John Missionary Baptist, and Bethel African Methodist.[20] The Hall Street Negro Park, one of the first city parks designated for black Dallasites, was built in the neighborhood in 1915.[21] North Dallas residents worked in an array of fields such as skilled and unskilled labor, education, ministry, undertaking, dentistry, medicine, and law.[22] Homes within the community reflected the area's socioeconomic diversity. Connected by unpaved

---

[13] Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 64.
[14] Graff, *The Dallas Myth*, 167.
[15] Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 103.
[16] Lisa Belkin, "Unearthing of Freed-Slave Cemetery May Put Dallas Road Project on Hold," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1990. Several ancestors of Dr. Robert Prince, Dallas physician and local historian, are buried in the cemetery. Dr. Prince, whose great-grandfather Dock Rowen was part of the group that purchased the land for the cemetery, argues that the land may have been used as a slave cemetery prior to emancipation.
[17] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 180.
[18] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 181.
[19] "The Fire Yesterday," *Dallas Morning News*, November 25, 1885, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 181.
[20] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 181.
[21] Peter Simek, "The Lost History of Dallas' Negro Parks," *D Magazine*, June 2016.
[22] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 181.

roads and alleys, small, shotgun style homes, many of which lined the tracks, stood among "larger, irregular shaped houses."[23]

North Dallas reached its zenith in the 1920s, by which time it had become the "residential and social center" for black Dallasites."[24] Blacks from across the city came to North Dallas for health services, education, shopping, and numerous other amenities. The McMillan Sanitarium, the Flowers Building, and the Pinkston Clinic made North Dallas the center for medical and dental care for black Dallasites and "served to unify the African American population at large."[25] Both of the city's black high schools were located in North Dallas.[26] The Moorland YMCA, the city's first YMCA for young black males, opened in North Dallas in the 1930s.[27]

The North Dallas community featured a thriving economic sector that grew exponentially during the 1920s. The number of businesses and self-employed individuals rose from fifty, following World War I, to over one hundred and thirty by 1924.[28] By this time, North Dallas businesses included drug stores, cafes and restaurants, ice cream parlors, furniture and clothing stores, taxi companies, taverns, barbershops, beauty salons and schools, hotels, garages, and theaters.[29] Home to several nightclubs including the Empire Room and the Powell Hotel & Court, North Dallas also served as a center of entertainment for black Dallasites.[30]

North Dallas proved important to blacks outside of Dallas as well. An overwhelming majority of black Dallas businesses listed between 1941 and 1964 in the Negro Motorist Green Book, an annually published guide for black travelers, operated out of North Dallas.[31] This was especially significant during the Jim Crow years when

---

[23] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 181.; Samuel Wilson, Jr, *New Orleans Architecture, Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs*, (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 1996), 71. Found primarily in the southern United States, shotgun houses are narrow, rectangular dwellings that were popular among low-income groups, particularly blacks, between the late 1800s and the 1920s. Some scholars argue that the term "shotgun house" is derived from the structure's floorplan wherein the front and back doors are aligned so that if a shotgun were fired through the front door the blast would travel through the home and out the back door.; John Michael Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy, Part I," *Pioneer America*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 1976), 47-56. Some scholars, such as John Michael Vlach, argue that the term is derived from the Haitian term 'togun,' which means "place of assembly."

[24] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 183.

[25] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 184.

[26] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 184. In 1922, Dallas Colored High School moved into a new building and became known as Booker T. Washington High School. The older building became B.F. Darrell Elementary, an all-black elementary school.

[27] "History of the Moorland YMCA - Dallas, Texas," Moorland YMCA and Dallas and QuimbyMcCoy Preservation Architecture, LLP, February 18, 2008.

[28] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 184.

[29] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 184.

[30] Kevin Pask, "Deep Ellum Blues," *Southern Spaces*, October 30, 2007.

[31] Victor Hugo Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, New York, 1936-1966, Digital Collections, New York Public Library, New York. These establishments included the Palm Café, Smith's Drug Store, Walker's Service Station, Jack's Service Station, the Regal Night Club, Washington's Barber Shop, Johnson's Eat Shop, the Grand Terrace Hotel, and several others.

most white establishments refused to serve blacks. Blacks travelling to or through Dallas from other areas found solace in the multitude of black-friendly institutions in North Dallas.

The same forces that compelled North Dallas to become a thriving, self-sufficient enclave ultimately led to overcrowding and dilapidation as this and Dallas' other black communities became obligated to accommodate the city's growing black population. By 1930, most of Dallas' 50,407 blacks were crammed into the city's eight established black communities, equaling "some three and one-half square miles" of segregated neighborhoods.[32] The city's black population swelled further during the Great Depression and World War II as rural blacks flocked to the city in search of jobs and opportunities.[33] By 1949, the city's black population had risen to 75,000.[34] Because the city contained a mere 12,451 dwellings available to blacks, more than 9,400 of the city's 22,000 black families lived doubled-up.[35] Many others lived in fields and viaducts.[36] With residential segregation remaining firmly in place, North Dallas and other black communities began to burst at the seams. [37]

---

[32] William H. Wilson, *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 10-11.

[33] Donald Payton, "Timeline A Concise History: Black Dallas Since 1842," *D Magazine*, June 1998. Between 1930 and 1940, Dallas' black population rose from 50,407 to 61,605. Between 1940 and 1949, Dallas' black population increased from 61,605 to 75,000.; Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 110. Dallas fared better than many American cities during the Great Depression due, in part, to an oil boom in the region which prompted petroleum companies and investors to establish headquarters in Dallas. This relative prosperity attracted blacks from nearby rural areas.; Nina Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 180. Aid programs offered in the city also enticed rural blacks during the Great Depression. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), for instance, provided employment services for black men and boys during the 1930s.

[34] Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 21.

[35] Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 21.

[36] "Mounting Negro Population Hard Pressed for Housing," *Dallas Morning News*, March 9, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[37] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 24.; "$200,000,000 in Housing," *Dallas Morning News*, September 20, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. By 1940, North Dallas had become the most densely populated area in the city, averaging 36.22 persons per acre.; "Mounting Negro Population Hard Pressed for Housing," *Dallas Morning News*, March 9, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. Meanwhile, there existed only 11,000 homes available to black Dallasites at this time.

Overcrowding inevitably led to deterioration, which began in the 1920s and worsened significantly over the following decades.[38] A 1938 survey, conducted by City Plan Engineer R. E. McVey, determined that 349 out of 426 homes in North Dallas were substandard, most of which were over forty years old and needed major repairs.[39] North Dallas, along with the city's other black communities, became breeding grounds for disease and illness, having higher occurrence rates of diarrhea, influenza, pneumonia, syphilis, kidney disease, and cancer than white neighborhoods.[40] A *Dallas Morning News* article from July 1939 cited North Dallas' "high rates of tuberculosis" and labeled the area "dirty, neglected, crowded, fetid."[41]

The blight that existed in North Dallas and the city's other black enclaves made these communities targets for slum clearance in the postwar years when the condition of Dallas' black housing began to threaten the city's postwar goals.[42] Despite being aware of growing blight in the city's black communities for decades, city officials failed

---

[38] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 17.; Dallas' black communities featured many structures of "extremely poor quality" packed closely together "without adequate open space."; Michael V. Hazel, *Dallas: A History of "Big D,"* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 28. A survey conducted between 1924 and 1925 concluded that substandard rental properties comprised a quarter of the city's black housing. In addition, sixty percent of Dallas' black housing lacked running water and fifty percent lacked electricity.; "New Negro Housing Unit to be Built," *Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 1941, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. In 1941, a city-wide survey of black housing conditions showed that 8,350 black Dallasites lived in substandard rental units, over forty percent of which lacked indoor plumbing.; "Mounting Negro Population Hard Pressed for Housing," *Dallas Morning News*, March 9, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. By 1949, eighty-six percent of Dallas' black housing qualified as substandard.

[39] "Negro Housing Unit Urged After Survey," *Dallas Morning News*, July 7, 1938, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 37.; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 41.

[40] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 20.; "Blighted Areas Hosts of Death," *Dallas Morning News*, July 14, 1939, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing*, Dallas, December 1944, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 57. Between 1933 and 1937, North Dallas experienced 8.25 tuberculosis deaths for every 1,000 persons while the most densely populated white neighborhoods experienced only 2 deaths per 1,000 persons in the same time frame.

[41] "Blighted Areas Hosts of Death," *Dallas Morning News*, July 14, 1939, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[42] "City Appoints Panel to Study Slum Clearance," *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. In 1949, the Dallas City Plan Commission appointed a special committee to study slum conditions throughout the city.; "Slum Clearance Committee Inspects Mill Creek Area," *Dallas Morning News*, July 24, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. The committee found blight in each of Dallas' black communities which featured blocks of "weather-beaten, unpainted shacks so close together a man could stand between two houses and touch them both with his arms barely extended" and dozens of dilapidated wooden shacks sharing one outdoor toilet and one water faucet.

to offer any tangible solutions.[43] Because "the reality of black housing could be ignored just as long as it did not tarnish the city's bright image of progressive commercial prosperity," by the time city officials proved ready to address the issue, it was at crisis levels.[44] Mayor Wallace Savage labeled black housing conditions within the city as "a boil which must be lanced immediately by one means or another."[45] Unable to obtain federal funds for slum clearance through the Federal Housing Act of 1949 due to a lack of necessary state laws, Dallas city leaders utilized eminent domain, municipal tax revenue, and alternative federal and state legislation—including the Colson-Briscoe Act of 1949 and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956—to acquire and clear large portions of North Dallas through the construction of two majors roadways, North Central Expressway and Woodall Rodgers Freeway.[46]

The city's first assault on the North Dallas community came in the form of North Central Expressway. St. Louis city planner Harland Bartholomew, hired by Dallas city leaders in 1943 to draft a master plan for the city, considered Central Expressway the "most important" of Dallas' planned thoroughfares as it would carry all traffic on US 75 through the heart of the city.[47] Building on Bartholomew's suggestion that Central Expressway should run north and south through the city with a concrete divider and limited, signal light-controlled intersections, Dallas city officials, partnering with the Texas Highway Department and the Federal Bureau of Roads, altered the original plans to include grade separations and a drainage tunnel, thereby transforming Central

---

[43] Darwin Payne, *Dallas Citizens Council: An Obligation of Leadership*, (Dallas: Three Forks Press, 2008), 21, 27. Speaking at the first general meeting of the Dallas Citizens Council (DCC) on March 1, 1938, DCC leader and theater owner Karl Hoblitzelle argued that Dallas needed a new city plan that would "demonstrate fairness to the negro population...eliminate slums and improve housing," a plea that he echoed at another DCC meeting in 1941.; "Three Million for Dallas," *Dallas Morning News*, June 26, 1938, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. In 1938, city plan engineer R.E. McVey suggested that the city acquire additional federal funding for public housing because "slum clearance projects [were] needed in the city's most blighted areas," namely Elm Thicket, Bon Ton, and North Dallas.

[44] Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 10.

[45] "Public Housing Demanded for Dallas Negroes," *Dallas Morning News*, February 10, 1950.

[46] Dallas City Plan Commission, *An Outline of the Dallas Master Plan*, Dallas, 1946, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, 21.; "Plan OK'd by Senate Panel," *Dallas Morning News*, March 15, 1945, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. In 1945, following city planner Harland Bartholomew's recommendation that the Texas Legislature pass an "Urban Redevelopment Law" to give cities the necessary authority to rebuild slums, Dallas officials submitted two bills to the Texas Legislature that would grant cities the authority and funds necessary to condemn blighted areas, clear them, and sell them to private developers or individuals.; "Blitzkrieg Against Slums," *Dallas Morning News*, September 5, 1945, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Neighborhood Planning," *Dallas Morning News*, June 17, 1945, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Texas Losing Housing Aids," *Dallas Morning News*, July 14, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. Despite similar slum clearance legislation being passed in seventeen other states, the Texas Legislature rejected the bills due, in part, to overwhelming opposition from real estate boards who criticized the proposed legislation for not "specify[ing] that condemnation should be ordered only in areas recognized as blighted."[46]

[47] Dallas City Plan Commission, *An Outline of the Dallas Master Plan*, 71.

Expressway from "just a boulevard" to a "state-of-the-art modern freeway."[48] Through the Colson-Briscoe Act of 1949, the City of Dallas and the Texas Highway Department shared construction costs which reached $25 million by 1949.[49] Right-of-way acquisitions began in 1943 and were completed quickly because the area consisted of many poor black renters.[50] Construction commenced with a groundbreaking ceremony on March 3, 1947.[51] The first section, which spanned from Fitzhugh Avenue on the north to San Jacinto Street on the south, opened on August 19, 1949 to extensive fanfare.[52] Upon completion, officials praised Central Expressway for "eras[ing] much of the sluminess" of North Dallas.[53]

North Central Expressway ran straight through the heart of North Dallas, bisecting the community and destroying at least 300 hundred homes and businesses in its path. In doing so, it displaced over 1,000 black Dallasites and forced many to relocate to other black enclaves within the city.[54] In addition to displacing black residents, North Central Expressway drove away nearby whites and, upon their departure, the community fell further into disrepair as city officials increasingly neglected the area.[55] By 1955, slum conditions in North Dallas had become so severe that nearby white homeowners and merchants formed the Uptown Improvement League to prevent blight in North Dallas from spreading into adjacent areas.[56]

Along with leveling black homes, the thoroughfare destroyed the commercial center of North Dallas, located around the intersection of Hall and Cochran streets, and

---

[48] Dallas City Plan Commission, *An Outline of the Dallas Master Plan*, 71.; Oscar Slotboom, "Dallas-Fort Worth Freeways: Texas-Sized Ambition," 2014. http://www.dfwfreeways.com, 82.; "Texas Highway Department," Texas Archival Resources Online, Texas State Library and Archives Division. The Texas Highway Department was established in 1916 to build and maintain roadways within the state. In 1975 the organization was absorbed by the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation. In 1991 it became part of the Texas Department of Transportation.

[49] Slotboom, *Dallas-Fort Worth Freeways*, 82.

[50] "Road Body Promises Action on Dallas Central Boulevard," *Dallas Morning News*, August 23, 1945, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[51] Slotboom, *Dallas-Fort Worth Freeways*, 82.

[52] "38-Year Dream Becomes Reality," *Dallas Morning News*, August 20, 1949, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[53] "Spirit of Unity Augurs Well for Dallas Future," *Dallas Morning News*, January 11, 1959, NewsBanks/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[54] Lucy Sosa, "Freedman's Cemetery Has a History as Complicated as its Buried Members," *The Daily Campus*, Southern Methodist University, March 4, 2013.; Briana Payne, "Oral History of Bonton and Ideal Neighborhoods in Dallas, Texas," Master's Thesis, University of North Texas, 2015, 66. Some, for instance, moved to the Bon Ton neighborhood in South Dallas. Bon Ton, located approximately three miles southeast of downtown, is a historically black neighborhood in South Dallas. Originally settled by whites, the area became predominately black over the course of the 1900s.; *Neighborhood Stories: Elm Thicket*, Film, The City of Dallas Office of Neighborhood Plus, Elm Thicket - Northpark Advisory Council, buildingcommunityWORKSHOP, 2017. The family of Elm Thicket resident Thomas Buffin who settled in North Dallas in the early 1940s, relocated to Elm Thicket after the city purchased their property for the construction of Central Expressway. Elm Thicket is a historically black Dallas neighborhood located roughly four miles northwest of downtown and just southeast of Dallas Love Field airport.

[55] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 193-194.

[56] "League Organized for Promotion of Uptown District," *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1955, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

thwarted future development by making the area undesirable for the establishment of new businesses.[57] Bisecting the community into eastern and western portions, North Central Expressway created a physical barrier between "friends, associates, and patrons of African-American businesses" and left residents with "no easy access from one side to the other."[58] In doing so, the roadway struck a fatal blow to the communal cohesion that had developed in North Dallas over the previous eighty years, an element upon which North Dallas residents depended for their social and economic wellbeing.

In the process of constructing North Central Expressway, crews paved over approximately half of the Freedman's Cemetery, an area that contained roughly 1,500 graves.[59] Because many residents could not afford proper tombstones, families of the deceased marked graves with "crosses and small meaningful objects."[60] Crews used these makeshift grave-markers, along with the few tombstones that did exist, as road fill.[61] The state offered ten dollars per grave to families who could prove that the graves of their relatives had been destroyed during construction of the roadway.[62]

Prior to construction, several North Dallas residents and business owners protested the path of the roadway, arguing that they could not relocate because "no housing construction for negros was underway."[63] However, "federal transit laws...left owners with little recourse except to challenge the appraised value of their property."[64] Still, few received fair prices.[65] One North Dallas resident, for instance, received a meager $262.50 for his home and land.[66] Meanwhile, nearby white-owned homes sold for between $20,000 and $40,000.[67] For those North Dallas residents that refused the

---

[57] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 192.; Victor Hugo Green, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, New York, 1936-1966, Digital Collections, New York Public Library, New York. State Taxicabs, Tommie & Fred's Restaurant, Jack's Service Station, Irene's Restaurant, and Given's Garage are just a few of the many North Dallas businesses that faced demolition.

[58] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 192.

[59] Lisa Belkin, "Unearthing of Freed-Slave Cemetery May Put Dallas Road Project on Hold," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1990.

[60] Lucy Sosa, "Freedman's Cemetery Has a History as Complicated as its Buried Members," *The Daily Campus*, Southern Methodist University, March 4, 2013.

[61] Kevin Pask, "Deep Ellum Blues," *Southern Spaces*, October 30, 2007.

[62] Lisa Belkin, "Unearthing of Freed-Slave Cemetery May Put Dallas Road Project on Hold," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1990.

[63] "OPA to Set Ouster Dates," *Dallas Morning News*, September 4, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; Lucy Sosa, "Freedman's Cemetery Has a History as Complicated as its Buried Members," *The Daily Campus*, Southern Methodist University, March 4, 2013.

[64] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 191.

[65] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 191.

[66] "City to Buy More Acreage for Airports," *Dallas Morning News*, June 28, 1944, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "City Gets Land for Boulevard," *Dallas Morning News*, February 27, 1947, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. In February 1947, the city purchased the entire block between Munger Avenue and Flora Street, an area that contained at least thirty black-owned homes, for $109,790, a mere $9,000 more than the city paid for one commercial building occupied by Macatee Incorporated in the same month.

[67] "City Okays 4 Projects," *Dallas Morning News*, July 2, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

city's purchase offer, city officials initiated "blanket condemnations" with eviction notices ranging from sixty days to six months.[68] Left with no place to go, those who faced eviction simply held out as long as possible, hoping to convince the city to delay evictions.[69] Mayor Woodall Rodgers, relaying the city council's decision on the matter, stated that there would be no halt to evictions for North Dallas residents who had been "negligent" in finding alternative housing.[70] In the same session, however, city council voted to delay evictions for white veterans in nearby neighborhoods.[71]

Not every North Dallas property purchased by the city faced demolition. In some cases the city sold properties to private individuals or companies who relocated the homes, intact, to another area.[72] In other cases, the city purchased the property from black homeowners then rented it back to them at exorbitant prices.[73] The problem of high rents became so severe that in October 1946 the Office of Price Administration (OPA) ordered the City of Dallas to reduce rents on several properties and refund thousands in overcharges.[74] To make matters worse, some of the funds generated by these rental properties lined the pockets of city officials. In April 1947, for instance, Dallas Police Captain A. C. Cantrell filed embezzlement charges against former city property manager Hal R. Juergens for the misappropriation of funds generated by city-owned rental properties that had been acquired for Central Expressway.[75]

In 1958, nine years after the opening of the first leg of North Central Expressway, city officials initiated their second assault on the North Dallas community with the construction of Woodall Rodgers Freeway, also known as Spur 366, which continued until 1983. Intended to alleviate mounting downtown traffic by connecting Interstate 35E with Central Expressway, Woodall Rodgers Freeway became marred by financial and logistical hurdles, delaying the roadway's opening for decades. The first portion of land acquired and cleared for Woodall Rodgers Freeway, from Field Street to Central Expressway, belonged to the North Dallas community. City officials managed to

---

[68] "City Pushes Purchase of Pass Rights," *Dallas Morning News*, January 1, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Central Boulevard Evictions Planned," *Dallas Morning News*, August 31, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.
[69] "Eviction Halt Refused for Master Plan," *Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.
[70] "Eviction Halt Refused for Master Plan," *Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1946.
[71] "Eviction Halt Refused for Master Plan," *Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1946.
[72] "City Gets Land for Boulevard," *Dallas Morning News*, February 27, 1947, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "County Roundup," *Dallas Morning News*, June 1, 1947, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. Sam Rutherford, for example, purchased and moved several homes, including a duplex and a four-bedroom house, from the path of Central Expressway to his hometown of Mesquite, Texas.
[73] "City Attorney to Battle OPA in Washington," *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1945, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.
[74] "City Must Dig up for Fight on OPA," *Dallas Morning News*, October 16, 1946, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.
[75] "Former City Aid Charged," *Dallas Morning News*, April 19, 1947, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

quickly complete property acquisitions in this section because the area consisted primarily of old shotgun houses inhabited by poor black renters.[76] Right-of-way acquisitions for the remaining segment proved both costly and complicated as the area contained several large commercial buildings.[77] While city officials negotiated purchasing agreements for the remaining land and bickered over the freeway's design and funding, the cleared portion sat in "an embarrassing state of half completion," empty and unused with the exception of serving occasionally as a makeshift parking facility.[78] For years it seemed as though city officials had cleared a significant portion of Dallas' largest and most prominent black community and displaced hundreds of black residents for a roadway that might never reach completion. Financial hurdles continued to delay construction which progressed slowly for nearly three decades until the freeway's opening in May 1983.[79] Upon completion, Woodall Rodgers Freeway had leveled roughly 200 black homes in North Dallas and disconnected the southwestern portion from the rest of the community.[80]

While North Central Expressway and Woodall Rodgers Freeway tore through North Dallas, similar events were occurring in other black communities across the city, displacing residents, dislodging social and economic institutions, and dividing once unified communities.[81] Meanwhile, unyielding residential segregation, propagated by hostile whites and implemented by ineffectual city leaders, left the thousands of black Dallasites displaced by the city's postwar renewal projects with few housing options.[82]

---

[76] "Inner Loop Proposal Draws Strong Support," *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1965, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[77] "Sidran Acquires Young Street Journal Building," *Dallas Morning News*, June 20, 1965, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. These included the Sidran Company, El Fenix Mexican restaurant, and a three-story masonry building owned by Vickery & Company.; "Old Mexican Restaurant to Move Across Street," *Dallas Morning News*, September 14, 1965, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "'Free' Day Slated for Bus Riders," *Dallas Morning News*, February 8, 1966, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[78] "Difference Clouds Rodgers Freeway," *Dallas Morning News*, June 21, 1967, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "There's Work to Do," *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 1968, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Freeway Land Buying to Resume," *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 1969, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "There's Work to Do," *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 1968, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "The Crosstown Freeway That Never Was," *Dallas Morning News*, January 3, 1970, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[79] Slotboom, *Dallas-Fort Worth Freeways*, 251.

[80] Eric Nicholson, "There Goes the Neighborhood: The Ups and Downs of Gentrification in Dallas," *The Dallas Observer*, October 28, 2015. Woodall Rodgers Freeway also tore through a small portion of Little Mexico, the city's primary Mexican-American community, located to the west of North Dallas. Little Mexico was founded in the early 1900s by refugees who fled to Dallas after the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

[81] Cynthia Lewis, "Under Asphalt and Concrete: Postwar Urban Redevelopment in Dallas and its Impact on Black Communities," Master's Thesis, Texas Woman's University, 2019.

[82] "Mesquite Negro Housing Site Turned down by Dallas FHA," *Dallas Morning News*, May 23, 1948, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985. Arguing that blacks living nearby would deflate land values and create the potential for racial unrest, white Dallasites successfully obstructed several black housing proposals. In many cases, outraged whites managed to use their collective influence to convince local and federal officials to reject black housing propositions.

White Dallasites clearly demonstrated their aversion to the establishment of new black residential areas by using their collective influence to convince local and federal officials to reject several black housing proposals.[83] Some hostile whites resorted to violence and intimidation tactics to thwart black incursion. In 1940-1941 and again in 1950-1951, for example, angry whites bombed dozens of black-owned homes located in traditionally white areas.[84]

Because city officials and private builders failed to provide replacement housing—due in large part to white opposition—many of those displaced by the city's renewal projects became forced to move in with family or friends. Consequently, many black Dallasites found themselves living "two, three, and four families in small dwellings" after postwar projects swept through their communities.[85] Meanwhile, the city's black population continued to swell. Between 1950 and 1970, Dallas' black population increased from 80,000 to over 210,000.[86] While each redevelopment project left the city with fewer homes available to blacks, North Dallas and the city's other black communities became forced to accommodate growing numbers of people.[87]

Because social and psychological inconstancy, economic stagnation, and overcrowding contribute to urban blight, Dallas' postwar redevelopment projects, coupled with stringent residential segregation, exacerbated slum conditions in North Dallas by undermining the community's stability and exacerbating the black housing

---

[83] "Mesquite Negro Housing Site Turned down by Dallas FHA," *Dallas Morning News*, May 23, 1948, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Clearance Denied for Apartments," *Dallas Morning News*, December 11, 1952, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[84] "Bomb Conviction Reward Announced," *Dallas Morning News*, May 12, 1950, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "State Patrolmen Leave Bomb Cases to Dallas," *Dallas Morning News*, July 11, 1950, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Bombing Aid Bid Going to Washington," *Dallas Morning News*, July 5, 1951, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[85] "Public Housing Demanded for Dallas Negroes," *Dallas Morning News*, February 10, 1950, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.

[86] "Annexing Urged for West Dallas," *Dallas Morning News*, May 28, 1950, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; Eric Nicholson, "Mapping Race, Poverty and a Half Century of Change in Dallas," *Dallas Observer*, March 31, 2016.; "City Population History from 1850–2000," *Texas Almanac*, Texas State Historical Association, 2000.

[87] "60,368 Homes Built by Dallas in Decade," *Dallas Morning News*, December 31, 1950, NewsBank/Readex, The Historical Dallas Morning News, 1885-1985.; "Annexing Urged for West Dallas," *Dallas Morning News*, May 28, 1950. The city's shortage of black housing should not be attributed to an overall abatement in homebuilding within the city. On the contrary, the construction of single-family homes in Dallas boomed after the war. Few of those, however, were intended for black occupation. Between 1940 and 1950, private builders constructed 60,368 single-family homes within the city. Only 1,000 of those were available to blacks.

crisis.[88] The destruction of businesses and churches—institutions which served as cohesive bonds that held North Dallas together—destabilized the community's economic and social centers. Those institutions that escaped the bulldozer suffered from the loss of patronage essential to their function. Meanwhile, North Central Expressway and Woodall Rodgers Freeway created physical barriers between the once unified North Dallas community, thus disrupting the communal unity upon which North Dallasites depended for their security and wellbeing.

In addition to unsettling the economic and social cohesion of North Dallas, the city's postwar renewal projects also amplified the black housing crisis by displacing thousands of black Dallasites. Because city officials failed to provide for their relocation and because racially discriminatory policies and attitudes prevented blacks from living beyond the borders of established black areas, those displaced by the city's urban renewal initiatives became forced to either remain in their neighborhood and live doubled-up with friends or family or relocate to another overcrowded black community that also faced destruction. Hence, these projects added further strain to already distressed communities by forcing North Dallas and other black enclaves within the city to accommodate additional people in the face of a rapidly diminishing housing supply.

Dallas' postwar urban redevelopment has left scant evidence of North Dallas. In the years following the construction of North Central Expressway and Woodall Rodgers Freeway, new construction gradually replaced the remains of North Dallas, driving out black Dallasites and replacing them with affluent whites.[89] The land once occupied by Dallas' largest and most prominent black community is now home to high-end apartment complexes, retail establishments, corporate headquarters, and art centers. The State-Thomas Historic District, a 115-acre tract on the western portion of what was

---

[88] The Federal Housing Act of 1937 defined a slum as "any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health or morals".; "Slum Clearance: 1932–1952," In *Editorial Research Reports 1952*, vol. II, 801-20, Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1952, http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1952112200. The physical characteristics of urban slums include "decayed housing structures, inadequate hygienic facilities, and congestion of inhabitants." Social and psychological trappings of slums include "a lack of social organization among its inhabitants and an individual acceptance of squalor as the norm of existence."

[89] Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 201-202. In the 1970s, most of North Dallas' southeastern portion—the area cut off from the rest of the community by Woodall Rodgers Freeway—became the Dallas Arts District, now home to the Dallas Museum of Art, the Nasher Sculpture Center, and Dallas Symphony Hall.; Prior and Kemper, "From Freedman's Town to Uptown," 202-204. In the early 1980s, the Southland Corporation purchased 160 acres of northeastern North Dallas from roughly 1,000 property owners—absentee landlords who rented properties to black residents—for the construction of a new corporate headquarters building called Cityplace. Completion of the massive 42-story building, that features both residential and office space, spurred the development of adjacent lands and the creation of the Cityplace Tax Increment Finance (CTIF) and the Uptown Public Improvement District which provided millions of dollars for the construction of residential, office, and retail spaces.

North Dallas, and the Freedman's Cemetery, designated as a historic landmark in 1992, serve as the only surviving pieces of North Dallas.[90]

As this research has demonstrated, residential segregation, which forced the formation and growth of North Dallas, led to the development of slum conditions as the city's black population swelled. In the immediate postwar years, Dallas city officials targeted North Dallas for slum clearance through the construction of two massive roadways. Although intended to clear out blighted areas, these projects, coupled with pervasive residential segregation, only served to exacerbate slum conditions in North Dallas by upsetting the community's social and economic stability and by contributing to the community's overcrowding by intensifying the black housing crisis.

Although a case study in nature, this research expands our understanding of urban history, African American history, and postwar race relations in Dallas and beyond. It also demonstrates that progress in the form of urban renewal has sometimes had highly detrimental impacts on poor and minority communities and, in doing so, allows us to better understand black urban communities that continue to struggle. For those communities, like North Dallas, that have been nearly erased by urban growth, this research helps ensure that their histories are not forgotten. We should remember that some Dallas roadways now sit upon land which once was home to black Dallasites who, in the face of unyielding oppression, managed to build thriving, self-sufficient communities.

---

[90] Dallas City Code, Article 225, PD 225, *State-Thomas Special Purpose District*. As new development crept across North Dallas, it threatened the State-Thomas area, a marginal portion of North Dallas occupied by blacks and affluent whites. In the early 1980s, preservationists stepped in to save the large, Victorian-style homes owed by these wealthy, white Dallasites, resulting in the creation of the State-Thomas Historic District in 1986. The State-Thomas Historic District is bounded by Fairmont Street, Colby Street, McKinney Avenue, and Worthington Street.; Dallas City Code, Chapter 51A, Ordinance #21203, *Freedman's Cemetery*. The Freedman's Cemetery is located on the southwestern corner of the intersection of Lemmon Avenue and North Central Expressway. When city and state officials proposed the expansion of Central Expressway in the 1990s, Donald Payton, president of the African American Genealogy Interest Group, and Frances James, cemetery preservationist, urged leaders to protect the cemetery. The Texas Highway Department agreed to an archeological survey led by archaeologist Jerry Henderson. Working with both the Texas and Dallas County Historical Commissions for over two years, the archeological team discovered roughly 2,000 unmarked graves. After relocating 1,500 graves, the Dallas County Historical Commission sponsored a memorial for the cemetery. Designed by sculptor David Newtown, the Freedman's Cemetery memorial features two bronze statues--one man and one woman--standing on either side of a large archway, seemingly guarding the entrance to the 150-year-old black cemetery.