

**From Jim Crow to Gentrification: Race, Urban Renewal, Architecture, and
Tourism in the Urban South, Memphis, Tennessee, 1954-1991**

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Introduction: From Jim Crow to Gentrification:
The Transformation of an American City

The Subject of Memphis

Memphis was at the center of mid-twentieth-century cultural life in the United States, whether anyone knew or appreciated it, then or now. Many of the cornerstones of American life—which was becoming increasingly suburbanized throughout the twentieth century—originated in Memphis. The supermarket grocery store began in Memphis. The roadside motel started with the local hotel company called Holiday Inn. When the quick and efficient distribution of goods became a key element of the global economy in the later twentieth-century, the Memphis company, Federal Express, led the way. The blues emerged across the South during the nineteenth century, from African American folk traditions developed during the era of slavery. In the early twentieth century, W.C. Handy was responsible for helping to change the face of American music by popularizing the blues—thanks to the admiration of his work among the prolific songwriters of Tin Pan Alley in the late 1910s. In the 1950s, while trying to market the Memphis blues, a small-time owner of a recording company stumbled upon rockabilly—and Elvis Presley—which helped to popularize rock ‘n’ roll in American culture. In the 1960s, another small record company in Memphis disseminated a unique form of rhythm and blues, the “Memphis Sound,” including Soul Music, once again transforming the face of American popular music. Unlike the creations of other cities at the center of American cultural life during the twentieth-century such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit, Memphis’s innovations were quickly exported and found greater success, often in the four previously

mentioned cities, leaving Memphis the backwards and relatively poor Southern city in the Mississippi delta that it had been in the nineteenth century.

Memphis was also at the center of American life at that time in a couple of other important ways. Other places in the South may have garnered more national attention early in the era of Civil Rights, but, even before the Sanitation Workers' Strike of 1968, Memphis was a key front in the battle for African American civil rights. A contemporary report on the race-relations in Memphis during the early 1960s claimed that the sit-in movement in Memphis was more extensive than in any other city.¹ The Supreme Court case on segregated public facilities in the city became a landmark case, alongside *Brown*, in the dismantling of Jim Crow. In 1968, as the injustice of economic inequality became a focus of the Civil Rights movement, the haphazard labor dispute among the all-black workforce of the Memphis Public Works department's sanitation division and the city's segregationist mayor brought the eyes of the nation to Memphis, first after riots on Beale Street during a March demonstration and later after the murder of Civil Rights icon, Martin Luther King, Jr., on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel on Mulberry Street.

If Memphis was uniquely centered as a major, though subservient, force in American cultural life, it was also in many ways an average American city. Like several other Midwestern, Southern (upland), and Western cities, Memphis grew from a small settlement to a major city and urbanized rapidly between the Gilded Age and the Second World War, fueled by rural in-migration. In Memphis, it included both whites and blacks at the time when many African Americans fled the South for the cities of the North. Its postwar urbanization coincided with mass suburbanization in cities across the country,

¹ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 2. Benjamin Muse, *Memphis*, (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1964), 45.

subsidized by middle class government programs such as the VA and the FHA loan programs, which widely discriminated against African Americans. Just as Thomas Sugrue observed in Detroit, blockbusting, discriminatory federal policies, redlining, violence, and threats of violence increased both the residential segregation and residential inequality in Memphis.² Like cities across the country, Memphis took advantage of the federal urban renewal program created in the 1949 Housing Act. The city used renewal, as so many American cities did, to remove densely populated, poor, ethnic neighborhoods around its downtown. During the second half of the twentieth century, a time when urban sprawl became widespread, Memphis became one of the least dense cities in the United States.

Memphis was also a typical, if not the quintessential, Southern city—like Charlotte, what happened in Memphis was much more akin to other smaller urbanized areas across the South than Atlanta or Houston. Despite the claims of some writers on Memphis who believe it is not a particularly Southern city, Memphis has been and continues to be the most Southern of cities. While a completely dominant Democratic political machine ran Memphis throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a phenomenon more widely associated with cities north of the Mason Dixon Line, Memphis's citizens (many of whom were poor, rural, Mississippi Delta whites and blacks), the predominant religion, the agriculture-based economy, and the strict adherence to the pervasive Jim Crow made Memphis's character prototypically Southern. Like urban and rural areas across the South around the turn of the twentieth century, Memphis was politically typical of the Populist-Revolt South. It participated in the Lost Cause fervor that swept the South around the same time, erecting Confederate Monuments and even reintering General Nathan Bedford

² Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Forrest and his wife under one of those monuments in a new park just outside the downtown. Lynchings were common in the “capital of north Mississippi,” as Memphis has been commonly called. Ida B. Wells became famous across the country and in Great Britain for her campaign against lynchings in the South. She was inspired in her crusade because of the lynching of a friend in Memphis and began her writing crusade with a small newspaper on Beale Street. Like most of the American South, Memphis had strict Jim Crow laws and even stricter social customs that separated blacks from whites and provided blacks with second-class accommodations in all spheres of life. Memphis was politically at the center of the Dixiecrat Revolt in 1948 and the Goldwater nomination of 1964.³ Like Charlotte and Atlanta, court-ordered busing designed to achieve desegregation resulted in droves of white Memphians either leaving the city limits or putting their children in private schools. As Matthew Lassiter observed in Charlotte, the busing controversy was a galvanizing event among segments of the white community in the South. The groups that it mobilized, and Memphis’s anti-busing group was the largest in the country, formed the basis for Nixon’s Southern Strategy and the Conservative Movement that would follow and establish Conservatism as the dominant force in American politics for the next three decades.⁴

Because Memphis was uniquely positioned at the center of mid-twentieth-century American cultural life and was typical in so many ways of the national and regional urban

³ See Sean J. Savage, “To Purge or Not to Purge: Hamlet Harry and the Dixiecrats, 1948-1952,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 27.4 (Fall 1997), 773-790. Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 155. David M. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971. Tucker’s history documents, Republican, George W. Lee’s and Memphis’s central role in the Goldwater nomination and the final break with African Americans and the Republican Party.

⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

trends of the time, the city makes a prime candidate for a captivating model study applicable to both American and Southern urbanization. There are, essentially, no studies of Memphis during the twentieth century from an architectural or urban history perspective. Many interesting book-length inquiries were possible, not only because of the dearth of scholarship but also because of the city's many fascinations. This dissertation addresses the city during the second half of the twentieth century. Each chapter of this dissertation could have formed the nucleus of at least one dissertation on Memphis topics including urban renewal, the fight for urban space during the era of Civil Rights, suburbanization, busing, Beale Street, and tourism. The section below sets the ambitious scope of this dissertation into context.

Outlining the Central Question

Memphis mayor, Edmund Orgill, speaking to a group of largely African Americans who lived in one of the first urban renewal zones in the 1950s, asked the crowd to re-imagine "their" city and to "sacrifice...for the whole community...for the benefit of the whole city of Memphis." This is either an amazingly naïve or astoundingly shameless statement for a white mayor speaking to a black audience in 1950s Memphis to make. At the time, African Americans were second-class citizens. Jim Crow laws and rigid social custom still had a stranglehold of social relations in Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s and restricted the urban space and civic benefits that most whites took for granted. As Laurie B. Green says in her outstanding monograph on the struggle for equality and fairness among everyday blacks in Memphis from the 1940s to the 1960s, there was, during this period, a pervasive "plantation mentality" in Memphis, a term she argues "captures both

the perpetuation *and* mutability of racial ideology and practices in American culture.”⁵

Thus, the mayor’s statement, reflecting that mentality, made the great assumption of a willingness on the part of these particular Memphians to share his and other civic leaders’ vision for the future of the city, a vision, at the time, in which they would not be able to partake. Urban renewal began in Memphis during the mid-1950s after the passage of the 1949 Housing Act that established the federal program. At the same time that this federal program began displacing densely populated black neighborhoods just outside the downtown area, many neighborhoods were becoming battlegrounds in a racial turf war. In mid-1953, unknown persons bombed the house of an African American family in the A.B. Hill neighborhood because they had moved onto a white street. While violence was rare, angry whites and white civic clubs commonly employed threats of violence and intimidation to try to ensure that their neighborhoods would remain all white. In response, African Americans formed their own civic clubs, both to counter the interests of white civic clubs and to fight urban renewal. These groups would successfully organize blacks politically in 1950s, post-poll-tax Tennessee. Along with the organization that united all black civic clubs in Memphis—the Bluff City and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs—these groups worked hand in hand with the NAACP, often filling the void for an organization that in the late 1940s and early 1950s, had waned to some extent. At time of neighborhood strife and the beginning of urban renewal, aided by the 1955 comprehensive city plan by the firm of Harland Bartholomew, many whites began to move beyond the historic edges of Memphis, in what would be the first wave of white flight that would last until the late 1960s, into expansive new suburban neighborhoods northeast (Frayser),

⁵ Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2.

southeast (Whitehaven), and east (East Memphis) of the city, seeking to escape the dense and racially entangled urban core.

This climate of the 1950s and 1960s, where Jim Crow dictated social boundaries while urban renewal, neighborhood strife, and white flight excluded and oppressed the African American community, changed dramatically in the following decades. Urban renewal continued unabated. The early projects that cleared densely populated neighborhoods gave way to a new focus on the Civic Center Plaza downtown during the first half of the 1960s. Neighborhoods east of downtown were cleared beginning in the mid-1960s for a medical center complex. The riots surrounding the Sanitation Workers' strike in 1968 became the death knell for downtown. Directly afterwards urban renewal turned to Beale Street in an unprecedented attempt to turn a city district into a tourist attraction. At the same time, court-ordered busing for public school in the city set off a second wave of white flight with whites fleeing the neighborhoods they settled during the first wave for destinations outside the city limits. During the 1980s, the city was finally able to redevelop Beale Street with some modicum of success. Also during the 1980s, an organized group concerned citizens led the effort to convert the bankrupt Lorraine Motel into the National Civil Rights Museum. By the 1990s, the city boasted a tourist industry that, in part, glorified a particular image of the African American community's cultural past: its music and Civil Rights heritage. Also by that time, Memphis had changed from a city with neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s that were extremely dense to one of the least densely populated cities in the country.⁶ Yet, through all of that change, Memphis remains today one of the poorest and most racially segregated cities in the country. How

⁶ This is based on the population density of major US cities within their city limits. It does not take into account cities' full metropolitan area or suburbs.

did this transformation happen? This dissertation studies that transformation, examining the city, its urban renewal program, its city planning, its struggle with neighborhood change and later busing, and its attempt to form a tourist industry, from the early 1950s to the early 1990s in order to see what actually occurred to bring about this level of change.

Position in the Field and Review of Scholarship and Sources

First, this dissertation will contribute to the study of the architecture and urban history of Memphis. Architectural and urban histories of the twentieth-century American South largely have ignored Memphis, and this dissertation will not only fill that gap but will demonstrate why Memphis is an important case study in the history of American urbanization during the second half of the twentieth century.⁷ Second, this dissertation breaks new ground in the scholarship on urban renewal by studying the extent to which renewal affected the form that American cities would take after the 1970s. The broad outlines of the history of urban renewal are well-established in the existing scholarship. Local governments used it heavily during the 1950s and 1960s to spur renewal of decaying parts of American cities, often in residential areas under the aegis of slum clearance, with small amounts of funding for building public housing.⁸ It was employed mostly as a tool

⁷ The comprehensive, region-wide studies that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s such as the work of David Goldfield and Lawrence Larsen mention the city but focus primarily on other Southern cities during different time periods. The more recent work on the urban South deals mainly with Atlanta, Charlotte, Birmingham, and the metropolises of the Sunbelt South such as Dallas, Houston, or Miami (see page 5). This might be due largely to the failure of Memphis to achieve the levels of growth during the era of the Sunbelt.

⁸ See Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002), 247-254 for a concise summary of urban renewal in the US. Some of the important scholarship on urban renewal includes works on individuals who were influential in the way urban renewal was used across the country such as Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City*, New York: Random House, 2009 or Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City*, Columbus: OSU Press, 1993. There are also case studies on individual cities such as David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980*,

to remove “blighted” African American or other ethnic neighborhoods. This study contributes to existing literature on urban renewal not only through its focus on Memphis but also by examining more closely the longer-term effects that these policies had on urban America after the 1970s. Christopher Scribner’s study of Birmingham was the first to study urban renewal’s effects on a city after the program ended. His findings are similar to this dissertation’s in that urban renewal became a tool in the transition from an industrial- (or in the case of Memphis agricultural/industrial) to a service-based economy. Scribner’s interest, however, lies more with the way a Southern city used federal funds and how that affected the city politically, rather than studying urban renewal and its longer-term effects on the physical city.⁹ Memphis is a prime case study for examining the changing urban landscape of the late-twentieth-century United States. Memphis’s small population density, its service and tourist industry, and the extremes in suburbanization and gentrification illustrate the landscape endemic to the era of flexible accumulation. As the US economy shifted from Fordism—with its structured landscape of office tower, factory, and suburb—to the era of flexible accumulation, the urban landscape became fractured, and uneven development and gentrification became normative.¹⁰ Memphis provides a new lens for examining late twentieth-century cities and postmodern urbanization, beyond the

University Park: PSU Press, 2002 or Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Finally, there are several works on the effect that renewal had on the black community such as June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 or the anthology Marsha Ritzdorf and June Manning Thomas, eds. *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997.

⁹ Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

¹⁰ See David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 141-172. Harvey describes flexible accumulation as being characterized by a postindustrial, monetarist economy that relies upon greater division of wealth and more and more severe uneven geographical development.

paradigmatic cities of American urbanism.¹¹ Third, Memphis serves as a new case study for understanding the urban transition in the South from Jim Crow and state institutionalized dwelling segregation to an urban spatiality that, if anything, became more racially divided toward the end of the twentieth century than it was during the Civil Rights era because of the circumstances of suburbanization and subsequent gentrification.¹² This study will show that the so-called “heroic” era of the Civil Rights Movement was, in a few important ways, altered by urban renewal.

While the dissertation’s overwhelming concern is with detailing what happened in Memphis between the 1950s and the 1990s, the dissertation is in conversation with a few discreet bodies of scholarship. First, it engages a diverse body of scholarship on urban transformation in the Postwar American landscape. One portion of that work involves the study of residential segregation and its effect on the American city. Thomas Sugrue, whose case study of Detroit follows on the heels of other earlier studies—such as Arnold R. Hirsch’s work on Chicago—found that, through structural racial inequalities, government and the private real estate industry colluded to create the vast levels of economic inequality and residential segregation: “In the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition. The physical state of African American neighborhoods and white neighborhoods in Detroit reinforced perceptions of race. The completeness of racial segregation made ghettoization seem an inevitable, natural consequence of profound racial

¹¹ Members of the L.A. School argue that Los Angeles is a paradigm of postmodern urbanization, a model city that cities across the world have followed. See Michael J. Dear, ed. *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002 for best summary of the L.A. School. Other scholars see Las Vegas as similarly paradigmatic for contemporary city landscapes of play, popular culture, and consumption.

¹² Matthew Lassiter in *The Silent Majority* points to the topic of the spatial history of the cities of the American South as an area that seriously needs development. See Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, (Princeton: University Press, 2006), 7.

differences. The barriers that kept blacks confined to racially isolated, deteriorating, inner-city neighborhoods were largely invisible to white Detroiters. To the majority of untutored white observers, visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses were signs of individual moral deficiencies, not manifestations of structural inequalities.”¹³ Bryant Simon made similar findings about a vastly different place in his case study on Atlantic City. In fact, Simon’s conclusions are very apt for Memphis. He found that a city where racial segregation and exclusion were pervasive in the 1950s was transformed through white flight and decline and was reborn as a place of tourism. Yet, like Memphis, that tourist landscape existed beside a very poor and very segregated urban area.¹⁴ Robert Self’s work on Oakland reflects the findings of Sugrue and Simon. He similarly outlines how government and capital subsidized the white suburbs and forsook black areas of the city. In Oakland, however, Self found that the rights movement there emphasized the failure of the physical city, which did not have a real parallel in Memphis beyond calls for more and better public housing. Also, he concludes that whites did not flee the city but were lured away by “powerful economic and cultural incentives.”¹⁵ This dissertation will show that whites in Memphis did flee the city in two separate waves between the 1950s and the 1980s. Most studies along these lines are more concerned with how white flight changed local, regional, and national politics than with a deeper study of the how it physically transformed the city, but Sugrue’s account did emphasize changes in the urban landscape. This dissertation is far more concerned with spatial transformation than urban politics.

¹³ Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis*, 9.

¹⁴ Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹⁵ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Two works on Southern cities that are even more concerned with the politics of the era are also important to mention here. Matthew D. Lassiter's *The Silent Majority* studies court ordered busing and neighborhood segregation in Charlotte, Atlanta, and Richmond.¹⁶ Lassiter concluded that busing organized a portion of the white community that would become the base of the Conservative Movement beginning in the 1970s. The book, however, argues that class increasingly divided the cities of the Sunbelt and Charlotte, Atlanta, and Richmond began to resemble cities in the North and West. In attempting to push back from what he calls a "race reductionist" view of suburban development and political alignment, Lassiter swings too far in the direction of class, but his larger point does find resonance with the conclusions of Chapter 2. Finally, Kevin Kruse's study of Atlanta during the Civil Rights Era similarly finds that the segregationist desires of the majority of Atlanta's white population used suburbanization outside the city limits to maintain segregation despite the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and in doing so helped birth modern conservatism.¹⁷

A second portion of the body of scholarship on the transformation of the postwar American city focuses more on cultural change. Two works, Erica Avila's study of Los Angeles and Lizabeth Cohen's work on the consumer landscape, outline the broad boundaries of this portion of the field from popular culture and tourism to consumer culture. After studying the social and historical processes that led to a racially segregated Los Angeles, Avila turns his attention to popular culture, which he believes is a manifestation of larger cultural trends due to his "demand side" view of the consumption

¹⁶ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

¹⁷ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

of popular culture. He looks to Hollywood, Disneyland, Dodger Stadium, and the freeway system, the latter of which is only tenuously a manifestation of “popular culture.” Avila found that these expressions of popular culture articulated and reflected a culture of “suburban whiteness.” They represented an escape from Hollywood’s noir vision of the metropolis and a retreat to a nostalgic and idealistic model of rural and suburban life. Avila’s turn to popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s offers a new strategy for thinking about some of the gentrification efforts that occurred in Memphis in the 1980s and 1990s. Cohen, somewhat in contradistinction to the historical geographers of the 1980s and 1990s (see below), argued that the postwar city was really the story of the “urbanization of consumption” as opposed to the “urbanization of capital.” Cohen found that the ideology of postwar mass consumption carried with it a hope that a new consumerism could bring about prosperity for all Americans, but the consumer landscape that Americans built during the postwar years created a landscape that highlighted both racial and class differences. Key to this new landscape was the suburban shopping mall, an advent that would have a major impact on central business districts across the country, including in Memphis.

Second, the dissertation resonates with a growing body of scholarship on urban renewal. Unfortunately, no historian has written a wide survey on urban renewal. It, therefore, is more difficult to determine how urban renewal played out differently in cities and regions across the country. Some of the scholarship on renewal looks at the—to the minds of many—central figure in urban renewal, New York’s Robert Moses.¹⁸ Moses receives attention not only because he operated at the center of the universe in New York,

¹⁸ Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City*. New York: Random House, 2009. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

but also because of the famed and successful attempt by Jane Jacobs and her allies to halt part of Moses's program. In studying urban renewal in Memphis and the models that civic leaders and planners looked to when embarking on their urban renewal program, Moses was not the central figure, though he did receive attention. Pittsburgh, more than any other city, was the preeminent model for Memphis's urban renewal leaders.¹⁹ The majority of the scholarship on urban renewal concentrate on cities in the American North, but a few studies of urban renewal address Southern cities. Thomas Hanchett's study on Charlotte and Christopher Scribner's work on Birmingham are some of the few works that address urban renewal in the American South.²⁰ While neither book's sole concern is with urban renewal, Scribner's and Hanchett's contributions to the study of urban renewal in the South moves that field of study forward. Hanchett's wider scope of time (1875-1975) allows him to track the evolution of the urban landscape for a century. Hanchett's main contribution to the field of urban studies is the conclusion that widespread residential segregation was not endemic to Charlotte. Through the social and political upheaval of the Populist Revolt era, the city began to become increasingly racially segregated in what he calls a "checkerboard" pattern. By the 1950s, city leaders used urban renewal to further increase the racial segregation that had been growing since the fin de siècle. This segregation developed in a new pattern that Hanchett dubbed "sector," which divided areas of the city by race and class. Scribner's account of Birmingham tracks all federal subsidy programs the city used from the New Deal to the rise of the modern Conservative Movement.

¹⁹ For more on urban renewal in Pittsburgh see Gregory J. Crowley, *The Politics of Place: Contentious Urban Redevelopment in Pittsburgh*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.

²⁰ Thomas Hanchett. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Scribner's findings, as mentioned above, are very similar to the conclusions of this dissertation. He observed that urban renewal brought African Americans into a wider engagement with politics and policy that they had been previously. He also concluded that urban renewal in Birmingham helped the city transition from its earlier industrial-based economy to a largely service-based economy, which is actually more true of Memphis than Birmingham, given both the enormous medical complexes that renewal birthed and the boost to tourism that it provided. A few other works on Birmingham that study the city during the era of urban renewal bear mentioning. Charles Connerly's work on the city tracks city planning from before the Depression to 1980.²¹ Connerly concluded that the city's white leadership used city planning as a tool to create a starkly segregated city, and his work is highly resonant with the findings of this dissertation. Bobby M. Wilson's monograph on Birmingham during this period studies the Civil Rights and neighborhood movement.²² Similar to the black civic clubs in Memphis, neighborhood groups in Birmingham were strong, grassroots support during the era of civil rights, but Wilson concludes that the politics of race and place were insufficient to achieve lasting success in the postmodern city. The conclusions of both Connerly and Wilson are helpful references to explain how Memphis in many ways resembled the urban landscape of Birmingham by the 1980s and 1990s.

Third, this dissertation utilizes some of the findings of the growing field of study on tourism. While the dissertation does not engage the more recent scholarship on tourism, which unfortunately still does not have a survey of tourism from a historical perspective,

²¹ Charles Connerly. *"The Most Segregated City in America": City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005.

²² Bobby M. Wilson, *Race and Place in Birmingham: The Civil Rights and Neighborhood Movements*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

it does rely on the two conflicting accounts of tourism by Dean MacCannell and John Urry. MacCannell's view of tourism is that modern man seeks authenticity in tourist sites because of his anxieties over the authenticity of personal relationships.²³ He outlines tourist sites from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries that seek to provide that authenticity, even if, as he describes it, that authenticity is "staged." Urry's approach is exactly the opposite. He argues that tourist sites are in contradistinction to the everyday. He believes tourist sites involve a visual anticipation that is often fostered by non-touristic visual sources such as various media. While Urry's approach is much more historically-minded than MacCannell's, and even though their projects do not lend themselves to such a simplified conclusion, this dissertation, through studying changes in the tourism industry and landscape in Memphis, argues that MacCannell's and Urry's conclusions about what motivates tourists are roughly true of the early twentieth-century and the late twentieth century respectively. In addition, the dissertation's findings resonate with the findings of more recent scholarship on tourism such as Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein's *The Tourist City*.²⁴ The book's essays find that post-Fordist cities across the globe increasingly are competing vigorously to attract tourists. In many cases, cities have reconstructed large portions of their downtowns to compete on a global scale. These scholars' conclusions are in line with those of a small sub-field in urban studies on marketing cities. Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo chart the rise of city marketing in the post-industrial city, while Stephen Ward studies how city boosterism of the nineteenth century transformed into place

²³ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.

²⁴ Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein, eds. *The Tourist City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

marketing in the late twentieth century.²⁵ Charles Rutheiser's case study of Atlanta applies these findings to one particular city that proved to be successful in marketing itself in the increasingly globalized marketplace.²⁶ In addition, these studies mirror the how-to literature from the applied field of tourism and the field of marketing.²⁷

Finally, the dissertation relies upon the conclusions of historical geographer, David Harvey, to place Memphis within the context of urban change in the second half of the twentieth century. Harvey's project has inspired a generation of urban historians, but more than any of the above bodies of scholarship, Harvey's comprehensive take on urbanism after the Second World War explains the urban changes that took place.²⁸ Both *The Urbanization of Capital* and *The Condition of Postmodernity* provide an unparalleled framework, based on a Marxist view of economics, for understanding not only how cities form and change, but specifically how the Postmodern city emerged from the ruins of the Keynesian city. In *The Urbanization of Capital*, Harvey provides a detailed explication of the process of urbanization in capitalist societies. Working from Karl Marx's idea of creative destruction—made famous and expounded upon by Joseph Schumpeter—Harvey applies the process of creative destruction to the built environment:

Capitalist development has therefore to negotiate a knife edge path between preserving the exchange values of past capital investments in the built environment and destroying the value of these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation. Under capitalism there is, then, a perpetual

²⁵ Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1993. Stephen Ward, *Selling Places: The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities, 1850-2000*, New York: Routledge, 1998.

²⁶ Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, New York: Verso, 1996.

²⁷ Teemu Moilanen and Seppo Rainisto, *How to Brand Nations, Cities, and Destination: A Planning Book for Place Branding*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009. Philip Kotler, *Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations*, New York: Free Press, 1993.

²⁸ For examples of case studies that follow a Harveyian methodology see Sugrue's *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, Berkeley: UC Press, 1991, or David M. Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis at a subsequent point in time. The temporal and geographical ebb and flow of investment in the built environment can be understood only in terms of such a process. The effects of the internal contradictions of capitalism, when projected into the specific context of fixed immobile investment in the built environment, are thus writ large in the historical geography of the landscape that results.²⁹

Harvey's conclusions in *The Urbanization of Capital* and other works explain exactly what happened in Memphis with urban renewal and its aftermath. Urban renewal was a tool of creative destruction that civic leaders used to attempt to preserve the high exchange values of the downtown while destroying value "in order to open up fresh room for accumulation."³⁰ Harvey even explains the rise of city planning in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as with attempts by the ruling capitalist class to maintain the built environment for the production, circulation, exchange, and consumption of goods and to maintain harmony within the capitalist social order. *The Condition of Postmodernity* applies Harvey's earlier findings to the historic moment of the second half of the twentieth century to show that changes in the regimes of accumulation and production, often referred to as the post-Fordist or postindustrial era that emerged in the 1970s, led to changes in the process of urbanization and city planning—as well as larger cultural changes known as Postmodernity. Harvey calls this new regime of accumulation flexible accumulation. Harvey argues that flexible accumulation created the growth of such disparate practices as

²⁹ David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), 25.

³⁰ It should be noted that historical geographer Edward Soja has criticized Harvey for "fetishizing space" and leaving out the dialectical nature of the creation of space that is both spatial and social. Soja's critique is fair especially when considering the work of Henri Lefebvre (who saw the production of space as being created by a dialectical triad that placed much more emphasis on the social than Harvey) influences Harvey's own project. See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, New York: Verso, 1989. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991.

the decentralization of production (which on the largest scale involves outsourcing and offshoring), the movement to create city images through spectacle and theatricality (e.g., the festival marketplaces such as Boston's Faneuil Hall and Baltimore's Harbor Place), and the rise of heritage tourism.³¹

In order to study the effects of urban renewal, city planning, and the rise of heritage tourism on Memphis, this dissertation relies heavily on extensive primary source research in Memphis, primarily the Shelby County Archives (SCA), the Mississippi Valley Collection at the University of Memphis's Special Collections (UMSC), and the Special Collections of the Memphis Public Library (MPL). The vast majority of urban renewal sources come from the more than 310 unprocessed and un-catalogued boxes of materials in the SCA gathered from the offices of the Memphis Housing Authority, which ran the urban renewal program from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s. Other urban renewal materials came from the collection at UMSC from the offices of the local federal urban renewal agency. The dissertation also relies on the papers of several Memphis mayors spread between UMSC and the MPL. The photograph collection at UMSC supplied the vast majority of the rich visual evidence gathered for this dissertation. The papers of Judge Robert M. McRae and Judge Bailey Brown at UMSC fill in the gaps on busing, while the papers of D'Army Bailey supply resources on the beginnings of the National Civil Rights Museum. Primary sources on Beale Street include the SCA's urban renewal files, the UMSC's federal urban renewal files, and the MPL's Beale Street Development Corporation papers. The Memphis Information Files of the MPL supplied much of the primary material on tourism. The MPL also supplied all of the major Memphis city plans,

³¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

from the three Bartholomew plans to the twenty-one volume downtown plan of Venturi, Rauch, Scott Brown. Newspapers were a vital source for the entire project. For most of the covered period, Memphis had two daily newspapers. The *Commercial Appeal* was the city's conservative morning paper, while the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* was the more moderate evening paper. In addition, the black weekly, *Tri-State Defender*, was invaluable in providing material that the daily papers omitted or marginalized.

The dissertation relies on several important secondary sources on Memphis. Laurie Green's work on the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis is important to the first three chapters. The business history of Memphis by Robert Sigafos is an invaluable summary of Memphis's history including many references to the built environment. Chapter 3 relies heavily on Michael K. Honey and Joan Turner Beifuss's monographs on the Sanitation Workers' Strike. Throughout, the helpful political histories of Memphis were crucial to providing the political context that coincided with other developments. G. Wayne Dowdy's work on the Crump machine, David M. Tucker's study of Memphis politics between the Crump era and the Sanitation Strike, and Marcus D. Pohlmann and Michael P. Kirby's work on the rise of W.W. Herenton span the time the dissertation covers. One chapter of Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie's book *Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl* covers Memphis from the postwar years to the 1990s, and, while it provides some insights into Memphis as an "edge city" as well as a short overview of architectural preservation in the city, many of its conclusion about the failure of downtown Memphis in the 1950s and 1960s were lacking.³² The

³² For example, Moe and Wilkie attribute the decline of the downtown during the 1950s to the end of the Crump Era and to the unnecessary height of the buildings downtown. Chapters 2 and 3 will show a much more complicated story that does not involve Crump on building heights.

chapter also addresses the New Urbanist gentrification developments of South Bluffs and Harbor Town, which fell beyond the period of this dissertation.³³ Finally, Christopher Silver and John V. Moser's study of black neighborhoods and how blacks organized politically during the Civil Rights Era in Richmond, Atlanta, and Memphis was invaluable to understanding Memphis's segregated urban landscape.³⁴

Outline

On studying the cities of the early American Republic, Dell Upton makes the important insight that Americans' responses to their cities at the time were to treat "them as creatures not of their own making."³⁵ This assessment could easily be made about postwar Memphis as well as likely all American cities since the founding of the republic. Whether one accepts Harvey's analysis of capital's role in creating urban form or Henri Lefebvre's dialectical triad for the production of space, these feelings that Upton describes are not surprising. Memphis, though, was a particularly serious case. Memphis's reputation among Memphians was at such a nadir in the 1970s that the city embarked on a campaign to raise the opinions that locals had of their own city. Through a complicated interplay of capitalism and cultural, political, and social forces, Memphians did create their own city, in fact, they got exactly what they asked for. Chapter 1 introduces the Memphis of the 1950s and the beginnings of the first two urban renewal projects. The chapter demonstrates

³³ Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 75-99.

³⁴ Christopher Silver and John V. Moser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995.

³⁵ Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2.

how civic leaders, both elected and unelected, attempted to recreate their city and in the process embarked on a new conception of their city, which asked even the poorest and most marginalized citizens to not only buy into but to sacrifice for it.

Chapter 2 is crucial for understanding what happened to make the Memphis urban landscape have such a small population density and such a stark level of residential segregation. The chapter outlines most of the forces that came to bear in creating the suburban landscape of Memphis that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. First, the chapter studies the lengths that many white Memphians in the 1950s and 1960s went to maintain both residential segregation and social segregation, even in their places of worship. It then looks at the failure of public housing in the city to meet the needs of the city's poorest citizens and how that failure affected the city's urban landscape. Next, it studies the city's attempts at city planning and how the comprehensive city plan of 1955 encouraged the suburban sprawl that began to occur during the city's first wave of white flight. Finally, the chapter considers the extent to which court-ordered busing brought about a second and even more consequential wave of white flight. This wave saw many whites fleeing the city's already expansive city limits in order to keep their children in white schools.

Chapter 3 shifts back to urban renewal. It provides an update on the early urban renewal projects and tells the story of the Court Avenue projects inside the downtown that brought the city its new governmental center. At the time, planners and even mayors foresaw a complex that would be a welcoming monument to liberal government, but, when a segregationist mayor refused to meet any of the demands of the city's sanitation workers, the new Civic Center Plaza became the central site for the workers and the larger African American community to protest their government. In creating a new government core for

the city through urban renewal, civic leaders unwittingly created a highly visible location for public protests by a group that those leaders did not want to represent—and they had actively campaigned to the larger white community that they would keep that group “in its place.”

Through Chapters 1 and 3, it becomes clear the civic leaders wanted to use urban renewal to remake their flailing downtown by building a new government center and clearing densely populated black neighborhoods on the north and east edges of the downtown. After the tragic event that brought about the conclusion to the Sanitation Workers’ Strike—the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—the MHA and local government set their sights on cordoning off the downtown from black neighborhoods on the south side by clearing the neighborhood that ran along the famed Beale Street. Chapter 4 surveys the history and importance of Beale Street for many black Memphians and then turns to the plans that the MHA had for the street. The city hoped to turn the street famous for its seminal role in the profligation of the blues and its mythic role in the creation of rock ‘n’ roll—and Elvis—into a tourist attraction. An MHA official later admitted to a local newspaper that they decided to clear the black neighborhoods around the street because they calculated that white tourists would not want to visit if it were surrounded by black residents. The project proved to be one of the last urban renewal projects in the city and the program’s greatest failure. When the MHA finally had the street ready for redevelopment, the economic crisis of 1973 had hit the city hard. For nearly a decade groups—both public and private—failed to redevelop the street as a tourist attraction, leaving vast spaces of land directly south of downtown little more than empty fields.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by completing the story of the redevelopment of Beale Street and the creation of other tourist attractions in Memphis during the 1980s and 1990s. Developer John Elkington, who was the protégé of the developer of Boston's Faneuil Hall and Baltimore's Harbor Place, was able to redevelop the street successfully, aided in part by the proven success of the new tourist attraction at Graceland after Elvis Presley's death. At the same time, the city funded large projects to make their downtown, which had been largely abandoned by a white population that lived twenty miles or more from it, attractive to tourists and conventioners. Their first project was to develop Mud Island, which had grown from a small sandbar in the early twentieth century. Plans called for a museum that featured Memphis's history, both its connection to the Mississippi River and its musical past. The plans also proposed a scale model of the river from Cairo, Illinois, to the Gulf of Mexico. When completed, a monorail connected the complex to the Civic Center Plaza. Soon afterwards, the city embarked on two major tourist projects that were both completed in 1991. First, the city bought into a scheme to build a thirty-two story steel-clad pyramid on the banks of the Mississippi that would serve as both a basketball arena and concert venue. Since the turn of the twentieth century, Memphis had attempted to erect an iconic monument for their skyline, a desire that only increased after their neighbor to the north completed its Gateway Arch. The Pyramid proved to be a boondoggle, but it opened for business in 1991 nonetheless. Second, the city, county, and state governments funded a project to turn the Lorraine Motel, the site of Dr. King's murder, into a museum devoted to the Civil Rights Movement.

By 1991, the city had successfully begun to redevelop its downtown as a government and tourist center. Since that time, the city's downtown area has continued to

gentrify and expand its tourist attractions that highlight the city's musical heritage in blues, rock 'n' roll, and R&B/Soul. Just as Scribner and Wilson conclude about Birmingham, this dissertation concludes with a city that is even more racially segregated—residentially—than it had been in the 1950s with an economy that is largely service-based. In the case of Memphis, however, a significant portion of its service-based economy is devoted to memorializing and often romanticizing the African American community's cultural and social heritage (e.g., the promotion of the myth of Beale Street's role in the creation of the rise of Elvis Presley and rock 'n' roll).

Chapter 1: “For the Benefit of the Whole City of Memphis”:

Jim Crow and Urban Renewal, the 1950s

Introduction

In an interview with psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark in 1963, James Baldwin famously explained that urban renewal was, in fact, “Negro removal,” saying “the federal government is an accomplice to this fact.” While Baldwin’s characterization was accurate, this type of characterization has been accepted as such a truism that urban renewal has not received ample scholarly attention. The study of its long-term effects has been especially neglected. Baldwin, like scholars who have addressed urban renewal, viewed it as a phenomenon that took place predominately in the cities of the American North, but urban renewal also took place in the American South.¹ Urban renewal’s occurrence across the South, beginning during the fading days of Jim Crow, before the *Brown* decision, should affect the way we understand urban renewal as a whole. Christopher Scribner’s case study of Birmingham begins to fill that gap in scholarship with his analysis of how urban renewal

¹ Most of the case studies on urban renewal look to the programs in Northern cities such as the work of Robert Moses in New York, Mayor Daley’s Chicago, or the city of New Haven, Connecticut, which had more federal urban renewal dollars spent per capita than any other US city. See Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City*. New York: Random House, 2009. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson. *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007. Nancy Kleniewski, “From Industrial to Corporate City: The Role of Urban Renewal,” in *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 205-222. Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Gregory D. Squires, Larry Bennett, Kathleen McCourt, and Philip Nyden. *Chicago: Race, Class, and the Response to Urban Decline*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. Daniel S. Berman. *Urban Renewal: Bonanza of the Real Estate Business*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969. Few of the urban renewal case studies look at urban renewal in the South. Scholarship on urban renewal in the American South includes Clarence N. Stone, *Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta*, Raleigh, University of North Carolina Press, 1976; James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackelford, *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998; Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

and other federal grant programs affected a city mired in Jim Crow. He concluded, in line with this chapter's findings, that urban renewal brought African Americans into new interactions with politics and policy in a way that had never been true before.² With the majority of the white population in the cities of the American South believing in the rightness of both legal and personal racial segregation, "negro removal" would take on an even more ominous tone than it did in the cities of the Rustbelt and the Northeast. It is difficult to characterize whether there were significant regional differences in the application of this federal program. The reasons are twofold. One is that because the 1949 Housing Act insisted that decisions regarding the location and zoning of urban renewal projects should reside with local governments. The other is that because no scholar has adequately surveyed the different courses that renewal took in cities across the country.

On the national scale, urban renewal coincided with rapid suburbanization across the country, which was one of the reasons Congress pursued it. Renewal also coincided with the construction of the United States Interstate Highway system, often working in coordination with those projects. Throughout the United States, the majority of the renewal sites were in the immediate ring of the downtown areas of cities, leveling the poorest and most ethnically diverse neighborhoods, which surrounded the central business district (CBD). Despite a compelling need for public housing, most renewal focused on either industrial or commercial redevelopment, large-scale civic projects like hospitals, universities, and governmental complexes, or a combination of the two. In the American South, urban renewal coincided with the growing protest movement for the civil rights of African Americans under the oppression of Jim Crow. The mass razing of black

² See Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

neighborhoods placed much of the black community, already denied the right to vote and enter many public places, under siege. Because urban renewal, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights era overlapped, urban renewal had different effects on cities of the American South than it did on other parts of the country. In Memphis the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and early 1960s in neighborhoods surrounding the downtown were cleared and replaced primarily with public works projects. In later projects, beginning in the late 1960s, the city planned no public works projects in these areas. The real estate absorbed through eminent domain was not sold to commercial interests in the downtown. In one case (the Riverview project), the city sold the land to real estate developers to build private middle-class neighborhoods. In another case (Beale Street), the city could not sell most of the land to private interests because no one wanted it.³ The downtown of Memphis became an abandoned shell, with the suburban rings of the city growing to an extremely low proportion in population density, one nearly unprecedented within the city limits of a major metropolitan area in the United States.⁴

When Congress implemented the postwar urban renewal program, the structure of American cities was already in flux. The suburbanization that had begun in the nineteenth century advanced rapidly in the postwar years and accelerated at the beginning of the twentieth century with the use of commuter rail and, later, the automobile. The middle class increasingly abandoned the urban cores that had once been not only the commercial center of the city but also the center of its cultural and social life. The shift that took place in the

³ The first four chapters of this dissertation rely heavily upon the urban renewal materials—315 boxes—from the Shelby County Archives.

⁴ For example, today the city's population density is nearly four times smaller than the famously sprawling Los Angeles. Memphis is the third least dense major metropolitan area in the country behind Jacksonville and Indianapolis.

postwar years marked an increase in the distance between home and work, an increase in personal homeownership, a decrease in the population density, and a vast increase in dwelling segregation based on class and race. Memphis experienced three periods of large population growth in its history. The first was during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, changing the city from a small Mississippi River hub into a regional urban center. The second was during the 1920s; Memphis's population according to the 1930s census was 240 percent higher than the 1900 census. The third period of major growth was the postwar era. Memphis's population grew at a rate of nearly thirty percent per decade into the 1970s.⁵ Because Memphis was a relatively small settlement until after the Civil War, it missed the period in American urbanization that Kenneth T. Jackson calls the era of the "walking city."⁶ Memphis, like other newer cities in the South, Midwest, and West, grew along with the railroad and the streetcar. The ideal of suburban living popularized in the mid-nineteenth century by people like Andrew Jackson Downing and Catharine Beecher was already intrinsic to American culture by the time Memphis began to become a city. The physical form that the city took in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was that of a semi-circle surrounding the downtown, with increasing suburbanization on the city's eastern edge. By the early decades of the twentieth century, Memphis had spread quickly to the east, aided by the rail loop built in 1904, called the Belt Line, which circled the southern, eastern, and northern boundaries of the city at the time.⁷ From 1890 to 1910, the five wards

⁵ Robert A. Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis*, Memphis: University of Memphis Press, 1979.

⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

⁷ Sigafos, *Cotton Row*, 91.

closest to the downtown all lost population while the wards surrounding those gained as much as 400 percent in population.⁸ The downtown area, however, remained the commercial center of Memphis. It was not until the postwar period that the downtown began to decline rapidly.

When local officials in Memphis—part of the new “good government,” pro-growth, and reform-minded group—began urban renewal, their intentions were to encourage growth, provide better living conditions for citizens, maintain the central city’s commercial preeminence, and bring large institutions into the downtown, like the University of Tennessee medical complex, St. Jude’s hospital, and, eventually, the Civic Center Plaza, a group of buildings housing local, state, and federal government offices. Urban renewal did bring these large institutions into the downtown area, but the effort to preserve the downtown as a commercial center failed. Many of these leaders were members of the Chamber of Commerce and property or business owners in the downtown.⁹ They had a vested interest in maintaining and increasing property values in the downtown, but the urban plan, highway system, and urban renewal scheme outlined in Harland Bartholomew’s 1955 *Comprehensive Plan*, a proposal that these leaders followed closely, marginalized the downtown by making further decentralization not only possible but inevitable.

Among the many unintended consequences of the postwar urban renewal program in Memphis, three were the most significant: Urban renewal joined with other forces to devastate the downtown area; it exacerbated residential segregation across the city; and it

⁸ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 381.

⁹ See Shelby County Archives, Urban Renewal Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, 25.

brought many African Americans into the public arena to protest for their rights, nearly a decade before the sit-ins for equal access to public space began in Memphis. First, what began as a program that intended to remove deficient housing stock and to buoy the downtown by funding projects that would benefit the city ended as a program that helped to decimate the downtown for the three decades that followed. Urban renewal worked alongside white suburbanization by creating a wasteland of empty lots, failing to spur much investment in the built environment, and furthering the divide between work and residence. The downtown in Memphis, like so many across the United States, became a place of white-collar office space. The retail businesses and residences of the downtown vanished, partly because of the suburbanization that renewal fostered but also because the downtown became a massive construction zone for two decades. **(Fig. 1)** Citizens accustomed to coming downtown for their shopping needs found it much more convenient to buy their goods at one of the new suburban shopping developments that emerged in the immediate postwar years. Urban renewal projects cleared retail space in the Court Avenue project area that did not see redevelopment until the 1980s. Renewal also cleared the neighborhoods surrounding Memphis's "black Main Street," Beale Street. **(Fig. 2)** Developers and investors did not begin to redevelop any of the land around Beale Street left empty by urban renewal until the late 1980s and early 1990s. Even then, most of it remained empty until the 1990s and the 2000s. For example, the FedEx Forum, the basketball arena for the NBA franchise, the Memphis Grizzlies, was built in 2002-2004 on vacant lots cleared by urban renewal between Beale Street and Linden Avenue in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Second, renewal facilitated the increase of residential segregation and amplified the anxieties stirred up over neighborhood change. Slum clearance removed large segments of

the black community without providing the necessary housing to meet the demands of the population. Renewal razed residences, mainly in the ring of older housing stock surrounding the downtown, which was affordable to poor and working-class blacks. The public housing project that the Memphis Housing Authority (MHA) constructed during the period of urban renewal was insufficient in replacing the affordable housing cleared by renewal. Renewal projects removed families from their homes and forced them to crowd into the increasingly limited affordable housing options in the city. This often meant that majority-white neighborhoods, especially working-class ones, began the transition to becoming majority-black neighborhoods. Due to the presence of white racism and a firm belief in the segregation of the races, many white families refused to buy homes in neighborhoods if black families had purchased homes in or near them, causing a decline in the exchange values of those properties. As Chapter 2 explains, white neighborhood groups formed to protect the “racial character” of their neighborhoods and, ultimately, their property’s exchange values.¹⁰ Because some neighborhoods had to make a racial transition due to the increasingly limited supply of housing for African Americans, city leaders tried to coordinate the racial character of neighborhoods. Joe Fowler, the Executive Director of the MHA, worked with prominent real estate developers to convince white neighborhood organizations to allow particular areas to “be developed for negro citizens.”¹¹

Finally, urban renewal programs fostered a sense of community and created deep feelings of personal and collective loss that inspired many African Americans who were outside of the political process to protest the white governing structure for the first time.

¹⁰ See John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 37-39.

¹¹ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, 26. The speaker is a Mr. Jones (a real estate developer).

Public forums mandated by the 1949 Housing Act became opportunities for African Americans who lived within urban renewal areas to voice their opposition to this public policy.¹² Black citizens within the neighborhoods designated for renewal, as well as those in neighborhoods where the residents feared future renewal programs, began to organize. Neighborhood clubs such as the Binghampton Civic League formed to protect the interests of tightly knit African American neighborhoods and counter the numerous white neighborhood groups that formed, in part, to maintain the institution of segregation.

Ultimately, this is not simply a story of spatial and social change caused by the unintended consequences of urban renewal and other forces. What this chapter—and the larger dissertation—attempts to demonstrate is that urban change, especially in the postwar South, is a story of changes in how residents, visitors, city planners, and business leaders understood, envisioned, and conceived the city. While also providing the larger context for the dissertation, this chapter explains that changes in the way leaders and citizens experienced and understood their city led to the physical and spatial changes that occurred in Memphis. First, this chapter quickly summarizes the pertinent political and social history of Memphis to frame the beginnings of urban renewal. It then places urban renewal within a broader historical context and the social context of Jim Crow. Finally, the chapter closes by studying the first urban renewal projects in the city.

¹² Numerous transcripts and even in some cases recordings of these hearings survive in the urban renewal materials of the Shelby County Archives.

Memphis under the Crump Machine

From 1909 until 1954, when Edward Hull Crump died, Mayor Crump ran Memphis as a benevolent dictatorship. (**Fig. 3**) Crump, whose image adorned the cover of *Time* magazine in 1946, was the political boss who, with few exceptions, controlled the city government from the day he became mayor in 1909 to the day he died in 1954.¹³ The extent of his political power, summarized best in the *Chicago Tribune* headline, “There is a Fuehrer in Memphis,” seemed to be limitless.¹⁴ By 1946, The *Washington Post* said, “Memphis, Tennessee, should be a warning to the whole country. The city is a perfect example of the ease with which Americans with a philosophy of efficiency and materialism can succumb to fascism and like it.”¹⁵ While only mayor for three terms from 1910 to 1915, Crump built a political machine in Memphis that dominated not only the city government but was determinate in statewide races throughout much of his period of influence.¹⁶ By the late 1940s, however, Crump’s statewide and local influence began to wane from its zenith in the 1930s, but he remained the primary political force in local politics until his death.

Urban politics play an important role in how cities implemented urban renewal differently across the country. Knowing the political milieu of Memphis, therefore, is essential background for understanding urban renewal. David Harvey’s analysis of urban politics in *The Urbanization of Capital* is a helpful tool in understanding the relationship between the effect that the capitalist mode of production has on the urban geography of a

¹³ *Time*, May 27, 1946.

¹⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1939.

¹⁵ *Washington Post*, May 13, 1946.

¹⁶ For more on the political history of E.H. Crump see G. Wayne Dowdy, *Mayor Crump Don’t Like It: Machine Politics in Memphis*, Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2006 and William D. Miller. *Mr. Crump of Memphis*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964.

particular city and that city's urban politics. Harvey argues that there is a "seemingly autonomous political" process that is essential to the "logic of accumulation in geographical space."¹⁷ Because of the capitalist imperative, first outlined by Marx, that says capitalism seeks "accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production," Harvey argues that urban politics have to precede the economy because "accumulation...requires the prior production of the necessary preconditions of production, the social and physical infrastructures being of the greatest significance."¹⁸ Therefore, "a ruling coalition...speculates on the production of the preconditions for accumulation; it collectivizes the risks through finance capital and the state...[where] certain dominant interests – of banking and finance capital, of property capital and construction interests..., of developers and ambitious agents of the state apparatus – typically call the tune. They seek profit from the production of preconditions."¹⁹

This is precisely where we find ourselves in mid-1950s Memphis at the outset of urban renewal. One ruling coalition, the Crump regime, began to fade in the early 1950s and a new, though short-lived coalition was born at the outset of the implementation of urban renewal. That coalition used renewal to try to alter the preconditions for accumulation and obtain profits from the production of those altered preconditions by creating hospitals and other infrastructural means necessary for a more robust and modern city. In doing so, leaders hoped to increase the property values and utility not only of the

¹⁷ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 156. *The Urban Experience* is a later abridged and combined version of two companion volumes published four years earlier: *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985 and *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of the Political Economy, Volume One*. New York: Penguin Books, (1976), 742. and Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, 156.

¹⁹ Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, 156-157.

land cleared through urban renewal—something the early projects were successful at doing—but of the land surrounding renewal zones where many of the “good government” reformers, who were members of the Chamber of Commerce, owned land and businesses.

Before detailing that shift in the ruling coalition and the politics involved, Harvey’s description of the effect that these coalitions have on a city’s physical and social infrastructures is useful for understanding urban renewal and the social changes swirling at the time:

Not only can [ruling coalitions] exercise direct control over the formation of physical and social infrastructures (and through them influence the basic economic and social attributes of the urban region), but it can also go out of its way to attract or repulse jobs (of this or that sort), people (of this or that class or sort), and business, commercial, financial, real estate, cultural, and political activities. It can strive to create an appropriate ‘business climate,’ fashion new kinds of living environments, encourage new kinds of life-style, facilitate and attract new kinds of development.... Even new patterns of social relations can be affected – segmentations of one sort may be diminished...while discrimination of another sort can be highlighted.²⁰

Harvey describes ruling coalitions as inherently unstable where “alliances can shift” and “different working coalitions define varied and sometimes quite contrary objectives.”²¹ In 1954, Memphis was at that moment of instability in the ruling coalition, but, as is the case with all history, what came before helped set the stage for the political change in the second half of the 1950s in Memphis.

To that point, the most significant product of Crump’s machine rule for the future of Memphis—and for the purposes of this study—was suffrage for African Americans. Unlike neighboring Mississippi, the Tennessee constitution allowed blacks to vote, but the two-dollar poll tax—which lawmakers finally removed in the constitutional convention of

²⁰ Ibid., 154.

²¹ Ibid., 153.

1953, notably during the waning years of Crump's power—prevented much of the black community from casting their ballots.²² Middle-class whites elected Crump in 1909 when he ran as a reformer, but he maintained his political power by turning to the black citizens of Memphis, who composed forty percent of the population in the 1910s. The Crump machine paid the poll taxes in black wards. In exchange, these citizens voted as Crump wanted. The machine paid the poll taxes with money collected from underworld businesses—dealing in prostitution, gambling, and liquor, the latter of which was legalized in Tennessee in 1939, when the Crump machine's members of the Shelby County delegation in the Tennessee Assembly pushed to override the governor's veto and repeal the liquor laws.²³ Because African Americans had been voting in large numbers since the 1910s even if under persuasion from the Crump machine, the African American vote began to become influential in Memphis politics, especially after the dissolution of the Crump organization and the end of the poll tax in the 1950s.

In the Democratic gubernatorial primary of August 4, 1938, the candidate Crump opposed, Gov. Gordon Browning, received 9,000 votes in Shelby County. By comparison, in the previous primary, the machine's opponent received only 825 votes. While the machine's candidate, Prentice Cooper, still won the primary, receiving 58,000 votes from Shelby County, historians believe that the disparity between the 1938 primary and the previous one was a result of many African Americans voting against the Crump machine.²⁴ What had caused this shift? Earlier in 1938, police shot and killed a black postal worker, George W. Brooks, in the middle of a scheme to catch him bothering a white woman who

²² Miller, *Mr. Crump of Memphis*.

²³ Dowdy, *Mayor Crump*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 98 and David M. Tucker. *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948-1968*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 29-30.

claimed he had “annoyed” her. Leaders in the black community met with Memphis mayor and Crump-man Watkins Overton regarding the issue, but the city failed to take any action. Following these events, O.G. Sledge formed the Negro Independent Voters League to counter the influence of the Crump machine in the black community. Crump chose to offset the rising independence of black voters by attempting to establish black leaders who were friendly to the Crump organization. In 1939, Crump drove black Republican leader Robert Church, Jr., into exile by having the city confiscate all of his property holdings under the pretense of unpaid back taxes. He likewise forced Church’s political partner, Dr. J.B. Martin, to flee the city in 1940.²⁵ Crump’s efforts, however, would backfire.

In 1947, the American Heritage Foundation funded a travelling exhibition of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and other important American documents, which was scheduled to come to Memphis. Memphis mayor and Crump loyalist, James J. Pleasants, Jr., refused to allow the event if it was not segregated, so the foundation, which would not allow a segregated exhibition, did not permit the exhibition to come to Memphis, a move that was widely publicized in the city. When Harry S. Truman proposed civil rights laws, including the abolition of the poll tax in early 1948, Crump worked to get Richard Russell, Jr., the nomination for president. After failing, Crump joined with other Southern Democrats by supporting South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond on the States’ Rights Party ticket. These two events displayed an end to Crump’s paternalism toward the black community in exchange for the unabashed racism of the Dixiecrats. Despite white government officials’ claims that “nobody in the city of Memphis nor any man in the United States thinks more of the welfare of the colored people in this community than the

²⁵ Dowdy, *Mayor Crump*, 97-98, 109.

Honorable E.H. Crump,” African Americans in Memphis were ready to overthrow the Crump machine.²⁶ In the Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1948, Crump’s hold on statewide political power ended. Crump’s chosen candidate for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1948 was defeated by his nemesis, former governor Gordon Browning, when African Americans and middle-class whites abandoned the Crump machine. The 1948 Democratic primary also brought Crump another loss. Estes Kefauver defeated Crump’s candidate, Judge John Mitchell, for the U.S. Senate nomination with the support of influential white moderates in Memphis such as Edmund Orgill, Edward J. Meeman, and Lucius E. Burch, Jr., as well as influential black leaders such as Dr. Joseph E. Walker. Crump’s man still received a plurality of the votes in Shelby County, but the margin was 37,000 to 27,000. Crump’s dictatorial grip on Memphis politics had ended, and the votes of African Americans in Memphis became an independent force in local and state politics.

Along with this shift in voting patterns came an increased movement for reform in Memphis’s city government. That movement began with local attorney Lucius Burch and *Press-Scimitar* editor, Edward Meeman. Burch was an unlikely candidate to become the leader of reform in Memphis. Raised in Southern aristocracy in Nashville, he was steeped in the mythology of the Old South through the influence of Southern Agrarian writer Robert Penn Warren who lived on the family farm for two years, but when Burch moved to Memphis to work in his uncle’s law firm, he encountered opposition from Crump in one of his cases. After finding himself an enemy of the machine, he began to reject Southern conservatism, coming to believe in racial equality and internationalism. This interest in internationalism, particularly Clarence Streit’s *Union Now* (1939), brought the political

²⁶ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, , “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, 13.

reformers in Memphis together. Burch made an internationalist convert of both Edward Meeman and, later, Edmund Orgill, the owner of a large wholesale hardware firm that stretched across the Mid-South and the respected president of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce. **(Fig. 4)** Burch and Meeman persuaded Orgill to help defeat the Crump machine by publically endorsing Estes Kefauver for Senate in the June 11 *Commercial Appeal*.

After the success of the Kefauver campaign, the first real sign of the Crump machine's decline, these civic reformers decided to form a non-partisan committee that would work for reform in Memphis but would avoid appearing as an anti-Crump group. This marked the beginning of the shift in the ruling coalition that would lead to urban renewal in Memphis. As Harvey described, these new leaders would seek to control the physical space, business climate, and living environments of the city for their own profit. In early 1949, the Civic Research Committee (CRC) formed. The CRC did not officially engage in political action, but many of its members went on to run for office and campaign against the Crump machine. Orgill even went so far as to endorse Dr. J.E. Walker, a leader in the black community, for school board in 1951. Members of the CRC ran a successful campaign in 1952 for the city to switch to voting machines instead of relying on Crump's men to hand-count the ballots. Members of the group were appointed to the Shelby County Election Commission after Governor Browning signed election reform. The group also campaigned to change the form of city government in Memphis from the commission government, which Memphis had since getting its charter back from the state in the wake of the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1877, to a manager-council form. Memphis's commission consisted of five commissioners, including the mayor, and acted as both the legislative and

the administrative branch of government. Each commissioner was the head of a separate executive division of the city government. The Crump machine could easily exploit this form of government because of the weakness of the mayoral position and because the commissioners were each elected in citywide votes. Reformers pushed for a manager-council form that would have separated the legislative and administrative roles, divided the city into voting districts to insure that blacks received representation, and employed an unelected, trained city manager to administrate the city government. Commission government continued in Memphis until the election of 1966, and the new government form did not go into effect until after the mayoral election of 1967, but the committee that wrote the new charter did not even consider a manager-council form. Instead, they opted for a mayor-council form, a move that would have profound repercussions in 1968. It was not until after the death of Crump that the reformers gained elected office in Memphis. Mayor Watkins Overton resigned from office in early 1953 after an extended dispute with Crump. Frank M. Tobey replaced Overton. Mayor Tobey was amenable to much of the reform ideas of the CRC, but he died of a massive heart attack just two months before the 1955 election. Reformers drafted Edmund Orgill to run in Tobey's place. With the strong backing of African Americans, Kefauver liberals, and Eisenhower Republicans, Orgill defeated Watkins Overton to become the mayor of Memphis in 1955. Orgill and other "good-government," Chamber of Commerce civic officials would introduce and carry out urban renewal in Memphis, but the ascendance of this ruling coalition proved to be short-lived. As race and civil rights increasingly became voting issues in Memphis, conservative Southern populists who often held strong segregationist positions took over the government in the 1960s. Leaders of this new ruling coalition, bolstered by the increased

power of the mayor's position after the 1967 mayors race then took over the reins of urban renewal, leading to the situation that sparked the Sanitation Workers' Strike and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.²⁷

Urban Renewal in the Modern World and in the Jim Crow South

As David Harvey argues in *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, the Haussmannization of Paris—the large-scale restructuring of the city plan of Paris during the Second Empire, requiring the destruction of centuries of accumulated urban form and architecture after the Revolution of 1848—established a condition that became central to modernity and to a modern sensibility of planning, ordering, and understanding the city: Under modern capitalism, planners and bureaucrats conceived of the city as a totality and not as a collection of discreet parts and projects.²⁸ (**Figs. 5, 6, & 7**) From this point forward, urban planning was accomplished on a completely new scale. Early figures in city planning—a practice that did not professionalize until the twentieth century—began to conceive of the city as a single entity. Ebenezer Howard proposed the Garden City concept that would depopulate the dense Victorian city by shifting large population segments to newly designed towns in the countryside (**Fig. 8**). Later planners expanded Howard's vision to a larger regional scale. Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and Lewis Mumford, followed the lead of the ideas of Scottish biologist, Patrick Geddes, who believed that broadening the city into a region, both conceptually and physically, would lead to a more livable and

²⁷ See David M. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948-1968*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979, for a thorough and insightful history of Memphis politics from the end of the Crump era to the Sanitation Strike.

²⁸ David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-20.

efficient city region.²⁹ Daniel Burnham, a key figure in the City Beautiful movement, prepared a plan for the city of Chicago in 1909 that sought to replicate Haussmann's Paris. In the *Plan of Chicago*, Burnham said, "the task which Haussmann accomplished for Paris corresponds with the work which must be done for Chicago" (**Fig. 9**).³⁰ Le Corbusier wanted to demolish existing cities completely so that they might be rebuilt under the direction of a master planner—such as himself—as cities filled with large towers in a park-like setting (**Fig. 10**).³¹ It was not until the early 1960s, when urban planning and redevelopment began to come under the attack of highly influential figures like Jane Jacobs, that large-scale urban planning's understanding of the city as a singular entity began to come into question.³² The Garden City, the regional city, the City Beautiful of Daniel Burnham and Harland Bartholomew, Le Corbusier's *Ville radieuse*, and the city of postwar urban renewal all exhibit the modern tendency toward large-scale planning first evident in Second Empire Paris.

Haussmannization demonstrated another theme that would be of particular significance in all modern urban redevelopment, particularly postwar renewal. Redevelopment became a key tool of governments as a means to invest surplus capital to maintain or stimulate the economy, especially in Keynesian postwar America. Harvey found that Haussmannization, and the large-scale redevelopment that accompanied it, was

²⁹ For a classic account of these early figures in urban planning movement see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

³⁰ Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993 (1909)), 18.

³¹ For more on Le Corbusier's urban theories see Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.

³² For more on Jane Jacobs see Alice S. Alexiou, *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006. Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City*, New York: Random House, 2009. Max Page and Timothy Mennel, eds. *Reconsidering Jane Jacobs*, Chicago: Planners Press, 2011.

a product of the crisis in global capitalism that occurred between 1848 and 1851, resulting from a surplus in labor and capital. Haussmann's plans became a kind of proto-Keynesian intervention that temporarily revived the economy of Second Empire France until the economy collapsed again in early 1870s. In the American context, the first attempt at urban redevelopment came because of the Great Depression. The economic collapse of 1937, believed to have been caused by balancing the budget, boosted the Keynesian approach to governmental management of the economy to prominence, which lasted until the 1970s.³³ Postwar renewal was itself a large-scale Keynesian intervention to keep the booming postwar economy from stalling.³⁴

The massive urban restructuring of Second Empire Paris points to a final theme of modern urban redevelopment. Part of the main thrust of the investment of capital and labor into the built environment under Haussmannization was to generate a new infrastructure, most notably the creation of a new system of transportation and communication for the empire.³⁵ The rail and road systems that linked France together—especially to the capital city—expanded rapidly. This modernization of transportation in the empire was coordinated with the newly regularized and linear roads in Paris that linked into the new omnibus system. A massive new telegraph infrastructure was also established. In addition, Haussmann devoted much of his energy to installing modernized sewage and water treatment systems. Modernizing infrastructure on a grand scale was the central theme of Haussmannization, which set the tone for urban restructuring in the modern world. In

³³ See Alan Brinkley, "The New Deal and the Idea of the State," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 85-121, especially 94-98.

³⁴ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 68-69.

³⁵ Harvey, *Paris*, 107-116.

postwar renewal, the construction of a vast new system of highways, the U.S. Interstate system, accompanied and often complemented urban renewal projects in the restructuring mid-century urban America. Much of the energy in urban renewal was not simply to remove large segments of the underclass urban population from the central business districts of American cities, but it was to modernize the infrastructure, the water, sewage, and electrical systems. In some urban renewal areas in Memphis, up to ninety percent of houses did not have indoor plumbing, and over sixty percent did not have running water.³⁶ The head of the Health Department in Memphis attributed the high rates of tuberculosis in the black community in Memphis—five times the white community’s rate in the 1930s—to the housing conditions.³⁷ These three key themes—the new scale of city planning after Haussmannization, the use of renewal as a tool for reinvesting surplus capital and labor, and the new infrastructure systems that attended most major urban redevelopment—supply the context for studying the American urban renewal program at mid-century.

Urban renewal would play out quite differently in the American context than in Second Empire France. The messiness of democracy ensured that. The complex history of urban renewal in the United States has been studied less than one might expect.³⁸ Urban historians are still determining the full effects that urban renewal had and continues to have on American cities. The history of the laws and conditions that led to urban renewal reveals the varying political and economic interests, both liberal and conservative, brought to bear on urban America. Through the legislation that led up to the Housing Act of 1949 (sometimes referred to as the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Act), these interests shaped American

³⁶ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, page 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁸ Most of the works on urban renewal are in the form of case studies. See footnote 1.

cities during the second half of the twentieth century. Mid-century renewal found its public policy roots in the New Deal. Public housing and slum removal originated in New Deal programs. Much of that policy had its intellectual foundations in the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA).³⁹ Lewis Mumford and architect Clarence Stein founded this group in 1923. Its central idea was industrial decentralization through the creation of garden cities planned on a regional scale, with the goal of increasing transportation and industrial efficiency. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's position on urban and regional planning was affected by his uncle Frederic Delano, who had been chairman of the committee on the Regional Plan for New York, a project that subscribed to RPAA ideas but with a more practical and incremental approach. Some New Deal programs were connected directly to the RPAA. In 1937, Catherine Bauer, an RPAA member, was highly influential on the housing legislation that Congress passed, the Wagner-Steagall Act, which, incidentally, would have much more influence on shaping postwar urban renewal than on American cities during the Depression. Other New Deal programs only had ideological affinity with the RPAA. Both the Resettlement Administration (RA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) used the power of eminent domain to create their projects, with the PWA pursuing a small slum removal program. The RA most closely followed the ideals of the RPAA. It built garden suburbs outside several cities. In urban history, the most well-known result of the RA was Greenbelt, Maryland, but despite creating one of the icons of the canon of twentieth-century urban and architectural history, the RA achieved little else. The cause of RA's stillborn arrival was twofold: First, it became a political liability for

³⁹ The RPAA's ultimate goal of efficiently planned garden communities where industry dispersed in a urban region planned for maximum efficiency never manifested in New Deal policy, but many of their ideas about slum clearance, decentralization, and decreasing population density did. For more on the RPAA see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 156-169.

FDR because there was no private involvement in the three RA garden cities that were built. Conservative politicians and their allies in the private sector argued in the media that this represented a turn toward socialism in the American federal government. Second, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the provisions in the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935, which gave the RA the authority of eminent domain, were invalid. What the RA lacked in tangible results, however, it surpassed in the influence of its ideas upon not only urban planning but also, and more importantly, on national urban policy and postwar renewal.⁴⁰ Rexford Guy Tugwell, a Columbia University economist who FDR chose to run the RA, said that the idea behind these new garden cities was “to go just outside centers of population, pick up cheap land, build a whole community, and entice people into them. Then go back into the cities and tear down whole slums and make parks of them.”⁴¹ Postwar renewal and the suburbanization that attended it operated along similar lines.

Several of the New Deal programs that continued during the war years played a major role in shaping postwar renewal. Most important among those was the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), run by Frederic Delano. The NRPB’s planning ideals were adapted to the expected postwar situation. A 1943 planning booklet, “Action for Cities,” proposed rehabilitating and rebuilding crumbling urban neighborhoods, which would lead to immediate jobs for soldiers returning from war.⁴² The National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) quickly formed opposition to NRPB’s proposal because it placed federal officials in a position to determine projects and controlled zoning and

⁴⁰ See Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 156-178.

⁴¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 195.

⁴² For more on the shift within New Deal liberalism toward a compensatory framework for the relationship between government and the economy see Brinkley, “The Idea of the State,” 105-112.

building decisions. NAREB would be highly influential in determining postwar renewal policies. In producing the 1937 Housing Act, Catherine Bauer joined forces with the construction unions to promote many of its measures, but NAREB and its research group, the Urban Land Institute (ULI), lobbied both for and against certain provisions in the bill. The compromise settled on temporary public housing provisions to house the urban poor combined with residential slum clearance that would clear land for redevelopment. NAREB and ULI pushed this particular aspect much further when Congress took up the 1949 and 1954 housing acts.⁴³

Beyond the policy foundations in the New Deal, the actual model or test case for postwar urban renewal policies was Pittsburgh. The City Engineer of Memphis shows the extent to which renewal across the country was modeled after Pittsburgh and the degree to which its perceived success was used in selling renewal to Memphians: “In Pittsburgh they are making wonderful progress and after the development is taking place, the conditions for those who did occupy the area and for those industries and those people that do occupy afterwards are so much better satisfied with conditions afterward than they were before.”⁴⁴ The booming economy of Pittsburgh’s steel industry of the 1920s bottomed out during the depression, which eventually led to a massive decline in property values in the city’s downtown—an \$18 million loss per year during the 1930s. This decline in value and the deterioration of property in downtown Pittsburgh led wealthy business leaders such as R.K. Mellon to organize and team with government leaders to begin redeveloping the downtown. Mellon ran the newly created Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association, which

⁴³ Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 247-254.

⁴⁴ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, page 12, Will Fowler quoted. Also see Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 79.

partnered with the Democratic political machine and Mayor David Lawrence. Their first major project was a traffic plan completed by the New York planner, Robert Moses. Part of this proposal was the creation of a park to replace an old railroad yard in the center of the downtown area.⁴⁵ The private-public partnership and the new plans to coordinate highway building with removing urban blight was a case study that NAREB used to push for certain goals in the 1949 Housing Act. Liberal forces in favor of public housing acquiesced to many of NAREB's ideas, believing that urban renewal might be the path to creating a new system of public housing in the United States.

In studying urban renewal in Philadelphia, Nancy Kleniewski found that renewal spurred investment in the downtown area, increased property values, transformed the city from industrial-era land use patterns to those typical of the era of flexible accumulation, and changed the composition of the people who lived in the downtown area from working-class blacks and ethnic whites to business-class whites.⁴⁶ Scribner's findings on Birmingham also reflect Kleniewski's. He concluded that urban renewal aided the city's transition from an industrial-based economy to a service-based economy.⁴⁷ These findings are typical of what happened across the country, but the details and results vary from city to city. Many of those differences tend to depend on other factors external to how the federal renewal programs operated in the individual cities. Urban renewal has the reputation of primarily removing black neighborhoods, but cities in the industrial North often removed newly immigrated white ethnic neighborhoods even more than black

⁴⁵ See Gregory J. Crowley, *The Politics of Place: Contentious Urban Redevelopment in Pittsburgh*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 31-57.

⁴⁶ Nancy Kleniewski, "From Industrial to Corporate City: The Role of Urban Renewal," in *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 205-222.

⁴⁷ Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

neighborhoods. In New Haven, Connecticut, the majority of those displaced by urban renewal were neighborhoods of more recently immigrated white ethnic groups such as Polish Americans.⁴⁸ Cities sold much of the redeveloped land for private industrial or commercial uses. The 1949 legislation prescribed that urban renewal projects should be “predominately residential,” but federal administrators circumvented this language because the legislation provided that any project that apportioned 51 percent of its funds to housing was authorized as 100 percent housing, thereby allowing as much as two-thirds of the federal funds to go to commercial projects.⁴⁹

The intellectual history of American postwar urban renewal, like that of the RPAA and the New Deal programs, promoted small population densities, a policy that some might consider anti-urban. The traditions of suspicion and outright contempt toward the messiness and contradictions of urban life have been foundational to a uniquely American urban sensibility. These traditions have roots that go back as far as John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill,” which shaped the Puritans’ unrealistically cohesive and idealistic vision of urban life.⁵⁰ The most well-known and intellectually influential anti-urbanist was Thomas Jefferson. In a letter to Benjamin Rush, Jefferson outlined his opinion of city life: “I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man. True, they nourish some of the elegant arts but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere, and less perfection in the others, with more health, virtue & freedom, would be my choice.”⁵¹ (No

⁴⁸ See Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.

⁴⁹ Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy*, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), 185.

⁵⁰ Architectural and urban historian, Spiro Kostof, traces anti-urbanism back to the Old Testament when God’s natural paradise of Eden is juxtaposed with Cain’s city that he built East of Eden. Spiro Kostof, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*, (New York: Bulfinch, 1991), 36.

⁵¹ Thomas Jefferson, “To Dr. Benjamin Rush,” in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, New York: Library of America, 1984), 1081.

word from Mr. Jefferson on whether life on the plantation was pestilential to the morals.) Jefferson represents the most extreme anti-urban views, but similar sentiments abound in American intellectual and city planning history from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Frank Lloyd Wright and from Frederick Law Olmsted to the New Urbanists. Christine Boyer describes anti-urban ideas as rooted in the Enlightenment: “Those who held Enlightenment ideals projected that scientific and technical instruments of rationality would control chaotic urban form and provide an emancipatory public sphere and an improved quality of life for all citizens in newly formed democratic states.”⁵² These sentiments form the underlying ideology of modern planning from Ebenezer Howard’s garden cities to Le Corbusier’s “architecture or revolution”⁵³ Jane Jacobs refers to these planners and their disciples as “decentrists,” and attacks them for their anti-urbanism.⁵⁴ Their most transformative expression was in the vast American urban renewal program in the 1950s through the 1970s, but an underlying ideology that Jacobs would call anti-urban cannot explain fully the program of urban renewal.

The policy of postwar renewal represented a set of values that concerned not simply the definition of what a city is or should be, but the definition of community and of society. Anthropologists describe policy as the political expression of a community’s collective aspirations.⁵⁵ What were the aspirations of American society that the policy of urban renewal reveals? Supporters believed that there would be a clear benefit to business and industry from urban renewal. It would provide the land in a dense urban core—cleared at

⁵² M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 11.

⁵³ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, Frederick Etchells, trans. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1986.

⁵⁴ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Modern Library, 1961.

⁵⁵ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 106–107.

the expense of the government—to redevelop the CBD, reverse declining property values, and make the city profitable again, but there was more than economic gain at the heart of renewal. The policy reflected a clear belief about what the urban community should be. Postwar renewal and the public policy that established it sought to create the illusion of a particular vision of the urban community by attempting to excise from America’s urban centers the appearance of want.⁵⁶ When put into practice, renewal often had a racial tinge to it. By eliminating the public image of blight and poverty, many believed, that white bourgeois society could reclaim the downtown that became surrounded by poor black neighborhoods in the city’s oldest housing stock. The racial element to urban renewal in the cities of the American South was different from the rest of the country. In the American South, a place already imbued with the anti-urban ideals of Jefferson and the Southern Agrarians as well as a long history of being a predominately rural society, the values of community were complicated by *de jure* segregation. Grace Hale’s *Making Whiteness*, brilliantly summarizes the forces that created Jim Crow:

Segregation...became the foundation of southern society and the central metaphor of southern life because it balanced white demand for a racially figured power, the spread of the new national ways of buying and selling that had originated in the Northeast, and African Americans’ insistence that freedom yield tangible benefits over slavery. Segregation provided a way to order the more impersonal social relations and potentially more subversive consuming practices of the new southern town life. White southerners nurtured their new racist culture to contain the centrifugal forces of a much less isolated, less rural world.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ I borrow Eric Avila’s description of urban renewal as creating the illusion of community, an illusion that he likens unto the false sense of communal small town American one can purchase at Disneyland. See Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 145.

⁵⁷ Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, (New York: Vintage, 1998), 124-125.

The lasting influence of segregation and its legal framework in the Jim Crow laws and the doctrine of separate but equal are evident in the story of postwar urban renewal in the American South.

Segregated Memphis

The urban and social landscape in Memphis, like the rest of the American South in the 1950s was deeply segregated by forces both *de jure* and *de facto*. It permeated every level of life. For example, a local schoolteacher, Lonnie Briscoe, was verbally abused by a police officer during a traffic stop when she wrote “Mrs.” in front of her name. The officer responded, “We don’t call any nigger ‘Mrs.’” He continued to berate her saying that all she was doing as a teacher was “teaching apes, nothing but prostitutes, liars, thieves, and murderers.”⁵⁸ Another example of the extent of segregation in Memphis is the case of a black war veteran who walked into a white café in 1953 and asked to buy a pack of cigarettes and matches. As was customary, the man was turned away because the café “didn’t serve Negroes,” but the incident did not end there. Directly after leaving “he was turned over to the police by a gang of over-solicitous white bystanders, who grabbed and held him until police arrived.” After being arrested, he was fined \$16 for violating Jim Crow laws.⁵⁹ Cross burnings to intimidate the African American community or specific individuals were common.⁶⁰ Foote Homes, the segregated public housing facility, was the target of a cross burning in retaliation for blacks who tried to enter Memphis State

⁵⁸ “Police Insults for Using ‘Mrs.’: ‘We Don’t Call Any Negro Mrs.’,” *Tri-State Defender*, October 20, 1956.

⁵⁹ “Seek Truce in ‘Gray Area’: Mayor Turns to MRA for Help,” *Tri-State Defender*, September 5, 1953.

⁶⁰ The article “Cleric to Keep Glenview Home,” *Tri-State Defender*, February 15, 1958 mentions several instances of cross burnings across the city in 1957 and 1958.

University, which would not be integrated until 1959.⁶¹ The council of civic clubs for black neighborhoods organized a boycott of an event at the Ellis Auditorium because the only advance tickets for sale to blacks were in the top gallery.⁶² The legal group Memphis Citizens Committee for the Promotion of Justice formed in response to an incident at a white restaurant, Patio 6. Six employees of the restaurant quit in protest over the restaurant's customer attraction tool, a black mammy figure ringing a bell outside. When the employees decided to quit in protest, however, the owner locked them inside the restaurant and held them until the police arrived to fine them for "disturbing the peace."⁶³

Just as in other cities in the Deep South, Jim Crow had become so well entrenched in Memphis that imagining their city without it was unthinkable for most of the white community and was a seemingly impossible goal for the black community. Just eight short years after the first public hearings on the early urban renewal projects, where voices of opposition in the black community were aired in a public setting, the first boycotts of the Civil Rights movement reached Memphis. A series of boycotts and sit-ins began in 1960. Students at LeMoyne and Owen Colleges started the sit-ins, and the collegiate and city chapters of the NAACP fostered them. The NAACP was a powerful force in the city. The Memphis branch was established in 1917 when James Weldon Johnson traveled to Memphis after the lynching of Ell Persons whose severed head was displayed on Beale Street as a warning to the black community. In the Memphis of the 1950s and 1960s, the NAACP was the unified public voice of the black community. Like it did in cities across the South, the NAACP organized sit-ins to change the nature of public space in the city.

⁶¹ "Cross Burned at Foote Project," *Tri-State Defender*, July 3, 1954.

⁶² "Club Council Hits Bias: Jim Crow at Auditorium Is Target," *Tri-State Defender*, April 9, 1955.

⁶³ "All-Out Fight Looms in 'Patio 6' Case: Cleric Lead in Move for Justice," *Tri-State Defender*, April 30, 1955.

The fight over public space that is so well-documented in Civil Rights history played out at the same time that a fight over private space and right to the city was occurring with urban renewal.

The fight over public space in Memphis, however, did not lead to the serious and often deadly racial struggles nor the widely publicized demonstrations that happened in many other cities across the Deep South during the 1950s and the early to mid-1960s. Like Atlanta, the city that Memphis tried so hard to emulate, Memphis had a robust biracial group, a moderate mayor, and an influential newspaper editor, who all devoted themselves to avoiding major racial conflict. Atlanta's mayor from 1937 to 1962, William Berry Hartsfield, famously claimed in 1955 that Atlanta was "a city too busy to hate."⁶⁴ As in Atlanta, the single greatest motivating factor for preventing racial tension in Memphis was so that it would not hinder commerce. Most of the work toward desegregation on the part of moderates in Memphis was accomplished with this goal in mind. Southern cities like Atlanta and Memphis, ever mindful of the need for Northern capital investment for growth since the first day of boosterism of the "New South," were highly conscious of the public image of their city. The threat of the appearance of poor race relations meant that white leaders would strive to maintain the façade of racial tranquility. In a report on Memphis for the Southern Regional Council (SRC), Benjamin Muse, an editorial columnist for the *Washington Post*, shows the extent to which commercial concerns forced Memphis into a position of moderation. He argues that the mayhem that surrounded the school

⁶⁴ Atlanta's mayor William Berry Hartsfield, like Memphis's Edmund Orgill was a proponent of segregation, but both leaders along with their respective Chambers of Commerce desired order and good press more than maintaining segregation. Hartsfield stated that Atlanta's goal was "to make no business, no industry, no educational or social organization ashamed of the dateline 'Atlanta.' " For more on Hartsfield's views regarding race see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: University Press, 2005) 25-41.

desegregation battle in nearby Little Rock was on the minds of civic leaders in Memphis: “The turmoil in Little Rock and the damage to that city’s economy in the late 1950s had a salutary effect upon the thinking of Memphians.”⁶⁵

Of the groups and individuals that worked toward easing racial tension for the benefit of commerce in Memphis, the biracial group known as the Memphis Committee on Community Relations (MCCR) had the greatest effect. This group formed after the Greater Memphis Race Relations Committee (GMRRC) failed to function effectively. Supporters of Mayor Orgill formed the GMRRC in March of 1956, but the group failed because several white members of the committee refused to attend integrated meetings. The committee divided into two working committees drawn along racial lines, but representatives from both of the segregated committees met so frequently that many prominent Memphians began to view the GMRRC as a voice of moderation on desegregation. The committee dissolved in 1958 when a prominent Memphis banker became chair of the GMRRC and his bank’s board of directors nearly succeeded in forcing him out. After this incident, the group quietly dispersed, but soon after, many of its core members formed the MCCR. Many white members of the MCCR, including its chief political leader, Edmund Orgill, were also members of the Chamber of Commerce. The MCCR’s charter of 1958 reveals the extent to which racial moderation on the part of whites was a function of business promotion and city boosterism:

This is an interracial committee organized for the purpose of avoiding and relieving racial tensions in Memphis and Shelby County. The purpose of our group is stated in its charter and constitution as follows: ‘to provide a meeting place for calm discussion and such responsible action as may be agreed upon to preserve order, under law, as interpreted by courts of

⁶⁵ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 2. Benjamin Muse, *Memphis*, (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1964), 3.

competent jurisdiction and the peace, happiness and continued progress of the great and growing City of Memphis and all its people.”⁶⁶

To this end, the committee actively pursued an agenda that would temporarily placate African Americans’ demands while requiring only minimal concessions from the white community. The MCCR pursued a policy of voluntary efforts on the part of whites and white-owned businesses in desegregating, believing that the city would avoid commercial disruption if there was the illusion of constant progress. Among the different branches of the MCCR, the Employment Committee worked to get concessions from white business-owners in Memphis. The committee encouraged Memphis retail institutions to hire black salespeople. The committee also pressured distribution companies and manufacturing sales companies to hire blacks in the area of sales. These committee efforts were designed so that black employment would be visible to the public.⁶⁷

The response of African Americans to these efforts was tepid. Black leaders believed more force was needed to speed the process along.⁶⁸ By 1966, the NAACP pressured the MCCR’s Employment Committee to do more about the mere token black hiring that many businesses used to satisfy the MCCR’s earlier persuasions.⁶⁹ The MCCR secured other concessions for the desegregation of public facilities and private businesses whose establishments served as public spaces, but only after two years of boycotts and sit-ins from a newly organized black community.⁷⁰ **(Fig. 11 & 12)** The City Commission

⁶⁶ University of Memphis Special Collections, Manuscript Collection 93, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁶⁷ For more on the MCCR see Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*.

⁶⁸ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 8, Minutes of the Employment Committee Meeting, May 7, 1963.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Minutes of the Employment Committee Meeting, September 21, 1966.

⁷⁰ “Sitdown Closes Memphis McClellans,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1960. “Sitdown Moves to Memphis Library,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1960. “New Sit-Ins: 23 Arrests at Cossitt and Brooks,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 22, 1960. “Negroes Urged to Avoid Main Street 2 Days a Week,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 22, 1960. “Memphis Negroes Urged: ‘Don’t Go Downtown at All,’” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 30, 1960. “4 in New Sit-in at Library,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 4, 1960. “5 Arrested at Pink Palace,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 15, 1960. “5 \$51 Fines for Museum Visit,”

desegregated public buses in September of 1960, libraries in October, and the city zoo in December. The city museums, art gallery, and some public parks (but not any public recreational facilities) were desegregated as well.⁷¹ Privately owned businesses that operated in public spaces began to be desegregated in 1962 and 1963. Downtown stores and lunch counters, hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, and restrooms were all desegregated.

Tellingly, the MCCR achieved their success by avoiding, as much as possible, publicity of the desegregation of these publicly and privately owned public spaces. Both Edward Meeman and Frank Ahlgren, the editors of the *Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal*, were on the MCCR and vowed to keep any mention of a facility or type of business that was about to desegregate out of the papers. Members of the MCCR bragged that “the almost unanimous opinion of our committee is that the secret of what we have accomplished is the fact that we have had practically no publicity either about our meetings, the matter on which we are working or what has been accomplished.” The success of the lack of publicity is evident in the fact that it took three months for anything to appear in the papers regarding the 1963 desegregation of movie theaters. Even then, it only appeared in a letter to the editor.⁷² Most of the newspaper articles dealing with desegregation summarized what the city and civic leaders had been doing, “and these [were] presented in a language tending to make the public proud of the progress that Memphis [was] making.”⁷³

Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 16, 1960. “Latest of Sit-Ins Is at Greyhound,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 23, 1960. “Negroes Arrested in Bus Incident,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 29, 1960. “Negroes Plea: Open Churches to All,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 29, 1960. “Negro Marchers Are Led by Boy,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 17, 1961. “Negroes Parade on Main Street,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 7, 1961. “Six Pickets Return to Tea Room After Yesterday’s Flare-Up,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 7, 1964.

⁷¹ James H. White, “All Memphis Parks Are Desegregated,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 30, 1963.

⁷² UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 1, Notes from a May 1963 MCCR meeting.

⁷³ Muse, *Memphis*, 27.

In accord with the MCCR's desire to keep any type of desegregation away from the public's ears, many of the white members of the MCCR were publicly supportive of segregation. Fire and police commissioner Claude Armour was publicly a staunch segregationist but worked with the MCCR to ease racial tensions "because negotiation lessened the police problem."⁷⁴ The most well-known charter member of the committee with publically stated segregationist views was Mayor Orgill. The draft of a speech for Orgill's aborted reelection campaign shows that the mayor intended to reassure the public of his "moderate" segregationist views:

I, along with other members of the present City Commission, am on record as being in favor of continued segregation.... However, as far as I know, no Commissioner has ever said, if and when a court of final jurisdiction has rendered a decision on a specific Memphis case which is contrary to his personal views, that he would refuse to accept such a decision, and refuse to use his influence to prevent violence. I believe that this policy of the present City Commission has been a major factor in maintaining our fine race relations, and I pledge my best efforts to a continuance of it.⁷⁵

In contrast to the hardliners on the issue of segregation, Orgill urges the acceptance of court decisions on segregation but *only* in cases dealing specifically with Memphis. This reaction to *Brown* and other Supreme Court decisions on segregation was common in the states of the upper South. Local officials refused to comply with the Court's decisions, even though they were nationally binding. Excluding Virginia, upper South states did not participate in the Massive Resistance movement and thus were willing to accept desegregation if it was forced upon them specifically.⁷⁶ Eventually, the Memphis chapter of the NAACP brought

⁷⁴ Muse, *Memphis*, 47.

⁷⁵ UMSC, MS 87, Box 16, Folder IX A.

⁷⁶ See Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1969. and Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds. *The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

a school desegregation case in federal court on March 31, 1960. In March of 1962, the Sixth Circuit ordered the Memphis board of education to submit a plan for school desegregation that complied with federal law.⁷⁷ That same year, the Sixth Circuit decided another desegregation case, *Watson v. City of Memphis*. The Supreme Court granted cert to hear this case, and its 1963 decision was influential on the desegregation of public facilities across the South.⁷⁸ It served as a warning for state and local governments by attacking the go-slow policy pursued by the South at the time: “This Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, never contemplated that the concept of ‘deliberate speed’ would countenance indefinite delay in elimination of racial barriers in public schools, let alone other public facilities not involving the same physical problems or comparable conditions.”⁷⁹ Despite *Watson* and the rulings on school desegregation from the Sixth Circuit, desegregation in Memphis, especially in its public schools, was slow and mostly token because of Southern gradualism. This gradualism was deeply rooted in a fundamental inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that there was a larger social problem.

In a 1963 letter to MCCR chairman, Arthur McCain, Memphis insurance man and fellow MCCR member, Ewing Carruthers exemplifies the spirit of Southern gradualism: “I see no crisis, and if we judge from History, then in the last ten years we have accomplished far more than has ever been accomplished before. As far as I am concerned there is no crisis and nothing can be accomplished by such emergency tactics that were

⁷⁷ Memphis did not actually move beyond token desegregation until the 1973 court ordered busing. For more on the desegregation of Memphis schools see Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 84-101 and Willie W. Herenton, “A Historical Study of School Desegregation in the Memphis City Schools, 1954-1970.” Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University, 1971. *Northcross v. Bd. of Ed. of City of Memphis, Tenn.*, 302 F.2d 818 (6th Cir. 1962).

⁷⁸ The Supreme Court already handed down a decision on public facilities in the case *Dawson v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore* (1955). In fact, the NAACP President H.T. Lockard sent a letter to then Mayor Walter Chandler that in light of *Dawson* the NAACP requests full compliance in Memphis.

⁷⁹ *Watson v. City of Memphis*, page 373 U. S. 530.

suggested [by the NAACP].”⁸⁰ These tactics of the NAACP induced Chamber of Commerce whites to begin making concessions to desegregation. The most successful argument that the MCCR used to persuade segregationist whites was that preemptory desegregation that was not court-ordered would diminish the power and influence of the NAACP.⁸¹ Fear of the NAACP’s power to disrupt commerce became tangible for white elites in Memphis during the protests of 1960 and 1961. After forty-one students from LeMoyne and Owen colleges were arrested in March of 1960 because they protested the segregation of the public libraries by walking into two all-white libraries, the NAACP supported a series of boycotts and sit-ins across the city that lasted until late 1961. After the 1960-61 series of boycotts and sit-ins, the NAACP in Memphis gained significant power over the white elites by threatening commercial disruptions. Fear on the part of elite whites extended to the threat of riots within the black community. NAACP President Jesse Turner threatened the white members of the MCCR in 1966 that riots were possible after the *Commercial Appeal* published a photograph of eight young black males lying prostrate surrounded by white police officers.⁸² The portent of boycotts and violence pushed the white business community in Memphis in the direction of concessions on desegregation. Two aspects of desegregation, however, proved intractable for whites in Memphis: school desegregation and residential integration. Anything beyond token school desegregation was a non-starter for the white civic leaders of Memphis. Despite protests in 1963 and court rulings, Memphis’s public schools did not see significant desegregation until court-

⁸⁰ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 1, Letter dated July 19, 1963 from Ewing Carruthers to Arthur W. McCain

⁸¹ Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 91.

⁸² “Memphis Community Relations Committee: Employment Committee,” UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 5.

enforced busing in 1972. (**Fig. 13**) Residential segregation only increased in Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s, the topic of Chapter Two.

The MCCR received hostility from whites in Memphis. This excerpt of a letter addressed to MCCR chairman, Arthur McCain, is not only representative of the hostility felt by many to the work of the MCCR but also of Southern racism in general:

Few white people like what you are doing after all you aren't a true southerner but if trouble comes the negro won't spare your life any quicker than mine. The Negro is a growing fearful race and removed from the jungles. My yardman went to his mother's funeral in Mississippi. She had 104 grandchildren. How many have you!⁸³

Any concessions on desegregation were met by a chorus of antipathy from much of the white population, which is why the MCCR worked so hard to avoid any publicity. Mayor Orgill learned the hard way that giving the public in Memphis a voice on issues that dealt with race was foolish. In February of 1956, the newly elected mayor proposed nominating Dr. J.E. Walker, an African American, to the board of the public John Gaston Hospital. In a television interview, Orgill publicly announced the nomination saying that since African Americans made up forty percent of the city and eighty-five percent of the patients of that hospital that it was fitting that they should be involved with governing the hospital and participating in government in general. Not surprisingly, Orgill's decision to make a public issue out of the Walker nomination proved a costly political misstep. His support of black representation on government boards and other instances of moderation on integration issues lost him the support of many conservative Democrats and union leaders. One union leader, John Vesey, wrote to the mayor after his decision to nominate Dr. Walker to the public hospital board saying, "I have done turned against you nigger-loving flat head."⁸⁴

⁸³ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 8

⁸⁴ UMSC, MS 87, Box 16, Folder 8, Letter from John Vesey.

When Orgill ran for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1958, his moderation on racial issues cost him the election. Staunch segregationist John T. Taylor succeeded in pushing sitting Governor Frank G. Clement's chosen candidate and eventual winner, Buford Ellington, far to the right on racial issues. In making the announcement of the Walker nomination public, Orgill also asked for the input from the citizens of Memphis. After many phone calls to the mayor's home that night as well as several fire alarms called in to his address, the mayor's office began to receive the feedback for which he asked. The overwhelming majority of the feedback was in opposition to the nomination. The responses from middle- and lower-class whites are quite telling. They speak to the level to which segregation was entrenched in the Deep South. Their anxieties show what desegregation meant to them. Most importantly, their responses are foundational not only to what the white response would be to the 1960s and early 1970s, especially court-enforced busing in the early 1970s, but also show the level to which whites would go during the 1950s all the way through the 1990s in maintaining residential segregation and civic, political, and educational segregation.

The first common theme among the responses was that desegregation would lead to miscegenation. "Interracial" marriage and other sexual images of "race-mixing" was one of the central concerns in racist ideology. Allan Asher, the grandson of a former Memphis mayor said, "What does the negro want? They have everything now that the whites have except sleeping with them and that will come before long." A Mrs. Bailey echoes these fears:

Isen't your mother a white woman? At least we though so. Isen't your wife from the wonderful white state of Mississippi? Did you think you was marring a Negro woman! I don't think you did; now maby you have changed your mind; A negro woman would suit you better for a wife than a

white one would. Now this is the possision you are asking for: when you stand for Integration for other folks. It seem like you are not satisfied with war we all ready have; you are inviting war here in Tennessee. [sic.]

These letters demonstrate the extent to which fear of miscegenation was at the heart of much of the anxiety about desegregation, especially in public schools. Other letters simply believed that blacks should not be involved in the white governing structure because of a firm belief in white supremacy: “we don’t need them in *our* government.” Taxes and falsely perceived inequity in the post-New Deal safety net was central to some concerns over blacks serving in managerial governmental positions: “I am not prejudiced toward negros. But I am opposed to this. I feel that the negro here in Memphis has been coddled too long. They look to the white race for everything free; there is not 15% of them that pay any kind of tax, except the state sales tax.... I say the negro is entitled to just the things they pay for. If they want all to share alike, then we should all pay alike [sic].”⁸⁵ Many appealed to their Christian faith, which they believed never advocates “racial mixing.” Finally, a common trope across the South that shows up in these letters and among other places in Memphis was to tie desegregation to Cold War anxieties about Communism. One example includes a racist pamphlet passed out in the parking lot of the International Harvesters Company in Memphis in March of 1960, which says to “let the Negro employ the Negro ... buy his needs from the Negro. Only then will they realize how well off they were before the existence of their ‘COMMUNISTIC, AGITATING, STRIFE INCITING’ NAACP!”⁸⁶ **(Figs. 14 & 15)** Other racist organizations inundated the mayor’s office with allegations about the NAACP and communism: “We must oppose any encroachment on the rights of

⁸⁵ UMSC, MS 87, Box 16, Folder 8. Four letters cited respectively: Allan Asher, February 28, 1956; Mrs. Bailey, February 26, 1956; Mrs. C.N. Oswalt, February 27, 1956; and Earnest Leslie, February 28, 1956.

⁸⁶ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 14.

the white race by the Communist inspired and partly financed NAACP.”⁸⁷ In the end, Mayor Orgill withdrew the nomination as a result of the public outcry and the opposition of all four City Commissioners.

Urban Renewal Begins

The City Commissioners of Memphis began studying the possibility of urban renewal—under the authority of Title I of the 1949 Housing Act and Tennessee Chapter 114 of 1945—on April 18, 1950, but the Crump regime opposed the plans made by the MHA.⁸⁸ The very first urban redevelopment program in Memphis, however, began in 1934, when the city used the New Deal’s Public Works Administration (PWA) to initiate a public housing and slum clearance program. A Works Progress Administration (WPA) survey executed in 1940 revealed that 46,753 of the 83,540 dwellings in Memphis were substandard, but the program that the city and the PWA pursued during the 1930s and 1940s mainly centered on building segregated public housing facilities on small, thinly populated areas on the north and east side of the downtown area. Unlike the urban renewal efforts of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, these programs did not clear large sections of population or dense neighborhoods.

Like cities across the country, Memphis began its urban renewal programs as a means to procure federal largess and as a tool to expurgate neighborhoods that city officials deemed slums. They did so in order to, in Harvey’s terms, “preserve or enhance achieved

⁸⁷ UMSC, MS 87, Box 16, Folder 9. From a letter to Mayor Edmund Orgill and the City Commissioners, dated February 14, 1956, from the Memphis Chapter president of Americans United for Patriotic Action, Dr. James A. Franklin, Jr.

⁸⁸ Tucker, *Memphis since Crump*, 92.

models of production and consumption, ...patterns of social relations, ...physical infrastructures, and the cultural qualities of living and working.”⁸⁹ In an era of increasing globalization of competition in the capitalist system, cities such as Memphis wanted to enhance their infrastructure while creating land value by destroying the stagnant values of some properties and improving the city’s visual and cultural appeal. In Memphis, the primary goal was to clear unprofitable and unsightly areas in a ring surrounding the downtown. They also pursued renewal to make room for redevelopment that would be profitable to the local economy and, often, to the political class and their supporters. The earliest renewal projects had slum clearance and, in the planning phase, public and private low-income housing as a goal. Under the Orgill Administration in the late 1950s, however, the MHA pursued renewal projects with the goal of creating public works and infrastructure projects, while still maintaining the goal of slum removal. Projects begun under mayor Orgill led to the University of Tennessee Medical Center, Baptist Hospital, a new government plaza, and St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. It was not until the later 1960s, under the Loeb administration, that urban renewal reverted to the original approach of the early 1950s. In 1967, the urban renewal project to clear neighborhoods around the famous Beale Street began with few long-term purposes other than the removal of residential neighborhoods surrounding the street, the subject of Chapter 4.

Federal postwar renewal in Memphis began on June 11, 1952, when the MHA officially declared what became known as the Railroad Avenue and the Jackson Avenue Projects as the first two areas of urban renewal.⁹⁰ The legal process for urban renewal

⁸⁹ Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, 148.

⁹⁰ The Jackson Avenue Project is often referred to as Tennessee R-3. The Railroad Avenue Project was first known as SCUR (Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal) Area Number 1 and later as Railroad Avenue (Tennessee R-8). Box 312 of the Urban Renewal Materials at the Shelby County Archives.

followed several steps. First, the local agency—the MHA in the case of Memphis—that wanted to pursue urban renewal with funding from the 1949 Housing Act must submit a Grant Application. If an application was approved from the HUD office with jurisdiction, then the local agency received funds to pursue a feasibility study. During the planning process, local agencies would decide what properties within the project zone to acquire and demolish and which to leave untouched. Once the planning stage was complete, the local agency sent the Loan and Grant Application to HUD. This application showed the findings of the planning stage. If the application was accepted the project was cleared to commence. The acquisition and relocation phase of renewal then started. The local agency would then negotiate with the property owners for the “fair-market value” of their properties based on real estate appraisals that were supposed to have been made with no conflict of interest. Once the properties were acquired the local agency supplied businesses and residents, including renters, the expense of relocating to another location or dwelling. After acquisition and relocation, the final phase included demolishing “substandard” properties, making public improvements such as paving streets, installing sidewalks, and providing city services to the properties, and then placing the property for sale. The potential buyers were supposed to redevelop the property in keeping with the plans described in the Loan and Grant Application, but in many cases, this was overlooked if the city could resell the property for any kind of improvement.

The Railroad Avenue project zone was in an older black neighborhood that surrounded one of the main railroad lines south and east of downtown. It was just beyond the outer edge of the downtown area. The location was adjacent to an earlier public housing project. The Jackson Avenue Project was much closer to downtown, directly north of the

white housing project, Lauderdale Courts, and the planned route of the new Interstate 40, at the time often called the “Interregional Express Highway.” (**Figs. 16 & 17**) Much of the work on these projects did not get under way until 1955 during the Orgill administration, and even then, the work was slow. In the Jackson Avenue area, just less than 50 percent of the households were relocated by 1960, and whites in the project area were far more likely to be relocated than blacks.⁹¹ The process for those families, however, began in 1952, when the city held public hearings to address questions from citizens about what was going to happen. Ed Barry, the Chairman of the MHA, publicly announced that the chief reason for selecting the Railroad Avenue area was “because of the dilapidated condition of the housing in the area.”⁹² The MHA submitted both the Jackson and Railroad Avenue projects to the Executive Committee of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce for their opinion and approval. The Chamber unanimously approved them because they made provisions for a large amount of business development. Renewal had broad support amongst elite and politically engaged whites as all fifty-two of the white civic clubs pledged their support for urban renewal at the “Forward Memphis” dinner on November 29, 1955.⁹³ Both projects were nearly exclusively in black neighborhoods, though some whites did live in the Jackson Avenue project. In the Railroad Avenue area, there were 570 families, and only two of them were white. The housing stock was old, with the majority dating to the 1880s and 1890s. (**Figs. 18 & 19**) The population density was high in these areas, as was common in many African American urban neighborhoods across the country. The Railroad Avenue

⁹¹ 56 percent of the whites had been relocated by 1960, while only 43 percent of the black population was relocated. SCA, UR Files, Box 108, “Final Narrative Relocation Report Jackson Avenue Urban Renewal Project Tenn. R-3”

⁹² SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952.

⁹³ Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 79.

project had a population density of over 30 persons per acre—or nearly 19,300 per square mile! An MHA staffer emphatically declared that urban renewal “wouldn’t permit” a high population density when the land was redeveloped. City officials claimed that the high density in the Railroad area led to traffic congestion, which the urban renewal scheme planned to alleviate by widening some streets and relocating businesses. Georgia Avenue was a major street connecting Crump Avenue to the railroad station and the freight station, so the city widened the street and the businesses surrounding it were forced to relocate.

The MHA’s original intent for the Railroad Avenue project was to clear all 1,728 residents from the 58-acre site and rezone the entire area for industrial purposes, but “it became apparent that this proposal would displace an unreasonable number of families—forcing them from their employment and cultural associations.”⁹⁴ The MHA changed their initial plans to allow 24 acres of the site for multiple family housing for blacks because of the project’s “close proximity to the downtown area which offers industrial employment to the Negro population.”⁹⁵ The MHA believed that “in view of the present overall shortage of non-white housing in the Memphis market and desirability of the proposed site, it seems reasonable to contemplate a favorable market experience for non-white rental units provided on this site.”⁹⁶ In documents submitted to the federal government, the MHA went so far as to claim that “the redevelopment project will provide approximately 350 Negro units,” but they go on to say that “experience has indicated that Negro families, in a redeveloped area, first have a tendency to relocate themselves within the general area; but

⁹⁴ SCA, UR Files, Box 312, “Railroad Avenue Area: Redevelopment Plan, Narrative Report,” April 30, 1952, 1.

⁹⁵ SCA, UR Files, Box 312, “Statement of Marketability: Residential and Industrial Reuse in the Railroad Avenue Area,” January 25, 1952, 2.

⁹⁶ SCA, UR Files, Box 312, “Railroad Avenue Area: Redevelopment Plan, Narrative Report,” April 30, 1952, 2.

that, in time, they move to other areas.”⁹⁷ In actuality, the MHA’s initial plans changed because of the provision in the housing act that mandated 51 percent of the money apportioned go to residential redevelopment. Their claim in the federal documents that 350 “Negro units” would emerge from the project was also in response to the 51 percent requirement. In actuality, there were no private investments in residential developments in the Railroad Avenue area as part of the project. In spite of zoning a 24-acre portion as class B residential, and despite the claims of the MHA’s marketability survey and federal application, there was no “market” for building multifamily dwellings within the project zone.⁹⁸ The Board of Education bought nearly half of the site for an elementary school at almost one-third of the land’s value, while distribution companies purchased the remaining portions of the land, setting up warehouses near the rail lines.

Like the Memphis Committee on Community Relations (MCCR) in the 1950s and 1960s, public officials kept news about urban renewal projects to a minimum. The law required public notice to be given to those affected by urban renewal for the purpose of public hearings, but wider publicity as to what urban renewal would entail was kept mostly out of the press in the case of the earliest projects. Case studies in other parts of the country reveal that the triumph of urban renewal during the 1950s and early 1960s was its low profile in the press.⁹⁹ It was not until later in the 1960s when urban renewal became publicly unpopular that it received extensive coverage in local newspapers. While limiting information on the ramifications of renewal, public officials simultaneously struggled to

⁹⁷ SCA, UR Files, Box 279, “Application for Temporary Loan and Capital Grant: Railroad Avenue Area,” 1952, 5.

⁹⁸ A portion of the property was deemed “unsuitable for residential use” because of subterranean conditions. SCA, UR Files, Box 222, “Final Report: Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area,” 1965, 3.

⁹⁹ See Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.

convince the families that lived in the urban renewal areas that the projects were going to benefit them. At a bare minimum, officials needed resignation on the part of residents, since open hostility could hinder redevelopment and would potentially lead to larger problems. A detailed transcript of the first urban renewal public hearing survives and provides a unique glimpse into not only how the white power structure tried to sell urban renewal to the black community, but also how the community reacted to the renewal plans. It is well worth taking an in-depth look at this hearing.

The Housing Act required local officials to hold public hearings, and the first forum held in Memphis was on June 2, 1952. **(Fig. 20)** Several themes emerge from this extended hearing. The first is that city leaders attempted to appeal to what they perceived should be these citizens' sense of civic pride, asking them to envision Memphis differently. The fact that the citizens that these officials were addressing were unable to enter their city's public libraries, museums, golf courses, parks, and the city's best public schools was lost upon those white leaders. Officials asked the black citizens of Memphis affected by urban renewal to join them in a new conception of the city, but the leaders provided no reason for them to do so. This disconnect between how civic leaders and members of the black community conceived of Memphis led both groups to talk past one another during much of the hearing. Second, white officials were cognizant of the racial tensions that would arise from beginning the process of removing a densely populated all-black neighborhood, and, therefore, white leaders appealed to the black community, attempting to convince them that they had the community's interests at heart. In the process, white officials often belittled these citizens with overt paternalism. Third, the response of the black community reveals the tragedy of removing black homeowners from their small pieces of land.

Property values in these neighborhoods were extremely low due to the poor condition of the housing stock, practices such as redlining, and the fact that, in the segregated South, black neighborhoods were well below the market value of white neighborhoods—some of which would have to transition to accommodate the overflow. The “fair market value” of these homeowners’ property was too far below the market value of pieces of property that might be available in other neighborhoods. This meant that homeownership among black Memphians declined during the period of urban renewal. It also meant that those displaced from urban renewal projects were left to crowd into a housing market already insufficient to meet the demands of the black community in segregated Memphis, a demand not met by the meager public housing constructed at the time. The final theme that this hearing shows is that questions over who would financially profit from urban redevelopment surfaced from the beginning. White officials, concerned over the obvious appearance of impropriety, defended themselves often without prompting.

After receiving the new powers granted by the 1949 Housing Act, white civic leaders began creating a new vision for their city. To encourage needed capital investments from outside the region, officials wanted to increase Memphis’s marketability by improving their CBD. They did so by moving poor neighborhoods to less visible areas—away from the downtown—while simultaneously freeing up cheap land to encourage industrial and commercial development. To perform this sleight of hand, civic leaders invited black residents of urban renewal zones to share their vision of Memphis. Former Mayor Walter Chandler tried to induce the crowd, largely consisting of poor African Americans, into believing urban renewal would benefit them:

This is a great opportunity to further the building of a great city not only that, but it is a great opportunity to decrease crime and misery and

degradation and dirt and swelt and it is also a great opportunity to give possibilities and happiness of all the people in this area.... I'm not unmindful of some of the people who live there prefer to live where they are and prefer not to change. After all is said and done some of you have lived in areas in which condemnation proceedings have taken place for the good of the whole community. The law provides that the individuals must give way to the betterment of the whole community of the whole city of the whole area. That is what is involved here. All of us must make sacrifices, privately and individually for the growth of communities in which we live.¹⁰⁰

Of course, after two decades of urban renewal playing out across the country, what Chandler said was not simply false but, in fact, the complete opposite of what actually happened. Urban renewal did not decrease crime and misery; it did not provide great opportunities for happiness to the people in urban renewal areas; and it did not provide for the betterment of the whole community. In the case of the Railroad Avenue project, urban renewal turned a closely-knit, densely populated poor black neighborhood into a mostly industrial area with a new public school adjacent to an existing public housing project. Chandler's line of reasoning, that some must sacrifice for the betterment of the whole city was a common theme surrounding urban renewal. White officials asked black communities displaced by urban renewal and new public housing facilities to sacrifice for a city that barred them from the vast majority of public space within the city. Mayor Orgill, in a public hearing on a housing project in north Memphis, asked the African American community in the neighborhood to re-imagine "their" city, to see it as a collective whole to which they can contribute, and to "sacrifice...for the whole community...for the benefit of the whole city of Memphis."¹⁰¹ Even the black insurance millionaire, Dr. J.E. Walker, used similar appeals:

¹⁰⁰ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, "Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority," June 2, 1952, 6.

¹⁰¹ SCA, Board of Commissioners Minute Books, Volume 19, 1956-1957, 229

I think [the Railroad Avenue project] is another forward step in the progress of our great city, both in health and education and in housing for citizens. The inconvenience, the temporary inconvenience, some of our people, our people who are living there is incontestable to the good that will approve to them in the future and we must commend our Housing Authority for the good they have done. They have not worked for white citizens or colored citizens but they have worked with the people of the city of Memphis. Now, I want to commend them for the great fine work they have done. I have driven through this project and it is dilapidated and houses are connected with outside toilet facilities and we must remember that good housing makes good citizens. Dilapidated houses call for crime and bad citizens. And when we have the best housing we can have the best citizens. I am sure no one will object to the progress that Memphis is making in this direction.¹⁰²

Part of Dr. Walker's point is well-taken, but the lack of private housing built in renewal sites and the cessation by the MHA from building public housing projects—from the mid-1950s until after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.—makes his point moot.

Members of the black community in neighborhoods affected by renewal and public housing projects refused to buy into the vision of Memphis presented to them by white officials. Rev. Morris, the spokesman for the Railroad Avenue neighborhood refused to affirm what he called an “abstract” idea of urban renewal and its complexities. He spoke about the feeling of helplessness that black homeowners experienced, saying it was “a tough proposition when you go up against a city who has authority over its people; they have authority; they have condemnation in one hand and a few dollars in the other, and there ain't much you can do about it. I don't see how anybody can come here this evening and say they like it.”¹⁰³

In addition to officials trying to convince citizens affected by urban renewal that it would benefit the whole community, white leaders, keenly aware of the racial issues

¹⁰² SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 16.

involved in the project they were proposing, endeavored to sway the black community by saying they had their best interests at heart. City Engineer, Will Fowler, tried to persuade the crowd that city officials were the friend of the black community, attempting to garner their sympathy by appealing to what he knew of their feelings of injustice:

I want to tell you colored people that I have in mind at all times your conditions and your needs and I don't know of a single time when it has been within my power that I haven't done what I could for you.... We have about 42 percent of the colored people that are among our population in the Memphis vicinity, and you are constantly being crowded out here and crowded out there and not permitted to go here and not permitted to go there. You certainly are entitled to a decent place in which to live, and I think it is up to the Planning Commission, City Commission, and Housing Authority to provide a decent and respectable place in which you could build or rent. And that is just what this redevelopment plan is supposed to bring about.... I beg of you to trust these people and I'm just as certain as you people are what is going to happen. When they gave me the assurance that you are going to get a fair price for your property, I said I don't know that I have a complaint to make.¹⁰⁴

Fowler even tells the audience that Crump, the recent Dixiecrat supporter, was a great friend of African Americans: "I am almost in daily contact with him and he is always thinking about doing something for colored people. Every time we improve a street for the white people, he says, 'Will, we have got to improve a street over here for colored people' and we fix our program that way."¹⁰⁵ The absurdity of Crump's supposed constant state of thinking about the welfare of blacks and the evils of separate but equal were not lost on the audience. A representative of the real estate industry also tried to convince the crowd that these men selflessly devoted themselves to the welfare of the black community in Memphis:

I have had the pleasure to have Mr. Fowler leave his home on Sunday and go with me and Mr. Clark [(another real estate developer)] out to sell some white citizens on letting an area be developed for negro citizens. Mr. Fowler

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

did that, gave up his Sunday, gives up anytime and any effort that can be made to advance the cause of colored housing in Memphis, Mr. Fowler is always in there pitching, so is Walter Simmons. And if I were a colored citizen I would think it was an opportunity to put myself in the hands of Walter Simmons and Joe Fowler and know that I was going to get fair treatment.¹⁰⁶

Rev. Morris, the neighborhood representative, saw right through Fowler's and Jones's lines of reasoning, however. He said that the white people who were telling them that it is for their betterment and that the sacrifices they must make will be worth it have no idea what it is like to be in their position: "They are not losing anything; they don't live there. They...point to the sacrifice of those people you see back there. They can't feel it."¹⁰⁷

If Fowler and Jones's statements display the paternalism and patronization that characterized much of the white power structure's way of dealing with the black community, then the outright denigration and derision of other leaders reflects a more sinister manifestation of personal and institutional racism. Dr. McDaniels expresses his desires to have the public see an African American community of affluence instead of one of poverty:

I wish in this development, particularly on Crump Boulevard where it has grown as a commercial or warehousing area that it might be opened to that street and for the benefit of many of a more well to do negro families to establish homes there that we might have an outlet to see so to speak, that the sun might shine in and that tourists from the East, the North and the West, passing through might know that negro Memphians are a part of this great city.¹⁰⁸

Dr. McDaniels demonstrates the extent to which civic leaders pursued urban renewal as a means to improve the image of the city and respond to what leaders perceived as its most serious image problems.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 26. The speaker is a Mr. Jones.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 15. The speaker is only referred to in the text as Morris (a colored man).l

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 7.

The response of the white officials to the process of reimbursement and relocation incensed neighborhood residents. Rev. H.C. Davis expressed the unfairness of the situation best:

[P]erhaps the home that was bought 20 years ago is not worth but the \$2,000.00 that they paid for it 20 years ago but you are overlooking one fact whether it has toilets inside or outside, it is their home, they own the title to it and when they are relocated chances are they will never own the title to another home, and that's quite a problem to these people. I don't know what we can do about it.¹⁰⁹

This response was the refrain of most speakers at the hearing. In surveying all of the records of public hearings, white officials had no adequate response to this injustice. This response from Walter Simmons was typical: "If you are living in one of these areas that is predominately substandard dwelling units, then, it's quite natural that that condition has depreciated to some extent the price on your property."¹¹⁰ Frequently, though, white officials made degrading and thoughtless responses that set the tone for how Memphis would handle urban renewal projects. The reply of Mr. Harsh, the attorney for the MHA, is emblematic:

There has been speaking of making sacrifices. I know that you people have got homes there some of you have homes that you have built your hopes around and you have your dreams about it. That is a real thing but whether it is a sacrifice or not for you to determine in the lights of the facts. Your children are going to school where the people of the slums go. That is the reason that so many of us can not have our homes immediately down town, white and colored, because of the fact that the schools there are largely people from the slums. We don't want our children to associate with.¹¹¹

Rev. Morris's response to Mr. Harsh shows just how much was at stake for these citizens:

I am pretty sure that these poor people here, wash women and chauffeurs years back have acquired some good property by the sweat of their own brow.... If those people that lives down in that community I thought you

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁰ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, "Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority," June 2, 1952, 21.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

came here to express their conditions as to how they felt about it. I'll tell you the reason that I am opposing it. I am opposing it on one great big ground that this is the United States of America and it says what the people own here don't take away from them, that's what I have been told and I kind of half way believe it. But it proves different when you get up in the morning and find five or six white men in the yard not asking whether you want to sell, measuring your yards, going in your house without any permission, measuring your rooms. Gentlemen, if you are a true American like you stand and don't like what they are doing across the waters, I can't see how you would approve of the conditions like that.... No, I don't like it. If you give me enough, if you will assure me enough, I've got to move...I've got to reorganize my living routine and all like that. I don't want to be out a nickel and you are getting ten million dollars from somewhere then come and tell me to cut short. I don't like that, Mr. Chairman. These people here are mostly interested in somebody taking their property that they can deal with. Not somebody that comes up and says this is all you are going to get and that's all and if you don't take it I'll sue you. That's kinda bad for a country like this.¹¹²

Despite the constitutionality of renewal due to the Takings Clause of the Fifth Amendment, these citizens viewed white elites confiscating their property for questionable benefit as contrary to American values. The pressure from black neighborhood citizens' clubs, united under the newly created Bluff City and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs, publicly criticized the MHA for the Railroad Avenue project. In the face of the protest from the civic clubs, which directly attacked the MHA for confiscating property that had already been improved—a criticism noted in the 1952 hearing—Memphis initiated a program called the “Memphis Plan,” modeled after the “Baltimore Plan,” which involved voluntary repairs by property owners to bring their residences up to code.¹¹³ In 1955, the city issued 4,911 permits to property owners for code inspections, but the program run by Public Service Commissioner John. T. Dwyer, only worked with neighborhoods that were “redeemable.”

¹¹² Ibid., 15-16

¹¹³ Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 134.

Finally, civic leaders defended against the appearance of financial impropriety. Will Fowler responded to the insinuation that this African American neighborhood would have to sacrifice in order to benefit the city of Memphis financially:

This is not a money making proposition, this urban redevelopment. After we purchase this property and clear it of all bills, we will lose a million and a half dollars. The government puts up two-thirds of the cost and the city puts up the other one-third, so you see it is not a money making proposition *as far as* the City of Memphis is concerned or as far as the Federal Government is concerned or as far as the Housing Authority is concerned. . . . Nobody is trying to put anything over on you to make money out of you.¹¹⁴

Fowler defends the city government but notably leaves open the possibility that individual citizens might personally gain from urban renewal. Ed Barry inexplicably hints at the possibility that he could personally benefit financially from urban redevelopment in Memphis:

What we are trying to do is something for the people. You take your own Housing Authority the men on your own Housing Authority are rugged individualists, they are free enterprisers. You have got one man in the cotton business, who is president of your cotton exchange, you have got another man that owns a big mercantile establishment here in your community. For myself, I own considerable property in the community of a very private and individual nature, business property, rental property, so we have no selfish interest in this matter at all. The only thing we are trying to do is stir up the people.¹¹⁵

Rev. Morris, adept again at reading between the lines asked, “After the federal government has its money and you have your money, who does the property belong to?”¹¹⁶ After being told the property would belong to whomever the city sold it to, Morris said, “It seems to me that the city is getting a cut in there or it wouldn’t be so interested.”¹¹⁷ In the final analysis, the city did benefit financially from the sale of the property because it was able

¹¹⁴ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, “Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority,” June 2, 1952, 26-27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

to obtain cheap land for a new public school and received a 20 percent increase in tax revenue from the new industries that bought property within the project zone.¹¹⁸ More than financial gain, however, the city believed they benefited by removing a densely populated poor neighborhood and replacing it with large warehouses for distribution companies.

Most of the later urban redevelopment begun under the Orgill administration benefited the public by creating hospitals and new government buildings, but the Railroad Avenue project demonstrates the extent to which urban renewal was actually concerned with changing the image of the city without a clear benefit to the greater public. To accomplish this, white leaders dissolved densely-populated neighborhoods occupied by a poor African American community. In doing so, they sought to persuade that community to adopt a new vision for the city, but white leaders provided no motivation to a black community mired under the yoke of Jim Crow. Due to requirements in the 1949 Housing Act, the MHA held public meetings with residents in areas affected by urban renewal—unlike all of the MHA's previous public housing projects beginning in the mid-1930s. These meetings allowed the voices of everyday African Americans an opportunity to be heard, supplying a public forum for the community to articulate their dissent from the white power structure. In the end, the resistance and opposition by neighborhood organizations and the Council of Civic Clubs did little to alter the plans for urban redevelopment in the Railroad Avenue area, but these groups, and much of the larger community, would soon find their voices in the sit-ins of the early 1960s and the major public demonstrations of the Sanitation Workers' Strike and the protests in the wake of the assassination of Dr. King.

¹¹⁸ SCA, UR Files, Box 222, "Final Report: Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area," 1965, 3.

Chapter 2: Suburbanization in Black and White:

City Planning, Neighborhood Strife, and Social Mobility, the 1950s, 1960s, and Early 1970s

Introduction

Major suburbanization in Memphis began in the last part of the nineteenth century. The first electric streetcar lines opened in the late 1880s and the 1890s and broadened the base of land available for residential development.¹ Real estate developers busily created new subdivisions along the streetcar lines that ran from Main Street downtown to the east like the spokes of a wheel. (**Fig. 1**) Developers coordinated with the Memphis Street Railway company in siting new routes.² The streetcars guided the direction of suburban growth in Memphis up to the 1920s, when the personal automobile came into wider use.³ Areas began to become increasingly divided by social class and race beginning in the 1890s and through the 1920s when several affluent neighborhoods were developed in the midtown area. The Annesdale Park subdivision, located just south of the present-day Methodist University Hospital, began in 1903 and was an early wealthy enclave in midtown.⁴ In addition, the Overton Park area drew more affluent whites during this period, with the first developments to the north and west of the park and later subdivisions filled in to the south. The area to the east of Overton Park developed as a black enclave, known as Binghampton, amidst the typically white middle-class neighborhoods of midtown.

¹ Horse-drawn streetcar lines emerged directly after the Civil War, but were too slow to open large swaths of land to residential development the way the electric streetcars were able to do.

² See Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 105.

³ In Memphis's first city plan, the Harland Bartholomew firm's 1924 Comprehensive Plan, planners advocated removing some of the streetcar lines to create wider streets for the increasing volume of car traffic coming to the downtown area. See Harland Bartholomew, *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1924), 60.

⁴ For an extended discussion of Annesdale Park see Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 100-102.

Despite this trend toward separation of class and race, racial residential segregation was less stark before the turn of the century than during the War and Postwar years, when dwelling segregation became starker and more pervasive.⁵ As the automobile fully supplanted the streetcar in the 1940s, dwelling segregation increased while the conditions of many black neighborhoods, especially those that had once been affluent white neighborhoods in earlier times, deteriorated. The joint MHA and WPA survey of substandard housing completed in 1941 (**Fig. 2**) showed the extent of the decline of housing in many of the African American areas of the city, including the Binghampton area east of Overton Park and the Orange Mound area south of the fairgrounds. The survey found that seventy-seven percent of African Americans lived in houses considered substandard while thirty-five percent of whites did.⁶ As black neighborhoods declined, whites, with the help of the streetcar and later the automobile, moved further to the east creating what Silver and Moeser refer to as the “white wedge,” the lasting pattern of white residential neighborhoods beginning in west-central midtown and extending in an expanding V-shape toward the east, a pattern that has lasted into the present.⁷ (**Figs. 3 & 4**)

This chapter studies several key aspects of suburbanization in Memphis during the early 1950s through the mid-1970s in order to understand both the larger urban context in which urban renewal took place and the processes that led to greater and greater residential segregation. This period of suburbanization in Memphis had and continues to have considerable impact on the direction that Memphis took in subsequent years, influencing both the resulting architectural and urban landscape and also the social, cultural, and

⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁶ Works Progress Administration, *The Housing Survey of the City of Memphis and Part of Shelby County, Tennessee*. Memphis: Memphis Housing Authority, 1941.

⁷ Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*, 38.

economic life of the city. As a way of introduction to the urban landscape of Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s, this chapter uses the well-known story of a poor family from rural northern Mississippi who settled in Memphis in the late 1940s and their nine subsequent moves in different neighborhoods and different housing options across Memphis—from single-room boarding house apartments to segregated public housing from modest, working-class rental housing in ethnically diverse neighborhoods to private homeownership in the all-white suburban sprawl of eastern Memphis.

The story of the nine different housing options that the family of Elvis Presley used between 1948 and 1957 provides a unique insight into the architectural and geographical aspects of social mobility in Memphis, Tennessee in the 1950s. In the Memphis of the 1950s, middle-class social mobility increasingly became tied not only to the type of house one chose to live in but, more importantly, where that house was located within the social geography of the city. The story of the houses of the Presley family also introduces several important aspects of suburbanization in Memphis from the 1950s to the 1970s. This chapter uses that introduction as a springboard to study several important issues in the suburbanization of Memphis between the 1950s and the 1970s. First, the Presleys lived in boarding houses and rental houses in racially mixed neighborhoods along Poplar Avenue just east of downtown, highlighting the extent to which poorer neighborhoods were more racially integrated in the fading days of the Jim Crow South. It contrasts with the racial tensions that arose in segregated mostly middle- or lower-middle-class white neighborhoods whose racial makeup began to transition due to a number of different forces. This section of the chapter studies segregation in 1950s Memphis, in the city's neighborhoods and in their neighborhoods' churches. Second, for three years, the Presleys

took advantage of the option of public housing, living in a Depression era, all-white housing project. Public housing in Memphis became a contentious racial issue in local Memphis politics during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The placement of public housing projects or the choice to build them at all coincided with the decision-making regarding urban renewal projects. This section of the chapter briefly surveys public housing in Memphis from the Depression to the late 1960s. Third, throughout the process of increasing suburbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, the role of city planning in determining the course that suburban neighborhoods such as the Audubon Park area where the Presleys owned their first house in 1956 took. City planners coordinated suburban growth with infrastructure projects from the elimination of the streetcar system to the siting and creation of the Interstate Highway System in and through the city. This section studies the major city plan of Memphis done by the firm of prolific city planner Harland Bartholomew from the mid-1950s. Fourth, the final move the Presleys made was to Graceland, which was located in a growing suburban, all-white neighborhood on the southern border of Memphis. The story of neighborhood change in Whitehaven from the 1950s through the 1980s is a quite different account of neighborhood change than the older neighborhoods within the city that transitioned in the 1950s and 1960s. To enact the *Brown* ruling, the federal court instituted busing that took white kids to formerly all-black schools and black kids to formerly all-white schools. This court-ordered busing would spur neighborhood change in Whitehaven. This portion of the chapter studies the two waves of white flight, first during the 1950s and 1960s when whites increasingly abandoned the areas near the downtown and in racially transitioning neighborhoods for the all-white suburbs of east Memphis, Whitehaven, and Frayser and later from the areas of the first wave after court-ordered

busing caused many whites to flee the city limits to avoid having their children attend integrated schools.

The Case of the Presley Family

Elvis Presley was born on January 8, 1935 inside a two-room shotgun house his father, Vernon Presley, his uncle, and his grandfather built just east of central Tupelo, Mississippi next door to Vernon's parents, Jesse and Minnie. Elvis's father drove a delivery truck and did sharecropping, while his mother, Gladys, sewed for Reed Manufacturing and Tupelo Garment Company. Vernon, hoping for the route to a better life in the city, sold all of the family's furniture and moved the Presleys to Memphis in November of 1948, when Elvis was in the eighth grade. The family landed in a boarding house on Washington Street, and soon after moved to another boarding house on Poplar a block away, down the street from (east of) Lauderdale Courts, the white housing project the Presleys would be admitted to in 1949. The family lived in segregated public housing for three years until their income exceeded the allowable maximum. In 1952, the family moved to another boarding house only for a few months in uptown Memphis on Saffarans Avenue. Shortly after their Saffarans Avenue move, the Presleys moved to an apartment on Alabama Avenue across the street from the Lauderdale Courts project and lived there until 1955. They moved into a rental house on the edge of the black neighborhood of Orange Mound on Lamar Avenue. A few months later in September of 1955, the family moved into another rental house on Getwell Avenue in East Memphis below Audubon Park until March of 1956 when the family moved into a house on Audubon Drive purchased by Elvis shortly after RCA Victor bought out Presley's contract with Sam Phillips's Sun Records and he recorded

“Heartbreak Hotel” in Nashville. In early 1957, after Elvis’s fame made their house in the Audubon Park neighborhood impractical, Elvis and his parents searched for a house suitable in size and on a large tract of property. They settled on an older, unused mansion on a nearly fourteen-acre site with large gates on the front of the property off US-51 in the unincorporated yet fast growing middle- and upper-middle-class suburb of Whitehaven nine miles south of downtown.

This story of the moves of the Presley family provides a window into white social mobility in Memphis that, if not for Elvis’s musical fame, we would not have in such detail. Just as scholars have dissected much of his musical and cultural impact, biographers have surveyed the known aspects of the early years of Elvis Presley, including biographies that focus solely on his younger days.⁸ That a boy from a poor working-class white family in Memphis has so much detail about his life, provides the opportunity to go in depth in analyzing the Presleys’ rise in social status and how that played out geographically and architecturally in Memphis. As Karal Ann Marling says in *Graceland: Going Home with Elvis*, with the moves of the Presleys away from the downtown “every mile [was] a measure of rising social status.”⁹

When the Presleys first arrived in Memphis on November 6, 1948 in their 1937 Plymouth that held all their possessions, they settled for a very short stint in a rooming house on Washington Street and soon after moved to another on Poplar. Marling describes the Poplar boarding house as a “horror-movie hellhole, with one kitchen for sixteen

⁸ See Earl Greenwood and Kathleen Tracy, *The Boy Who Would Be King*, New York: Penguin, 1990. and Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994 survey the early years of Presley. For the definitive biography of Presley see Albert Goldman, *Elvis*, New York: Avon, 1981.

⁹ Karal Ann Marling, *Graceland: Going Home with Elvis*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 52.

families and hairs in the single bathtub.”¹⁰ The house on Poplar was an old Victorian that had been divided into sixteen one-room apartments for which the Presleys paid \$9.50 per week, roughly a quarter of Vernon’s weekly salary. Poplar was a mostly commercial street, but the area, known as Little Mississippi due no doubt to the preponderance of boarding houses that were often filled with families like the Presleys newly arrived from the Mississippi delta, was close to the downtown area and the major centers of urban life in the city. In the spring of 1949 after Vernon landed a job as a loader at United Paint, the Presleys applied to the MHA for access to public housing. On June 17, 1949, Jane Richardson, an MHA home service adviser, interviewed Gladys Presley at the boarding house on Poplar. She noted in the report that the Presleys “cook, eat, and sleep in one room. Share bath. No privacy....They seem very nice and deserving. Lauderdale if possible, near husband’s work.”¹¹ In fact, the MHA admitted the Presleys to the all-white Lauderdale Courts housing project on September 20. **(Fig. 5)**

The Presleys paid the same rent to the MHA to rent the two-bedroom apartment in the public housing project as they had paid for their one room with communal kitchen and bath in the boarding house. There was an income ceiling that required Vernon to biannually have his boss give notice to the MHA.¹² The MHA based monthly rent on the tenants’ ability to pay, and the formula was that rent would be the cost of one weeks’ salary for one month’s rent. The Presleys’ first-floor apartment at 185 Winchester Avenue was in the far northwest corner of Lauderdale Courts. From the Presleys’ apartment one could witness the urban renewal taking place at the Jackson Avenue renewal area one block north of

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 33.

¹² Goldman, *Elvis*, 88.

Winchester and, later, the interstate highway construction that flowed directly between Lauderdale Courts and the Jackson Avenue zone, just yards from the Presleys' front door. This location, like their previous boarding houses to the east provided quick access to the downtown as well as to Beale Street. In the biographies as well as the music scholarship, much has been made of the time Elvis spent on Beale. The biographies tend to romanticize the influence of "black music" that Elvis came into contact with in Memphis that would go on to produce what biographers and some scholars might view as Elvis's singular, beloved style of music. To that point, Marling idealizes Beale Street as "the great symbolic crossroads of postwar Memphis, where business stopped for pleasure and black America let well-behaved white boys sit inside rusty screendoors and listen to the blues."¹³ Of course, the story of Beale, the origins of rock 'n' roll, and Elvis's legacy regarding race is much more complicated.

For nearly three years, the Presleys lived in segregated public housing. From here, Elvis had a twenty-minute walk to the segregated, working-class L.C. Humes High School, north of the Courts on Manassas Street. Humes became an important local distinction for the singer when his Sun Records singles first received radio airtime, alerting local listeners, confused about his racial identity because of his music's heavy borrowing from the blues and R&B, that he was white. During the three years the Presleys lived in public housing, the MHA warned them that their income was getting too close to the ceiling. In early 1952 that their income had exceeded the maximum after Gladys started work as a nurse's aid at nearby St. Joseph's Hospital, a job she subsequently quit to avoid eviction.¹⁴ She went back to work at St. Joseph's after mom and dad made Elvis quit his job at MARL Metal Products,

¹³ Marling, *Graceland*, 42.

¹⁴ Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 44.

a kitchen furniture manufacturer, during his senior year. This pushed the Presleys' income well over the MHA's limit, and the family received an eviction notice at the end of 1952 that required them out by the end of February 1953. On January 7, 1953 the Presleys moved to a boarding house on Saffarans on the east side of the Pinch District near Humes High, but in April they moved back near the Courts to 462 Alabama.¹⁵ **(Fig. 6)** The portion of Alabama Avenue the Presleys moved to was just inside the Jackson Avenue urban renewal area and would eventually be replaced by Interstate 40. At the time the Presleys moved in, Alabama Avenue had a mix of older houses split into apartments and newer modest houses. It was a street that was an example of the close proximity many lower class whites lived to African American. Just a block from the house the Presleys rented the street became predominately black. The Millers, a family of ten who lived in a shotgun house at 405 Alabama, just up the street from the Presleys, were an African American family whom the MHA used in their promotional materials to show the benefits of urban renewal and public housing. The "Plans for Progress" report from 1958 shows a rear view of the Millers' shotgun house and the family inside the house on Alabama juxtaposed next to a picture of them inside a public housing development.¹⁶ **(Figs. 7-9)** As chapter 1 demonstrated, however, the Miller family was an exception to the rule in 1958. The MHA had relocated less than half of the residents of the Jackson Avenue renewal zone by 1960, and far fewer were moved to public housing because of the lack of availability.

After Elvis graduated from Humes in 1953, he worked at M.B. Parker Machinists' Shop and later Precision Tool where he worked on an assembly line. During this time, in

¹⁵ Ibid., 49-52.

¹⁶ "Plans for Progress: MHA 1958 Annual Report," UMSC, MS 93, Memphis Housing Authority, Box 28, Folder I.A.

the fall of 1953, Elvis entered Sam Phillips's Memphis Recording Service (MRS), later called Sun Studios, on Union Avenue, a block north of Beale and a block west of Forrest Park, to as the myth now goes to record a couple songs as a birthday present for his mother. **(Fig. 10)** In addition to Elvis, Phillips discovered or gave recording starts to future blues greats such as Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Junior Parker, James Cotton, and Ike Turner as well as rock 'n' roll stars Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, and Jerry Lee Lewis. On June 26, 1954, Phillips had Elvis come back to record a song called "Without You." Phillips was not satisfied with what Elvis was doing with the song, but he had the young singer stay and listened to him sing little pieces of anything Elvis new for nearly three hours.¹⁷ **(Fig. 11)**

A week later on the Fourth, Elvis was contacted by Scotty Moore, whose group—the Starlite Wranglers—Phillips had recorded earlier in May. Scotty had heard from Phillips about a young "ballad singer," and he invited Elvis to practice with them. Elvis did not impress Scotty, but he and Phillips agreed to come into the studio with him the next day. Toward the end of an unproductive session, Elvis suggested the band try one of his favorite songs of Delta blues great Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, "That's All Right." Elvis cut loose and the band joined him. Phillips reportedly told the group to do it that way again, and after a couple more takes, "That's All Right Mama," Elvis's breakout hit, was ready for release. To complement "That's All Right Mama" for the B-side of the record, Phillips and the band decided on "Blue Moon of Kentucky," a song from the "Father of Bluegrass," Bill Monroe. Phillips gave the songs to local WHBQ DJ, Dewey Phillips, whose broadcast, *Red, Hot 'n' Blues*, featured the recordings of the local Delta Blues singers along with other

¹⁷ Goldman, *Elvis*, 124-130.

music at the time called “race music,” including Rhythm & Blues. Dewey was concerned about playing Elvis’s record because he was white. After consulting with fellow WHBQ DJ Wink Martindale, of subsequent game show fame, Dewey reluctantly put Elvis’s record on the air. Dewey’s format on *Red, Hot ‘n’ Blues* was interactive, and after playing “That’s All Right Mama” callers to the broadcast were numerous. Dewey immediately called the Presley home to get Elvis into the studio for an interview because of the response from listeners. During the interview, Dewey asked Presley what high school in Memphis he attended to confirm to his audience, used to listening to “race music” that this singer, who sounded something like a blues or R&B artist, was, in fact, white. Dewey later recalled, “I wanted to get that out, because a lot of people listening had thought he was colored.”¹⁸ “That’s All Right Mama/Blue Moon of Kentucky” was not a national hit, selling only twenty-thousand copies, but it was a local and regional hit and landed Presley a recurring role on the *Louisiana Hayride*, a radio show broadcast widely in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. During this period, Elvis toured extensively through the region. His first record to chart nationally would be “Baby, Let’s Play House.”¹⁹

At this point, Elvis had the money to buy himself a Cadillac and his parents a Crown Victoria. His parents now had the money to rent a house for themselves, yet another step away from boarding houses and public housing.²⁰ They moved to a small brick bungalow on Lamar Avenue just on the west side of the black neighborhood of Orange Mound. Elvis would not live in the house until three months after the family moved in because he was touring. The family was not in the house long before they sought a better house in the new

¹⁸ Ibid., 131-140. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 92-103.

¹⁹ Goldman, *Elvis*, 198.

²⁰ Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 185. Goldman, *Elvis*, 151 incorrectly asserts that Elvis bought his parents the house on Larmer Avenue.

suburban landscape often referred to as “out east.” They chose a rental house below Audubon Park on Getwell Avenue, an area only recently included in the Memphis city limits. This area saw fast-paced growth after the Second World War. **Figures 12 through 15** show the tempo of development on the eastern edge of Memphis from 1940 to 1959. Farmland that remained active until the 1940s was swallowed by the suburban development fueled by postwar subsidy programs. Nearby the house on Getwell, the federal government built the Kennedy Veterans Hospital that served the returning GI’s who were buying houses in east Memphis with VA loans.

Meanwhile, Phillips struck a deal worth \$35,000 with RCA Victor and Elvis’s new manager, Colonel Tom Parker, signing over his contract and the rights to his Sun Records songs. Sun had two budding rockabilly stars with Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins, who were soon to make big hits with “I Walk the Line” and “Blue Suede Shoes,” but Phillips needed the cash from Elvis deal to keep Sun afloat. Elvis soon began his recording sessions with RCA in Nashville, cutting “Heartbreak Hotel” in January, a record that would top both Billboard’s pop and country and western charts, thanks in no small part to Elvis’s six appearances on CBS’s *Stage Show*, where he sang the song on three separate occasions. Shortly after signing the RCA contract, Elvis decided to buy his parents a house, completing the family’s atypical journey from a one-room boarding house apartment and segregated public housing to homeownership.

The new house the Presleys selected in March of 1956 was near to the rental on Getwell. The house was a three-bedroom ranch house on Audubon Drive directly below Audubon Park.²¹ (**Figs. 16 & 17**) The completion of the Presleys route to owning their own

²¹ Gulnarik, *Last Train to Memphis*, 258.

house took the family from rooming houses and public housing just east of the downtown through midtown and into the newly created suburban sprawl on the eastern border of the city. Architecturally, their moves showed a continual progression toward newer, more modern housing that would have appealed to middle- and working-class sensibilities of the 1950s such as their ranch house on Audubon. Socially, the Presleys route ran toward neighborhoods with greater social status that were more and more racially segregated. In the 1958 special census, the census tract below Audubon Park where the Presleys last rental house and their Audubon Avenue house had an African American population of 0.3 percent. In contrast, however, the census tract that surrounded their house on Alabama had an African American population of 61.4 percent, and the census tract where their public housing unit was located had a 44.0 percent African American population. The house on Lamar that was the transition between their neighborhood downtown and their Audubon Park neighborhood was directly on the border between a predominately white neighborhood (1.5 percent African American) and a predominately black one (74.0 percent).²²

The Presleys time at 1034 Audubon was short lived due to Elvis's increasing fame. During the time when his family lived on Lamar, Elvis released "Heartbreak Hotel," "Hound Dog," his debut album *Elvis Presley*, "Don't Be Cruel," and "Love Me Tender," and appeared on the *Milton Berle Show*, the *Steve Allen Show*, and the *Ed Sullivan Show*. His fame led to large crowds around the new family home on Audubon: "When Elvis was home, they came by the hundreds, at all hours of the day and night. Vernon never had to mow the lawn. The girls plucked it out, blade by blade, for their scrapbooks."²³ **(Fig. 18)**

²² Special Census of Memphis, Tennessee, January 31, 1958, US Department of Commerce, MPL, MSCR.

²³ Marling, *Graceland*, 115.

Even though Elvis spent much of 1956 touring, the stress of the crowds of people outside the Presley house in Memphis not only on the Presley family but also on their neighbors on Audubon Street, the Presleys decided to find a larger house with land to keep the fans at a distance.

The story of the Presley's history with the famed Graceland mansion begins in early 1957 in the parking lot of one of the new suburban shopping centers, Lowenstein East, which was one of the new branches, built in the mid 1950s, of the original downtown department store, built in 1886, thirty-one years after Lowenstein Dry Goods Store opened in Memphis. **(Figs 19 & 20)** There Virginia Grant, a young real estate agent, spotted Gladys Presley in her new Cadillac. She struck up a conversation with Mrs. Presley who informed her that they were interested in a big house with land close to town. After rejecting several houses that Grant showed the Presleys, she introduced them to an unoccupied mansion on nearly fourteen acres of land in the new and unincorporated suburb of Whitehaven, nine miles due south of downtown Memphis west of the airport. At the time, the aptly, though unintentionally, named Whitehaven was a growing middle- and upper-middle-class white enclave that expanded rapidly during the early postwar years with the help of FHA and VA financing programs.²⁴ Harland Bartholomew's 1955 Comprehensive Plan called for Memphis to annex the growing suburbs of Whitehaven and Frayser, a suburb to the north, so that Memphis could plan and coordinate their growth. In 1958, Memphis annexed Frayser, adding 20,000 people and over fifteen square miles to Memphis, but Whitehaven did not see annexation until 1969. Edmund Orgill hoped for the city to set a date in 1961 or 1962 for annexing Whitehaven, but the political and financial commitment was not there

²⁴ Whitehaven derived its name from Francis White an early property owner in the area.

for annexation. Interestingly, in a memorandum to the City Commissioners proposed that the west side of Whitehaven near Fuller Park “is a ‘natural’ for Negro housing,” because “it is relatively close to the industries located in South Memphis.”²⁵ Whitehaven would not begin to see the movement of large numbers of African Americans until the 1960s and especially the 1970s.

In 1957, Graceland was surrounded by new development in postwar Whitehaven. The mansion house was located on the fourteen remaining acres of what had been a five-hundred acre plot of land owned by the Toof family who owned S.C. Toof and Company, a printing business in Memphis. S.C. Toof’s daughter, Grace, who was the namesake for Graceland, inherited the land and gave a portion of it to her great-niece, Ruth Moore, who along with her husband Dr. Thomas Moore built Graceland mansion in 1939. Much of the rest of the land was subdivided and sold creating the Graceland Estates subdivision and Whitehaven Plaza, where the Lowenstein’s Department Store opened another suburban branch.²⁶ Marling describes mid-1950s Whitehaven Plaza as “the last word in retail modernity, stores for the comfortably-off and the choosy set in vast, free-parking lots that gave the shopper the kind of easy access downtowns never quite achieved. It was the place to be seen.”²⁷ The new suburban world created with breakneck pace during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s meant social cachet for those who had achieved the means to afford it, but if 1034 Audubon Drive represented the ideal of 1950s middle-class life then Graceland represented something quite different.

²⁵ Memo to City Commissioners, October 19, 1959, Orgill Papers, MVC, UM. Cited in Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 226.

²⁶ Gulnarik, *Last Train to Memphis*, 396.

²⁷ Marling, *Graceland*, 123-124.

Marling likens Graceland to a roadside attraction that locates Elvis geographically and offers his fans an opportunity to partake in his celebrity; she compares the gates and the wall to a billboard, advertising the celebrity of Elvis like the neon boomerangs of Memphian, Kemmons Wilson's Holiday Inn signs; and she rightly ties Graceland into the Colonial Revival movement that exploded after *Gone with the Wind*.²⁸ (**Fig. 21**) But there is more to Graceland both socially and architecturally. Graceland itself became a billboard, a three-dimensional sign that advertised social status and stardom at the same time. The Presleys lined the driveway of Graceland with lights, placed white and blue spotlights that lit up the façade, and put smaller white lights along the pediment and downspouts, which leads Marling to liken Graceland to a roadside attraction. But it also announced, architecturally, that the poor white Presleys from northern Mississippi had attained the "American dream." Because Graceland did not simply locate Elvis geographically; it also did so architecturally. Marling situates Graceland within the context of the houses of the Hollywood elite, but the more modest colonial revival house placed the Presleys more within the regional and national architectural mainstream using the traditional colonial revival to legitimize the family socially.²⁹ (**Fig. 22**)

Maintaining Segregation

At 1:30 in the morning on June 29, 1953 a bomb rocked a quiet neighborhood south of downtown Memphis. The target of the never-captured bomber(s) was the newly purchased house of an African American family at 430 East Olive Street. In late October

²⁸ Ibid., 128, 139-148

²⁹ Karal Ann Marling, "Elvis Presley's Graceland, or the Aesthetic of Rock 'n' Roll Heaven," *American Art* 7.4, Autumn 1993, 80-82.

of the previous year, a representative of the all-white A.B. Hill Civic Club, an organization that represented the neighborhood where the bombing would take place, stood before the City Commission to voice the club's outrage over their neighborhood being the target of racial transition. The transition was spurred by "blockbusting" real estate agents who advertised that the area was slated to become "all-colored" because they erroneously claimed that the Board of Education was going to change the Southside School from all-white to all-black. At the time of the hearing, three black families had already purchased houses in that neighborhood. The A.B. Hill Civic Club's petition to the City Commissioners stated that the neighborhood's residents "appreciated the fact that the colored people must live somewhere," but they believed "in segregation and earnestly desired the assistance in straightening out the situation." The petitioners went on to say that "most of the colored people when approached stated that they did not desire to move into an all-white neighborhood but understood that this section was to become colored within a short time."³⁰ The perceived threat posed by blockbusting real estate agents created such hostility for local residents that during the club's meetings, before the official petition to the City Commission, some residents threatened to riot if the city did nothing to stem the neighborhood transition.³¹ Signs in the A.B. Hill neighborhood saying that houses were "not for sale to Negroes" warned blockbusting real estate agents not to sell to blacks.³²

Something had clearly changed in how the residents of the A.B. Hill neighborhood viewed their city and their neighborhood. In fact, a significant transformation had begun in

³⁰ Shelby County Archives, Minute Book 10, Board of Commissioners of the City of Memphis, October 28, 1952, 389. Silver and Moeser erroneously place the A.B Hill Civic Club (which they call "A.P." Hill) in north Memphis.

³¹ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 202. Green cites Gloria Brown Melton, "Blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, 1920-1955: A Historical Study." (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1982), 337-339.

³² "...," *Memphis World*, June 10, 1952.

Memphis that caused this new anxiety. Middle and lower income whites began to feel threatened in the late 1940s and early 1950s by a formerly subservient black community that was becoming increasingly organized in their demands for equality in many spheres of life including residential equality. With the power of the Crump regime waning and their ability to maintain the suppression of the black community and deference from black leaders declining in the early 1950s, African Americans began to defy more openly the white power structure of the Crump regime. The votes of an organized African American community in the 1948 Democratic primary pushed Kefauver and Browning over the edge helping to defeat the anti-civil rights senator, Tom Stewart. Locally, African American leaders pushed Mayor Pleasants to appoint black police officers after a series of incidents involving police brutality, including the rape of two young African American restaurant workers by two Memphis police officers, a crime that garnered much attention both in Memphis and nationally with the NAACP and other civil rights groups and spurred many in Memphis to action.³³ At the same time, African Americans organized local neighborhood associations, which began to demand equality in city services and pushed for the expansion of black neighborhoods because of the inadequate supply of housing available to blacks in the city. Whites, especially those in “gray” areas where the spatial line between blacks and whites was already tenuous became increasingly uncomfortable with the rising political power and the slowly expanding spatial footprint of the black community in Memphis.

The bomb that shattered the peace of the neighborhood that summer night targeted Wren Williams and his children along with his sister Annie Eggleston. The blast

³³ See Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 81-111.

shattered the windows and blew a hole in a concrete wall on the house's exterior. Fortunately, none of the family members were physically harmed. Eggleston told the *Press-Scimitar* that she had received an anonymous phone call before their family moved into the house that if they did move into the neighborhood "there'd be some bombings."³⁴ African Americans across the city were sent a clear message from some white Memphians, that the threats of violence commonly used in neighborhoods that were gray zones might actually be carried out. With neighborhoods battle zones in a burgeoning war over what the future of Memphis would be, the black community could expect no help from the current city government. The commentary that Memphis Police Chief, E.H. Reeves, offered laid the ultimate blame on the African Americans who moved into the neighborhood: "the trouble is, negroes moved in on a white street."³⁵ The NAACP president, U.R. Phillips, put out a statement suggesting that the police sympathized with the bombers: "Some member of the police force who have similar prejudices as those contained by the perpetrators of the bombing, fail to exert themselves sufficiently to bring the culprits to justice."³⁶ Despite the statements of Mayor Tobey and other members of the City Commission that condemned the bombing, no arrests were made in connection with the Olive Street bombing, and arrests were made during only one incident in the neighborhood regarding racial intimidation.³⁷ A group of four individuals, two older white women, a middle-aged white woman, and a 39-year old man amongst a crowd of nearly twenty were arrested after spraying both a white real estate agent and her African American

³⁴ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, "Blast Breaks Window of Negro Home: Mystery So Far: No One Injured," June 29, 1953.

³⁵ "Negro Leaders Ask Tobey for a Solution," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 27, 1953.

³⁶ "NAACP Hits Bombing, Seek More Protection," *Tri-State Defender*, July 11, 1953.

³⁷ For more on the reaction of city officials to the East Olive Street bombing see Wayne Dowdy, "Something for the Colored People': Memphis Mayor Frank Tobey and the East Olive Bombing." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 51 (1997): 108-115.

client with a garden hose as the agent showed a house two months after the bombing.³⁸

(Fig. 23)

In the months leading up to the bombing and those following it, the neighborhood saw intimidation of both the African American families that had moved into the block and the white families selling their houses. The *Commercial Appeal* claimed “a spirit of mob violence had existed in this neighborhood for a period of more than two months.”³⁹ White residents selling their house described the scene in the neighborhood as lawless and terrifying. One individual said, “when they see a house being shown, they round up the mob. It’s like the Paul Revere signal.” One of the white individuals who owned a house on the street reported that those crusading against black encroachment sent cabs, hearses, and ambulances that catered only to African Americans to her home after being told by a neighbor that she had requested their services. When they arrived at her door, she would have to explain that she had not called for them, as she did not own a phone. In this manner, whites who fought to maintain the racial character of the neighborhoods in which they lived exerted an undue influence over the spatial makeup of their city and garnered the attention and even sometimes sympathy of Memphis’s government leaders.⁴⁰

The terror unleashed by the small mobs from Lauderdale Street, on the east side of the neighborhood, matched the fears that residents wishing to sell and leave the neighborhood felt because of the encroachment of several African American families onto their block. The individuals Mayor Tobey spoke with expressed their desire to sell now

³⁸ “Trouble Flares Up Again over Olive St. Homes,” *Tri-State Defender*, August 29, 1953. “Two E. Oliver Residents Are Fined in Case of Doused Real Estate Agent,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 25, 1953.

³⁹ “Negro Leaders Ask Tobey for a Solution,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 27, 1953.

⁴⁰ Transcript of a meeting between five homeowners in the E. Olive St. area who were willing to sell their houses to blacks and mayor Tobey on August 26, 1953. The Papers of Mayor Frank T. Tobey, The Shelby County Room of the Memphis Public Library.

because blacks had already begun to move into the neighborhood, leading one woman to say, “They are all around us, Mayor Tobey.” Because of the strong desire to flee their homes due to racial fears, residents that desired to leave the area had no qualms about selling their houses to African Americans. One individual said that her house had been for sale for a year and a half and had no interest from any whites: “If we can’t sell to whites, we’ll sell to negroes.”⁴¹ Nationally, this issue had become significant, especially within the real estate sector. *The Appraisal Journal* published articles on the effects of racial transition in neighborhoods on property values.

The case of the Olive Street bombing, however, is simply the most sensational example in a host of conflicts during the struggle over neighborhood change in Memphis. Strife over blockbusting and neighborhood transition were very common across the country during this period. Thomas Sugrue deftly outlines the case of blockbusting and the violence that often erupted during neighborhood transition in Detroit during the 1950s and 1960s.⁴² Sugrue concludes that the actions taken by neighborhood associations to resist neighborhood change, including threats of violence exacerbated, the problem of the lack of affordable housing for African Americans. He argues that the violence and threats of violence gave racial identity a geographical and physical manifestation, debased the African American community, and fortified inequalities. Sugrue’s conclusions could well have been said of Memphis along with other cities across the country during this time. Sugrue also concludes that white neighborhoods that tried to defend against racial change ended up being some of the most altered because, as one black Detroiter said, recalcitrant

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 181-258, especially 231-258.

whites “hold ‘til the dam bursts, then run like hell.”⁴³ This pattern, for the most part, held true across the country in cities in both the northern and southern states.⁴⁴

Until the dams failed, however, all-white neighborhoods in Memphis used every conceivable method to maintain segregation including violence and the threat of violence. In addition to the A.B. Hill Civic Club’s petitioning the City Commission in late 1952, the East of Highland Improvement Club protested the plan for a new black subdivision in northeastern Memphis called Graham Gardens.⁴⁵ Another furor erupted over a different black subdivision proposal in north Memphis. The Union Villa Civic Club drew a crowd of over 500 to protest the Chelsea Gardens subdivision plan.⁴⁶ In the area of the Trigg bombing, in the Fordhurst subdivision, white residents of the area came out in protest on Easter to protest the possible sale of a house in the neighborhood to blacks. When an African American family, the Barbees, actually moved into the neighborhood they reported receiving several threatening phone calls including one that said, “Expect trouble if you move in there because you are going to get plenty.”⁴⁷ In early 1958, Rev. C.H. Mason, a black minister, purchased a house in the white neighborhood southwest of Orange Mound across Lamar Avenue. Shortly afterwards either the Ku Klux Klan or someone imitating their famed *modus operandi* burned a cross in the minister’s yard, which had happened in several instances across the city the year before. A week later arsons burned his church to the ground, Home Temple of the Church of God in Christ located at Lauderdale and

⁴³ Ibid., 257 quoting an observer in the *Detroit News*, October 4, 1961.

⁴⁴ In addition to Sugrue’s work on Detroit see Arnold R. Hirsch. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Kevin M. Kruse. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

⁴⁵ Letter from Vernon F. Gamble of the East of Highland Improvement Club to Mayor Watkins Overton on May 18, 1949, Overton Papers, box 2, folder: Civic Clubs 4, MPL.

⁴⁶ “Mass Meeting Is Held over Negro Project,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 30, 1950.

⁴⁷ “Warned by Whites Not to Move In,” *Tri-State Defender*, April 18, 1953.

Georgia. This was followed shortly after by someone throwing two large stones through his house's front window. An organization formed by the local neighborhood group, called Glenview Plan, Inc., had been seeking to repurchase the house, and shortly afterward made it clear that the minister was mistaken if he believed that "his presence in the former all-white neighborhood had been accepted."⁴⁸

In numerous instances, white neighborhood organizations fought zoning changes that might bring multi-family dwellings close to their neighborhoods filled with single-family houses. In one circumstance in south Memphis, west of what became Whitehaven, white residents of the Levi neighborhood successfully petitioned the Planning Commission to add an eighteen-foot buffer zone along Horn Lake Road including a steel wire fence to separate a newly created black neighborhood west of Horn Lake Road. They also agreed to allow only an entrance to the subdivision Mitchell Road on the north side of the subdivision and not one on Horn Lake closer to the white neighborhood.⁴⁹ In the Getwell area near the Presleys rental house, a group of whites protested the rezoning of land there from agricultural to either residential or commercial, which was supposed to be "zoned" for blacks. Despite their failure to keep the zoning from taking effect, they were able to prevent the contractor from building houses in that area for blacks.⁵⁰ In the Cherokee neighborhood near Lamar and Dunn, even though thirty black families had already been living in the area before white subdivisions were put in nearby, the City Commission voted down a proposal to build a horseshoe-shaped black subdivision that would only slightly

⁴⁸ "Cleric to Keep Glenview Home," *Tri-State Defender*, February 15, 1958. "Smash Window in Rev. Mason's Home: Action Follows Mystery Burning of His Church," *Tri-State Defender*, February 22, 1958.

⁴⁹ "'Steel Curtain' Barrier Well on Way to Memphis," *Tri-State Defender*, December 6, 1952.

⁵⁰ "'Try to Push Residents from Area,' Contractor Hits Group with Charge," *Tri-State Defender*, April 16, 1955.

abut the backs of white houses on Harris Circle.⁵¹ Whites on the southern portion of Bellevue were able to convince the Planning Commission to rezone an area east of Bellevue and south of Alcy as light industrial to avoid a proposed \$500,000 black subdivision.⁵²

In addition to petitions to the City Commission and Planning Commission, the struggle over housing in Memphis was waged using neighborhood covenants and unstipulated social contracts in order to maintain dwelling segregation and neighborhood status quo in the 1950s and 1960s. No new restrictive covenants in the 1950s in Memphis had language that specifically denied African Americans from purchasing houses or renting in all-white subdivisions or blocks. Neighborhoods and subdivisions built before the 1950s, however, did have restrictive covenants that stipulated that owners could not sell their houses to African Americans. Restrictive covenants became a pressing issue in transitional or gray neighborhoods. In spite of the Supreme Court ruling in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), neighborhoods in Memphis tried to use restrictive covenants written earlier to block African Americans from buying houses. In the middle-class neighborhood directly east of Riverside Park in south Memphis, the Riverside Civic Club filed suit to uphold their block's restrictive covenant after an African American family purchased a house at Arkansas Street and Edsel Avenue and refused to move after three white neighbors tried to convince the family to relocate. The suit was not decided until 1955, when the chancery court abided by the Supreme Court ruling and sided with the defendant.⁵³ Despite the ruling against restrictive covenants, there was a common clause in many subdivisions' restrictive

⁵¹ Moses J. Newson, "30 Negro Families in Cherokee Area Begin Fight to Keep Homes: Council of Clubs Pledges Support," *Tri-State Defender*, December 8, 1956.

⁵² "Whites Prefer Industry to Negro Subdivision," *Tri-State Defender*, April 20, 1957.

⁵³ Green, *Plantation Mentality*, 202-203.

covenants in Memphis that could prevent white homeowners from selling their houses to blacks. The clause stated that homeowners could not take any actions that could be “an annoyance or nuisance to the neighborhood.”⁵⁴ Custom and social pressure also dictated maintaining neighborhood homogeneity. In addition, neighborhood covenants maintained a minimum square footage requirement that could be used to exclude essentially based on race and completely based on class.

These tools combined with the already limited housing stock and the insufficient commitment to public housing forced the African American community to squeeze into neighborhoods that were unable to keep pace with the population growth. As the *Tri-State Defender* editorialized, “Only five percent of the private housing built in Memphis during the past 20 years has been for Negroes. Spelled out that means those who have been able to buy homes in decent neighborhoods have been pressured into staying put.”⁵⁵ In addition, two important external factors helped to maintain segregated housing, forcing African Americans to squeeze into an inadequate and poor quality housing supply. One was the barriers to black homeownership. White real estate brokers, for the most part, refused to serve black clients. Banks often would not make loans for African Americans looking to buy a house. This was largely a result of so-called “redlining,” where federal housing appraisal practices drew red lines around black neighborhoods and other risky areas to indicate places where providing home loans and mortgage subsidies that bankers believed to be too much of a gamble. Rent practices were another significant external factor helping to maintain segregation and limit the housing prospects of the African American

⁵⁴ Reading through several minute books of the Board of Commissioners during the 1950s from the Shelby County Archives there were numerous restrictive covenants attached that were approved by the Board of Commissioners. Their language was very similar and in many cases verbatim.

⁵⁵ “A Blot on Race Relations in Memphis,” *Tri-State Defender*, July 11, 1953.

community. With a high demand for rentals due to the combination of an inability for African Americans to buy a house and large swaths of neighborhoods being essentially off limits due to whites refusing to sell to blacks, landlords were able to extract high rents, especially considering the quality of the rentals available. Blacks in Memphis paid a higher proportion of their income for housing than whites. The combination of high rent and low incomes left many black families to double up with family members or other families to save money on rent.⁵⁶

All of these factors led to superlative population densities in many African American neighborhoods across the city. As Chapter 1 observed, the neighborhoods cleared under urban renewal had very high densities. Emptying these neighborhoods left several thousand African Americans forced from their homes by renewal to crowd into the already limited housing market available to the black population in Memphis, but worse, the conditions of the houses in many of these neighborhoods, in addition to the areas that urban renewal cleared, were often substandard. **(Fig. 24)** Large swaths of older residential areas surrounding the downtown had few available public works. Many houses and tenement buildings had no sewage service, many streets were not paved, and many of these neighborhoods had no sidewalks. The neighborhoods were often older, formerly white neighborhoods that were built in a time when the city did not provide the level of services standard in the 1950s, and, because as the neighborhoods declined and were repopulated by the growing black population, the city felt no need or responsibility to provide them during the 1940s. The Desoto Bayou and the Bayou Gayoso flowed through some of these neighborhoods. **(Fig. 25)** Raw sewage from the city's sewer lines flowed into what

⁵⁶ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 89.

amounted to large open-air drainage ditches. Some of Bayou Gayoso was placed underground in 1916. Neighborhoods that bordered the Desoto Bayou, however, often did not have sewer service and many of their outdoor toilet facilities seeped into these ditches. Pending on the direction of the wind, neighborhoods bordering these bayous were olfactorily set apart from the more desirable neighborhoods to the east by the strong stench that could hang over them, especially after flood waters backed up into the bayous, creeks, and ditches. (**Fig. 26**) One of the goals of the Railroad Avenue project was to place the open-air drainage ditches underground. In addition to the lack of services within these neighborhoods, much of the houses themselves were in bad shape. Within the Riverview project area, the MHA determined that seventy percent of the dwellings within the 100-acre project area were deteriorated to the point that it was “not economically feasible to rehabilitate or repair” them.⁵⁷

With a housing supply in generally poor conditions within neighborhoods that had limited city services and the added pressure of displacement by urban renewal and the construction of the interstate highway system, the situation was ripe for conflict over urban space. The dearth of affordable housing for the African American community combined with the social realities of Jim Crow Memphis made neighborhoods battlegrounds in the struggle to live in and control space in the city. Just as urban space became a major point of public angst, Memphis contracted the firm of the prolific American city planner, Harland Bartholomew, to develop a comprehensive city plan that would, among the many goals of the project, standardize the zoning regulations and outline a long-range improvement plan. Bartholomew’s plans for Memphis would help shape the city’s suburban character for the

⁵⁷ UR Box 24, SCA, “Riverview Urban Renewal Area Survey and Planning Application, Binder 5,” November 19, 1956, 104.

next half century. Bartholomew claimed that city planning “has nothing to do with political interests or factional differences.”⁵⁸ Within the context of increasing angst over the racial makeup of neighborhoods, however, Bartholomew’s plan, enhanced by the federal funding available through the 1949 Housing Act, began to reshape the city in profoundly political ways.

In 1941 after Mayor Walter Chandler was inaugurated, Bartholomew sent the mayor a letter urging the city to encourage the creation of neighborhood associations across the city to protect the property values and maintain the character of neighborhoods.⁵⁹ Soon after the white civic clubs joined together in the county-wide Memphis and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs (MSCCCC). In 1952, black civic clubs joined together to create the Bluff City and Shelby County Council of Civic Clubs (BCSCCCC) as a counterpart to the all-white organization. Clubs within the BCSCCCC pushed the local government for improvements to their neighborhoods, which often had unpaved streets, no sidewalks, and no sewage. Those involved with these civic clubs saw their demands in terms of equality with white neighborhoods not simply as a means to improve their own houses or increase their property values.⁶⁰ While clubs in the BCSCCCC pushed the city for improvements in public services and fought against some urban renewal projects, clubs in the MSCCCC pushed back against public housing and new black subdivisions near white neighborhoods.

In addition to neighborhoods, many churches were a battleground in the era of racial hostility and forces in the effort to maintain segregation. Some churches and ministers were quieter in their racism, choosing to write letters to city officials or other

⁵⁸ Harland Bartholomew, *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1924), 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁰ See Green, *Plantation Mentality*, 200 and Silver and Moeser, 133.

small acts, but some such as Wayne Cox, the pastor of Woodlawn Terrace Baptist Church were more assertive. Cox spoke publicly at a rally of the racist and neo-Confederate group, Pro-Southerners, in Frayser.⁶¹ In the 1950s, when neighborhood transition and the issue of new housing for blacks in the city were major issues, churches and their pastors tried to influence local government officials to help maintain racial segregation across the city. If neighborhood transition occurred or was accelerated, the churches across the city, which were as segregated as the neighborhoods they served, would be in jeopardy. Once the “racial character” of a neighborhood changed, neighborhood churches would have to move, forcing the makeup of the congregation to change and causing the church to lose out financially if the congregation decided to move their building location. In one instance during the late 1950s, a white neighborhood pressured a white church, Sylvan Heights Baptist Church, located in their neighborhood to back down from selling their church building and parsonage to Jackson Avenue Baptist Church, an African American congregation.⁶²

In letters to Mayor Orgill written in protest of the proposed creation of the Lemoyne Park Subdivision, a new black subdivision to be located directly below Elmwood Cemetery, local citizens, including pastors of local churches, pleaded with the mayor to not enable a change in the racial character of their neighborhood, citing the effect it would have on local churches: “I am a communicant member of Grace-St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and, as such, am concerned for *all* churches. It is distressing to see Holy Trinity Episcopal Church on Cummings Street being rapidly destroyed by allowing the infiltration

⁶¹ “White Cleric Wants Jim Crow Churches,” *Tri-State Defender*, May 5, 1956.

⁶² “White Church Backs Down on Offer to Sell,” *Tri-State Defender*, June 7, 1958.

of negroes in this section of Memphis.”⁶³ Local pastors also addressed the mayor concerning the proposed black subdivision. James E. Hamill, the pastor of the First Assembly of God Church, then located on the corner of McLemore and Somerville, wrote the mayor expressing his congregation’s desire to maintain the local neighborhood: “We are most anxious to preserve this community if at all possible and such a subdivision would of course at this time spell the doom of this area as a white community.”⁶⁴ Orgill and the City Planning Commission killed the Lemoyne Park Subdivision plans in February of that year. Pastor Stoy Pate of McLemore Avenue Church of Christ wrote thanking the mayor for stopping the subdivision, couching his congregations objections as financially motivated:

We did not want our protest to be considered as presenting a racial issue, for it was not, but it is vital to our organization, the vast majority of whose members live in this section, that there be no further invasion of this community by colored residents. Particularly so, by reason of the fact that our congregation has within the past few years built a new church, at great expense, for expected established occupancy, and it would, indeed, be an irreparable injury to permit such an encroachment.⁶⁵

Despite the Mayor’s decision to kill the Lemoyne Park Subdivision, churches like First Assembly of God moved out of the area, which had been in the process of racial transition before the Lemoyne Park proposal, into the more firmly established white areas of midtown. First Assembly of God moved from their location at McLemore and Somerville to North Highland and Waynoka in 1962 before moving further east in 1999 to a site at Walnut Grove and Sanga, fifteen miles east of their McLemore location. In fact, the social

⁶³ Letter from Doris Ruth Stokes to Mayor Edmund Orgill, January 28, 1956. UMSC, MS 93, Orgill Papers, Box 16, Folder X,

⁶⁴ Letter from James E. Hamill to Mayor Edmund Orgill, February 11, 1956. UMSC, MS 93, Orgill Papers, Box 16, Folder X.

⁶⁵ Letter from Stoy Pate to Mayor Edmund Orgill, February 22, 1956. UMSC, MS 93, Orgill Papers, Box 16, Folder X.

and racial geography of Memphis is mirrored in the relocation of many of the city's prominent churches.

Two churches that are notable for their engagement in the effort to maintain segregation, both residentially and actually, were Second Presbyterian Church and Bellevue Baptist Church. In 1964, a bi-racial group from Southwestern College (now Rhodes College) attended church services at many of the prominent churches in Memphis. The first "kneel-ins" or "pray-ins" in the country were in Atlanta beginning in August 1960, where only the Baptist churches turned the interracial groups away. As Stephen R. Haynes argues, "Kneel-ins were designed to move the desegregation debate from civic spaces shaped by concerns for property rights and freedom of association into sacred spaces that were morally and theologically charged." They asked the question "would African Americans and their white accomplices be permitted to enter space in which white Christians worshipped a God they claimed loved all persons without distinction." The first kneel-ins in Memphis were on August 21, 1960 when black college and high-school students tried to attend several white churches. At Bellevue Baptist, the largest Baptist church in Memphis, fifty congregants left the building when the group arrived and when ushers told the group of African Americans that they could sit in the third-floor balcony, they left. Two students were arrested by a policeman who had been directing traffic nearby.

The real conflicts regarding church segregation occurred in early 1964 when the Non-Violent Committee, of the intercollegiate chapter of the NAACP, led by the white Southwestern senior Howard Romaine, began a city-wide kneel-in campaign. On March 22, 1964, two college students, one black and one white, tried to attend Second Presbyterian Church (SPC). The church's session had already devised a policy for a

potential kneel-in: They were not to be admitted. After Joe Purdy and Jim Bullock were barred from entering SPC, they came back the next Sunday, Easter, with more members of the NAACP's intercollegiate group. They stood outside in the rain and prayed for an hour while "officers of the church jeered at them." For eight consecutive Sundays, the group held vigil outside SPC. The white press in Memphis, as was typical of most civil rights conflicts and efforts of desegregation, did not report the kneel-ins, but that ended when a religion columnist at the *Commercial Appeal* visited SPC to see that an official from the national Presbyterian denomination had come to SPC to stand in solidarity with the kneel-in participants. Elders at SPC mailed letters to the parents of the students from Southwestern—a Presbyterian school—describing their race-mixing, including suggestions of miscegenation and color photographs of black and white students of different genders standing together. SPC was scheduled to host the 1965 meeting of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) General Assembly. The PCUS was the Southern branch of the American Presbyterian church at the time and most of its congregations were in the South and in border states. Presbyteries and synods throughout the denomination voted to urge SPC to change its policy or forfeit hosting the General Assembly, which it did in early 1965.

At the same time, the pastoral staff, including the Senior Pastor Jeb Russell, brother of Senator Richard Russell (D-GA) who co-authored the famed "Southern Manifesto," had written a letter to the congregation opposing the session's position on integration. Soon after the PCUS relocated their General Assembly, the congregation overruled the session by forcing the oldest and most conservative elders off the session, which led around 300 members to leave and form Independent Presbyterian Church. Independent officially

couched their rupture as being because of the theological liberalism of the PCUS, and the church maintained their denominational independence until joining the Presbyterian Church in America—an organization with its own checkered racial history—in 2000. Despite its reimagined history and the feeling among many of its members that it had moved well beyond its sad racist beginnings, the church forced its new pastor in 2005 out as a result of comments he made during a sermon that suggested that having a problem with “interracial” marriage was a sin. The religious landscape of suburban Memphis is still scarred by the racial struggles of the past and remains, despite some examples to the contrary, deeply segregated.⁶⁶

Public Housing

There were two strands of housing legislation in the New Deal. One was public housing for the poor, and the other was encouraging private homeownership through federal loans programs. The first housing legislation passed in the United States was the Capehart Act of 1934, which created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). This bill was a response to the massive quantity of foreclosures at the height of the Depression and created a system of publicly subsidized low-interest loans to stabilize private, middle-class homeownership.⁶⁷ Public housing projects appeared through one of the major New Deal programs, the Public Works Administration (PWA), which was created by the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. The PWA built the first American public housing project,

⁶⁶ Stephen R. Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-Ins and the Campaign for Southern Church Desegregation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁶⁷ See Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Techwood Homes in Atlanta in 1935. In Memphis, the PWA built two segregated public housing projects in the 1930s, Lauderdale Courts, a 442-unit complex built for whites only, and Dixie Homes, a 675-unit complex built for blacks only. The PWA was also given the authority to execute slum clearance, but these attempts across the country were only marginal, especially when compared to postwar renewal. But the idea of combining slum clearance with building public housing set an important policy precedent for urban renewal programs. Because the courts ruled that the PWA did not have the authority of eminent domain, Congress passed the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937 that created the United States Housing Authority (USHA). USHA served as a lending and planning agency for public housing facilities, while the Federal Works Agency did the construction.

From the beginnings of federal public housing during the New Deal into the mid-1950s, Memphis pursued public housing as a tool to help the poor and the elderly, providing affordable housing that private builders were less willing to construct. This was especially true of neighborhoods that were predominately African American. After the WPA built Lauderdale Courts and Dixie Homes, two more public housing projects were built toward the end of the Depression. Lamar Terrace, an all-white project with 478 units, and two all-black developments, William H. Foote Homes with 900 units and LeMoyne Gardens with 842 units, were completed in 1940 and 1941. The next public housing built in Memphis, however, was not until over a decade later. During the war and in the immediate postwar years, when housing in the city available to blacks was desperately low, the MHA did not construct public housing. The reasons for the twelve-year hiatus between public housing projects remain murky. Sigafos speculates that that the combination of

opposition from the private real estate and construction industry and Crump's increasing skepticism over federal intervention in local affairs explains the gap.⁶⁸

In the early 1950s, the MHA built two more public housing projects. H.P. Hurt Village, an all-white 450-unit project and Edward O. Cleaborn Homes, an all-black 651-unit project, were finished in 1953 and 1954, but only two small projects, one south of downtown and one north of it were built between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s. These two projects were the last built as intentionally segregated public housing. Henry E. Oates Manor, an all-white 280-unit project west of north Manassas Street between Marble and Wortham Avenues, and Joseph A. Fowler Homes, an all-black 320-unit project south of Crump Boulevard between Fourth and Willoughby Streets were built in 1959 and 1960. Fowler Homes presents an interesting case of the politics surrounding public housing construction, a story that helps to explain the absence of public housing construction between 1960 and 1970. The local Home Builders Association (HBA) and the Real Estate Board of Memphis (REBM), the local branch of NAREB, publicly and strongly opposed the construction of Fowler Homes. Of course, NAREB strongly opposed public housing legislation in Congress and, as chapter 1 noted, were strong proponents of the private redevelopment plans in the laws that created urban renewal. REBM had opposed all public housing projects in Memphis before Fowler Homes including the New Deal era projects, and, with the strong and creative opposition to Fowler Homes, REBM ensured that there would be another decade between the construction of another MHA public housing project.

On February 12 and 15, 1957, at a public hearing that spanned two days on the subject of the Fowler Homes project, the attorney representing both the HBA and the

⁶⁸ Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street* 272.

REBM, John Heiskell, argued that their opposition to Fowler Homes was simply to the location that the MHA had chosen. They were siding with the local residents of the area whose homes would be cleared to make for the new project because, according to Heiskell, local residents had made too many investments in rehabilitation for the government to tear down their property. Heiskell argued that in the location the MHA chose residents had invested over \$170,000 in rehabilitating their properties under the program, modeled after the “Baltimore Plan,” run by the Housing Department, a separate entity from the MHA run by Public Service Commissioner, John T. Dwyer. In actuality, internal MHA documents show that only \$27,000 had been spent on rehabilitation.⁶⁹ Around fifty residents of the area, which was a black neighborhood, came to the meeting in protest, carrying signs. One protest read: “You made us repair—Now you want us to tear down our homes.” Of course, the HBA and the REBM’s argument in opposition to the project was cynical since the organizations opposed all public housing in the city, but the tack they took in the debate at the drawn out public hearing was their strongest hand and enjoyed the support of the local residents. Mayor Orgill laughed off Heiskell’s and the local residents’ objections saying, “It’s impossible to bring that area up to anything like a decent standard. If you brick-veneered all the buildings you wouldn’t have anything when you finished.” Along with the Mayor, the MHA as well as the Memphis Building Trades Council spoke in support of the project.⁷⁰ The City Commission approved the project, but the strong opposition of the HBA and the REBM along with the new mayor after the 1959 election led to a halt in the construction of public housing in Memphis for a decade.

⁶⁹ UR Box 236, SCA, Fowler Homes File, “Statement to the City Commission,” 3.

⁷⁰ “Orgill Comes Out for Crump Site,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 16, 1957. “Case Presented Against Public Housing Project,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 13, 1957.

The public housing built between the early 1950s and 1960 helped assure the support of black leaders for urban renewal. The MHA argued when they sold urban renewal, that the MHA was going to invest in a robust campaign of public housing. They said that many of the areas cleared by urban renewal would have public housing projects located on them. This quote from Republican black leader, Lieutenant Lee is emblematic of the way the promise of public housing ensured the support of black leaders:

I have seen inside many of these shotgun houses in the alley and shanties in which large numbers of my people are crowded into two rooms living on the borderline of mere subsistence. I have felt the sorrow of their dark and gloomy surroundings. I have shed tears with them for a better place and a better day. And I have rejoiced at the development of Dixie Homes, Foote Homes, and Le Moyne Gardens and I have measured the fine spirits of my people grow in the development of these places.... Our people have lived on the borderline of mere subsistence and sacrifices mean much to them. Their homes may be small but they are their home and they have built them out of wash tubs, out of the anvils, and the farms and I'm sure that despite the fact that many fine memories cluster around those firesides, on the walls are "God Bless The Home." I'm sure if the right kind of an agreement are maintained in order to pay them adequate sums for these homes in which to rebuild their lives and their families I'm sure with that in mind the Housing Authority keeping that in mind, values and all, our people will be ready to march with the progress of Memphis and plant new flowers in new yards to bloom eternally to everlasting beauty and glory in our city.⁷¹

Despite the failure of the MHA to deliver public housing in the 1960s, during the mid-1960s, segregated public housing in Memphis began to change. In August 1965, the Federal Public Housing Authority opened an investigation into MHA with the regional office in Atlanta leading the inquiry. Cornelia Crenshaw, the manager of the Dixie Homes project until she resigned in July, came to the NAACP with a complaint about the MHA that centered around two elderly sisters who, she claimed were denied entrance into Lauderdale Courts, a previously all-white project. The sisters lived on Ashland Street north

⁷¹ SCA, UR Files, Box 154, "Public Hearing of Memphis Housing Authority," June 2, 1952, 10.

of Poplar Avenue and needed to be near the hospital complex, Crenshaw claimed that they were accepted to Dixie homes but were denied entrance into Lauderdale Courts. Crenshaw's account showed that the size apartment that the sisters qualified for was not available in Dixie Homes, which was close to the hospital where one of the sisters required treatment for cancer and diabetes. Instead, Crenshaw had their papers indicate Lauderdale Courts but when the papers came back from the MHA they had been changed to the larger apartment in Dixie Homes.⁷² After the Crenshaw case, the MHA slowly began to integrate their housing projects. By 1967, the MHA had admitted twenty black families into apartments in formerly all-white projects and one white person into a formerly all-black project. In September 1967, the MHA changed their application policies to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The new rules restricted applicants from being able to designate their preference for a particular housing project. Instead, applicants were assigned to the housing project with the greatest number of vacancies. They were allowed to reject the first two options without consequence, but if they rejected the third their name was placed at the bottom of the waiting list.⁷³

After the integration of public housing in Memphis, the MHA built several housing projects during the first term of the Nixon Administration. The location of those housing projects by the MHA was a contentious political issue in local politics. The MHA planned a turnkey—or private/public partnership—public housing facility for the Frayser area. This project is particularly notable because of the area's success in keeping public housing out of the neighborhood—unlike some of the other contentious public housing sites. Again in 1972, Frayser successfully defended itself against public housing. The City Council voted

⁷² "Memphis Housing Authority Faces Discrimination Probe," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 3, 1965.

⁷³ "Preference Halted in MHA Housing," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 16, 1967.

to reject the MHA's plans for a turnkey project in Frayser. The vote in the City Council divided along racial lines, with the three black councilpersons voting for the project and all of the white members voting against it. The rejection of the 100-unit project resulted in Memphis losing allocated funding from HUD.⁷⁴ Mayor Wyeth Chandler after the proposals defeat chided the MHA saying that staff members who "are limited in their thinking on assigning housing to a place in a community where it can cause more damage than good" should resign.⁷⁵

Among the projects that the MHA did manage to build, the first project completed during this new surge in public housing construction was Walter M. Simmons Estates, a 300-unit project built outside the Interstate Highway loop in Oakville a neighborhood to the east of the airport finished in 1970. It was followed shortly after by Dr. L.M. Graves Manor in west Whitehaven and Getwell Gardens, also in Oakville, which were built in 1971. The MHA built two more, both smaller projects, in the early 1970s, one in west Whitehaven, Horn Lake Heights, and one in South Memphis, Willis E. Montgomery Plaza, the first built within the Interstate loop since Fowler Homes in 1960 and the last conventional public housing project built in Memphis. In the early 1970s, other public housing options began to emerge in addition to the conventional projects. Five leased housing options, a public-private hybrid, were constructed in the early 1970s totaling 481 units. Two were in west Whitehaven, one in South Memphis, one on the northwest edge of the Orange Mound neighborhood, and one north of Frayser. In addition, four projects were built in 1972 and 1973 specifically for the elderly all built surrounding the downtown.

⁷⁴ Clark Porteus, "Public Housing Development in Frayser Is Rejected by City Council," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 20, 1972. and James Denley, "Public Housing Site Rejected by Council," *Commercial Appeal*, October 20, 1972.

⁷⁵ "Mayor Hits MHA for Frayser Action," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 20, 1972.

The Bartholomew Plan and the City Planning Commission

In 1920, the city of Memphis hired Harland Bartholomew and Associates to execute a comprehensive plan, Memphis's first foray into formal city planning.⁷⁶ Bartholomew began his career after E.P. Goodrich and George B. Ford hired him to work on the city plan of Newark, New Jersey during the early 1910s, before being hired as the chief planner of St. Louis, Missouri, where he served as its planning engineer from 1916 to 1950. In 1919, Bartholomew founded a consulting firm, Harland Bartholomew and Associates, executing his first plan for the city of Omaha. Throughout his career, Bartholomew's firm carried out numerous comprehensive city plans for many cities across the United States and Canada, the most prolific city planning firm of the time period. Bartholomew developed planning ideals for the automobile age that would have lasting effects on urbanization in the United States during the twentieth century. Bartholomew also influenced the trajectory of American city planning by training a vast army of city planners who at one point or another found their way through the Bartholomew firm. In a time when city planning did not have an established academic foundation—only four schools by 1940 had professional planning degrees—Bartholomew's firm served as an important training ground. Associates were aided by the firm's increasingly vast resources of information on cities across the country. Bartholomew, in a desire to see his comprehensive plans actually carried through, chose a project manager for each individual comprehensive plan who would live in the city they were planning for a period of three years to work closely with the local planning operation.

⁷⁶ For an in depth look at the career and influence of Harland Bartholomew see Eldridge Lovelace. *Harland Bartholomew: His Contributions to American Urban Planning*. Urbana, IL: Department of Urban and Regional Planning, 1993.

Bartholomew encouraged project managers to join and lead the local city planning office if the locals wanted longer-term help in implementing the comprehensive plan. Through his firm's proliferation and what Norman Johnston calls colonization practices, Bartholomew had a lasting and significant influence on the shape of many major American cities.⁷⁷

At the time Memphis hired Bartholomew in 1920 for his first of what would be three comprehensive city plans, Memphis had just established the Memphis City Planning Commission (MCPC) after the state of Tennessee legislatively encouraged its largest cities to start actively engaging in formal city planning. The stimulus for creating planning agencies across the country during this period was the increasing problem of traffic congestion created after the introduction and growing popularity of the automobile.⁷⁸ Congestion was one of the primary forces in Memphis's charter for the MCPC.⁷⁹ Completed in 1924, Bartholomew's plan for Memphis outlines six main concerns of a comprehensive city plan: streets, transit, transportation, public recreation, zoning, and civic art.⁸⁰ Much of the 1924 plan dealt with making the Memphis street system work together, by connecting dead end streets and widening cross-town avenues. (**Fig. 27**) Bartholomew put primary emphasis on carefully executing the major street plan outside the city limits for future growth because of the difficulty in changing the street pattern in established areas of the city.⁸¹ In planning for the automobile, he urged the reduction of cross streets within

⁷⁷ Norman J. Johnston, "Harland Bartholomew: Precedent for the Profession," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Volume 39:2, 115-124.

⁷⁸ See Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

⁷⁹ In its enumerated powers and duties the first three are to collect data, to remain current on city planning practices, and to act on matters that affect "the present and future movement of traffic."

⁸⁰ Bartholomew, *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee* (1924), 11.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

residential neighborhoods to maximize space for houses. Many of the recommendations for the street system outlined in the 1924 plan were implemented in subsequent years. At the time planners believed these types of changes to the city's street system would aid the success of the CBD after the threat of congestion caused by increased automobile traffic made trips downtown cumbersome. These changes, however, actually ushered in the beginning of the decline in the prominence of the downtown in the intervening postwar years by opening up large swaths of the city for the advent of the suburban shopping mall.

By the time Bartholomew's firm executed their third comprehensive plan—the second was submitted in 1938 but never officially adopted—the implementation of Bartholomew's 1924 plan facilitated the introduction of the suburban shopping mall, leading to a decline in the commercial supremacy of the CBD. In addition, the postwar growth boom aided by cheap home financing from the FHA and the VA led to the rise of new subdivisions outside the existing suburbanized area of the city. With no comprehensive plan and a leadership vacuum in the MCPC, most of the plans for new subdivisions were approved without alteration. Despite objections from the CRC, the Memphis Real Estate Board and the Homebuilders Association, Mayor Overton refused to hire a professional planner, but, after the Crump organization forced Overton's resignation and Frank Tobey became mayor, the city hired Bartholomew for a third plan. Shortly after Mayor Orgill was elected, the city and county, at the recommendation of the Bartholomew firm, combined their planning agencies, creating the Memphis and Shelby County Planning Commission (MSCPC).⁸²

⁸² Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 221-222.

In the 1955 plan, the Bartholomew firm orchestrated a plan that they believed would allow for the continued preeminence of the CBD but would also encourage suburban sprawl:

The trend toward decentralization of business and industry must be recognized in the Comprehensive Plan and provisions made for new developments of this nature. While the central business district always will be the principal shopping, financial, and amusement center for the Memphis area, modern outlying shopping centers will be built as population increases in the outlying areas. The central business district should remain in its present location and if provided with adequate off-street parking facilities and easy access by private and public transportation, should continue to expand and prosper.⁸³

Bartholomew's sunny outlook for the CBD belied the plan's proscriptions for encouraging decentralization and the attendant proliferation of the suburban shopping mall. Bartholomew believed, as did many in the local government, that the only threat to the CBD was deterioration on its edges and the problem of the automobile, particularly parking. Their policy prescriptions, in line with the national "trend toward decentralization," enabled the further drift toward suburban sprawl and a decrease in the population density. The corporate population density was 13.1 persons per acre in 1938 when the Bartholomew firm presented its second plan. By 1953, the number was 11.8 and the 1955 Bartholomew plan predicted that the population density within the city limits would be 9.98 by 1980.⁸⁴ The Bartholomew firm had already aided the steady decline in the population density. The 1924 Comprehensive Plan called for "spreading out development," citing Los Angeles as a city with a fast growth rate despite zoning measures

⁸³ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Report upon the Comprehensive Plan: Memphis, Tennessee*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1955), 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

that encouraged lower population densities.⁸⁵ He also called for eliminating several streetcar lines to open up roads for automobiles to travel downtown.⁸⁶ The plan believed that “more area will be used in all residential categories” in a Memphis that the plan says should more than double in land area.⁸⁷

The Bartholomew plan’s design for a less-dense urban area is an example of the belief in a small population density which was at the heart of mid-century urban planning in the United States. The plan asserts that these prescriptions were simply following national trends, but Bartholomew, of course, was at the pinnacle of his influence over the direction of national city planning trends.⁸⁸ During the Second World War, FDR appointed Bartholomew and six other leading city planners and engineers, including Frederic Delano and Rexford Tugwell, to the Interregional Highways Committee who drew up the blueprint for what would become the Interstate Highway System.⁸⁹ In addition to drawing up the comprehensive plan for Memphis, Bartholomew’s firm executed significant plans for Atlanta, the San Francisco Bay area, and Washington, DC among several others during the

⁸⁵ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee: Final Report*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1924), 124.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁷ Bartholomew, *Comprehensive Plan: Memphis*, 1955, 11-12.

⁸⁸ Jeffrey Brown’s article on Bartholomew and Robert Moses asserts that there were two competing vision of freeway planning that vied gain preeminence, what he calls the planning vision of Bartholomew and the traffic service vision of the engineers best represented by Moses. I take issue with Brown’s assessment of dueling visions. Neither Bartholomew nor Moses completely dominated the path that the Interstate System would take in urban areas—after all Moses advocated interstates directly crossing Manhattan. In the end the main distinction between these two “visions” is that the Federal Highway Administration sent all interstate funding directly to states without funding urban planning commissions to advise the state highway departments on routing the interstate within an urban area. Jeffrey Brown, “A Tale of Two Visions: Harland Bartholomew, Robert Moses, and the Development of the American Freeway,” *Journal of Planning History* 4:3 (2005), 3-32.

⁸⁹ See Interregional Highways Committee, *Interregional Highways: A Report of the National Interregional Highway Committee Outlining and Recommending a National System of Interregional Highways*. For further reading on the origins of the Interstate Highway System see David Lewis. *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highway, Transforming American Life*. New York: Viking, 1997. Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, 1944.

postwar years. Bartholomew, prolific in the 1950s, advocated a policy of increasing decentralization and decreasing density:

The objective of the Comprehensive Plan should be the gradual attainment of a city that will be attractive as a place to live, work, and raise a family; in such a city the impact of urbanization will be minimized to the fullest extent.⁹⁰

Bartholomew's claim of mitigating the results of urbanization is one of the most succinct expressions of the anti-urban sentiment typical of some planners, architects, and politicians during the postwar decades. Concretely, what Bartholomew meant by minimizing "the impact of urbanization" was alleviating traffic congestion, creating parks, removing slum areas, and creating a low population density. Bartholomew believed that zoning laws were the most important tool in lessening the results of urbanization and "very largely determine the character, efficiency, and quality of Memphis."⁹¹

Shortly after the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Hadacheck v. Sebastian* (1915), which affirmed the right of Los Angeles to make zoning ordinances restricting brick-making to specified districts of the city, a ruling that sparked New York to establish a comprehensive zoning ordinance in 1916, Memphis inaugurated its first zoning laws during the city's first contract with the Bartholomew firm. The planning outfit called for density regulation in the city's comprehensive zoning ordinance—first passed in 1921—in order to encourage lower densities in the city.⁹² Height restrictions were particularly important in Bartholomew's plans for Memphis in the 1920s for both aesthetic and functional—maintaining low density—reasons. His vision for the city was similar to the Washington, DC that resulted from the Heights of Buildings Act (1899). (**Fig. 28**) When

⁹⁰ Bartholomew, *Comprehensive Plan: Memphis*, 1955, 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹² Bartholomew, *City Plan of Memphis*, 1924, 126.

the firm reevaluated the city's zoning ordinances during the 1950s, they found the city "seriously over-zoned for multiple dwellings" with single-family dwellings "not receiving adequate protection."⁹³ The zoning ordinance passed by the city under the advisement of the Bartholomew firm expanded the acreage zoned exclusively for single-family dwellings over five times the amount designated in the amended 1921 ordinance. The new ordinance cut the size of areas for two family dwellings nearly in half and cut the multiple-family areas by over half. The new ordinance also made modest cuts to the size of areas zoned commercial and industrial.⁹⁴ Despite the Bartholomew plan's clear prescriptions for decreasing population density and increasing decentralization, some of the plan's proposals were reacting to the form the city was already taking. The increased emphasis on the single-family dwelling unit in the plan was in large part due to the fact that they made up most of the development in the eastern third of the city, part of the haphazard suburban growth during the intervening postwar years before the city hired the Bartholomew firm.

As Bartholomew and Associates guided the future growth of Memphis toward decentralization and low density, the urban renewal projects taking place in the city reinforced those policy recommendations. The building codes and regulations for the redevelopment of the Railroad Avenue project required that 4.2 dwelling units per acre was the maximum density. Buildings could cover no more than twenty-five percent of the land, and houses had a two and a half story maximum and required a minimum thirty-feet-deep front yard.⁹⁵ In the Bartholomew plan, zoning ordinances were to be an aid to urban renewal. Under the advisement of Bartholomew and Associates, the administration of

⁹³ Bartholomew, *Comprehensive Plan: Memphis*, 1955, 19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁹⁵ UR Box 24, SCA, "Riverview Urban Renewal Composite Plan," April 7, 1964, 28.

Mayor Tobey enacted the “Rehabilitation Ordinance” to create the Department of Housing Improvement, directed by the Commissioner of Public Service. This agency, whose responsibility was to supplement the MHA’s urban renewal program, was charged with the task of enforcing housing ordinances in neighborhoods with “buildings and premises which are unfit for human habitation or use due to [...] conditions rendering the dwellings, buildings, and premises unsafe, unsanitary, and dangerous or detrimental to the health, safety, or morals.”⁹⁶ There was at times a moral component in the language used by some in the discussions of suburbanization and decreasing population density.⁹⁷

Decisions from the MSCPC during the 1960s also encouraged low population density and the sprawling nature that the city would take. Memphis did not hire a full-time professional planner until Jerrold Moore in 1962, but even by then the power of the MSCPC was so weak that their planning recommendation in zoning cases were rejected by the city government in over half the cases.⁹⁸ The roughshod planning of new subdivisions to the east continued unabated from the immediate postwar years through the 1960s. **Figures 29 and 30** show how new subdivisions on the eastern fringe of Memphis frequently were developed in the middle of the open countryside. One planning idea from the MSCPC that did not receive approval would have further encouraged decentralization. The recommendation was for creating multiple centers, planned sub-downtowns where office

⁹⁶ “An Ordinance to Amend Article 3007 of Volume II of the Memphis Digest,” 1. The Papers of Mayor Frank T. Tobey, The Shelby County Room of the Memphis Public Library.

⁹⁷ The moral rightness of decreased population density or the deleterious effect that high population density had on the morals was common throughout the planning documents from the Bartholomew firm as well as from others within the local government. Ernest P. Schumacher, chair of the CPC during part of the 1950s said to the *Commercial Appeal* in a 1966 article commenting on the new direction of the CPC’s zoning ordinances said that the city had a “moral responsibility” to limit the size of zone categories with the implication being that all categories but single-family dwellings should be limited. See William J. Miles, “Rezoning Advice Goes Unheeded,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 26, 1966.

⁹⁸ Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 222.

buildings and shopping centers would be focused.⁹⁹ Despite the plan's failure to be embraced by local officials, one such center in Memphis was developed. At White Station Road and Poplar Avenue, just inside the eastern loop of Interstate-240, ten miles from the CBD, a suburban office park complex began to be built in the mid-1960s. (**Fig. 31**)

Within all of the discussion of zoning ordinances, the Bartholomew plan did not directly address the effects of urban renewal and zoning ordinances on racial issues, but the authors of the 1938 Comprehensive Plan advised city officials to enact zoning ordinances based on race:

It would be advantageous to the city if the bulk of the Negro population could be confined to definite districts that have already been established. With a limited increase in Negro population expected in the future, improvement of health and sanitary conditions within these districts will largely eliminate further shifting of the Negro population.¹⁰⁰

In addition to establishing for Memphis's civic leaders and planners the powerful effect that zoning ordinances could have on the spatial makeup of the city, in this statement are the seeds of the central goal of urban renewal. One of the primary objectives of zoning, according to Bartholomew and Associates, was "to conserve the value of land by protecting the character of all neighborhoods or districts within the city," maintaining the stability of the racial character of neighborhoods was a key zoning issue.¹⁰¹ When the Bartholomew Plan of 1955 urges the city to increase greatly the acreage of neighborhoods designated single-family dwellings only, this is a veiled attempt to minimize the encroachment of many African Americans on suburban neighborhoods. With the removal of the streetcar lines in 1947, an automobile was a requirement for living in many suburban neighborhoods

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 184.

¹⁰¹ Bartholomew, *Comprehensive Plan: Memphis*, 1955, 16.

in the city. The necessity of an automobile combined with the pressure of unstipulated social contracts barred most African Americans from seeking better housing in neighborhoods not traditionally open to blacks—restrictive covenants stipulating race specifically were not used in new subdivisions during the 1950s after the 1948 Supreme Court decision *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which said that the courts could not uphold racial covenants. Because these zoning ordinances kept two- and multi-family dwellings away from many of the suburban neighborhoods, especially the newer neighborhoods to the east as well as Whitehaven to the south and Frayser to the north, they essentially zoned the majority of African Americans out of these areas because many could not afford to live in detached single-family units.

In addition to zoning, the Bartholomew plan also put many African American neighborhoods under fire with the scheme for the placement of the new interstate highways that would run through and around Memphis. As **Figure 32** demonstrates, the plan for interstate highways adopted in 1956 by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) consisted of a loop around the existing suburbanized districts in the city surrounding a cross of freeways with a major north-south and east-west route. The north the loop was to run just north of the Wolf River, crossing the length of Mud Island to meet the main route of the system near where the present-day A.W. Willis Avenue crosses onto the island. The loop would continue down the tip of Mud Island joining downtown at Beale Street and running where present-day Riverside Drive continues until hitting the interchange where E.H. Crump Boulevard meets Interstate-55. The plan sited the southern loop to the north of Nonconnah Creek turning north just beyond the intersection of Quince and Crestwood. The plan for the main route or what would become Interstate-40 was to

cross Mud Island at A.W. Willis Avenue and continuing to follow the path of present-day North Parkway and Sam Cooper Boulevard. A north-south route was planned to run where present-day Interstate-240 cuts just to the west of midtown. The only portions of the plans not put into place were the northwest corner of the loop from the top of the north-south highway to the location of the present-day Memphis-Arkansas Bridge on Interstate-55 and the east-west highway from Interstate-240 to the loop. The plans for the loop were mostly innocuous, not affecting existing neighborhoods because they followed two lowland streams. The north-south highway as well as the western portion (and the portion built) of the east-west highway, however, ran directly through several African American neighborhoods. The north-south route would essentially separate the black neighborhoods to the west from the all-white neighborhoods to the east in midtown. Despite the fact that the 1949 Housing Act separated the agencies responsible for urban renewal and the new interstate highway system, urban renewal locations in Memphis—as was common in cities across the country—were coordinated with the locations of the interstates, with most of the major urban renewal projects located adjacent to these new freeways. In fact, the only urban renewal projects that the city undertook that were not near the new highways were the Court Avenue projects where the new Civic Center Plaza would be located and the two Beale Street projects. Both the Court Avenue and Beale Street projects were located in or on the periphery of the CBD.

The main north-south interstate branch and the short section of the east-west branch from Interstate-240 to the Mississippi River ran through African American neighborhoods. Notably, these were the only portions of the system of interstate highways in the Memphis metropolitan area that cut through developed localities. In these neighborhoods, the

decisions on siting the freeways proceeded as it did in the vast majority of cases around the country. Neighborhoods with the least costly land values were the areas pursued by state highway departments using eminent domain to acquire the land. In most cases, black neighborhoods were the least expensive land in the city, thanks to over two decades of redlining through the FHA, the lower average lifetime earning power of African Americans than whites, and the forces of segregation that confined the majority of blacks to living in older, neglected neighborhoods. In addition, the north-south interstate that became 240 was routed on a nearly perfect line separating the black districts surrounding the downtown to the west from the white neighborhoods of midtown to the east. (**Fig. 33**) Interstates and other limited access roads were used as a stable physical barrier between white and black neighborhoods in cities across the country.¹⁰² The case of Memphis shows that interstate highways that separated black neighborhoods from white neighborhoods might have a lasting effect on the racial makeup of neighborhoods for the long-term as white neighborhoods in central midtown remain mostly white to the present despite the large amount of white flight that took place in other districts of the city.

The one planned freeway that would have affected white neighborhoods, the intended routing of Interstate-40 through the center of Memphis, was tied up in over two decades of legal challenges and bureaucratic wrangling that prevented the highway from ever getting constructed.¹⁰³ The actual construction of the interstates in the city began in 1958, and by 1963 around 18 miles of freeways had come to completion. In 1958, however,

¹⁰² See Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008, for an account of the highway loop proposed in New Haven, CT.

¹⁰³ CPOP, which still exists to the present, acknowledges that the effort to kill the interstate route was not simply to save Overton Park but also to protect midtown Memphis from being split in two by a major interstate highway. See Naomi Van Tol, "Forty Years Ago" March 3, 2011. <http://www.overtonparkforever.org/2011/03/forty-years-ago.html>.

just as construction had begun on the new highway system, early opposition to the east-west route came to the fore at public hearings because the new interstate would cut the 342-acre Overton Park in half. The issue became a cause for many midtown upper middle-class whites, most of whom lived in the area. In 1964 after the Tennessee highway department finalized their plans for the new Interstate-40, these residents and several faculty members of the nearby liberal arts college Southwestern at Memphis—later Rhodes College—formed Citizens to Preserve Overton Park (CPOP) in order to prevent the midtown location of the new freeway. Environmental groups including the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society joined CPOP in opposition and helped make the issue a minor national environmental issue. CPOP took their opposition into the US District Court and the case landed in the Supreme Court, which ordered TDOT to find “feasible and prudent alternatives” to routing highways through public parks.¹⁰⁴ From 1971, when the case was decided, until 1981 when TDOT removed the midtown route of Interstate-40 from the federal highway plans, TDOT sent several proposals to the US Department of Transportation including a planned tunnel, all of which were rejected. White middle- and upper middle-class residents of midtown had opposed the federal and state governments as well as the local Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Association, Future Memphis, Inc., and the newly elected City Council to kill the plans for an interstate highway through their neighborhoods, a feat that local black neighborhoods just to the west were absolutely powerless to do.¹⁰⁵ In 1975, a downtown investment company owner said about the inability to complete the east-west expressway, “the exodus from downtown started with

¹⁰⁴ In *Citizens to Preserve Overton Park v. Volpe*, the Supreme Court cited the 1966 Department of Transportation Act to side with CPOP and force TDOT to find an alternative route.

¹⁰⁵ See Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 228-232.

great haste when they stopped it [the expressway]. It was hard to get downtown. Gone is the old compulsion to go because of its inaccessibility.”¹⁰⁶

Throughout the process of suburbanization in Memphis, the city used annexation as a tool to incorporate new growth inside the city limits. Memphis had an aggressive annexation campaign throughout the twentieth century, and unlike most other American cities, Memphis continued annexation up to the last half of the twentieth century. The first major annexation occurred in 1899 when the city annexed 12 square miles of new territory, netting the city 58,300 new citizens.¹⁰⁷ The city made major annexations before the 1910 and 1920 census and subsequently in 1944, 1947, and 1950. Much of these annexations were implemented to boost Memphis’s census populations at a time when population growth was a major tool of city boosterism. The 1947 instance, however, was used to incorporate E.H. Crump’s pet industrial project on Presidents Island. After the 1950 annexation, the city felt it need the advice of a professional city planner and hired the Bartholomew firm to help the city guide its growth. In 1958, the city annexed the northern suburb of Frayser and in 1969 the city finally added Whitehaven to the south. In the early 1970s, Memphis incorporated the Raleigh area. Later annexations added lands surrounding Interstate-40 east of the expressway loop, but the already incorporated towns of Bartlett to the northeast and Germantown and Collierville to the east brought the annexation movement in Memphis mostly to a halt.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Weiler and Jefferson Riker, “‘The Downtown Problem’: Acceleration in Decline of Memphis Traced to 1968 Events,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 28, 1975.

¹⁰⁷ Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 98.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 205, 213-214, 223-227.

The Case of Whitehaven and Frayser

In *The Silent Majority*, Matthew Lassiter convincingly argues that suburban whites, who benefitted from the massive federal subsidy programs—the VA and FHA loan programs—that encouraged suburbanization, fought vehemently against court-ordered busing programs. In doing so, these middle-class suburban whites nationally formed the basis for the beginnings of the Conservative Movement in the 1970s and locally helped to increase racial and class segregation: “Through the populist revolt of the Silent Majority, millions of white homeowners who had achieved a residentially segregated and federally subsidized version of the American Dream forcefully rejected race-conscious liberalism as an unconstitutional exercise in social engineering and an unprecedented violation of free-market meritocracy.”¹⁰⁹ Forced busing in Memphis proved to be a galvanizing event for middle-class whites. In the communities of Frayser and Whitehaven, the federally imposed busing program along with other factors spurred white flight in suburban neighborhoods and produced a vast increase in private school attendance.

By the late 1960s, much of the Memphis school system was segregated still. In October and November of 1969, the United Black Coalition and the NAACP led marches against the Memphis Board of Education to protest continued segregation, non-compliance with the fifteen-year-old *Brown* decision, and the lack of black representation on the school board and in the classroom. (**Figs. 34 – 36**) Coalition leaders called on parents to withhold their children from school until the disputes were settled with the Board. On November 3, 1969, called “Black Monday,” an estimated 67,000 students were absent from classes

¹⁰⁹ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 2.

across Memphis.¹¹⁰ Large demonstrations were held as a part of Black Monday as well as calls on protesters to boycott white businesses during the Christmas shopping season. (Figs. 37 – 41) As the 1960s came to a close and the federal judiciary intervened in cities across the country in the early 1970s, enforcing the *Brown* decision over fifteen years later by means of the busing policy, public protest amongst whites became as much a force in the Memphis political and urban landscape as the demonstrations for the civil rights of African Americans did in the 1950s and 1960s.

In Memphis, the court-ordered busing came through the case *Northcross v. Board of Education of Memphis* first filed in 1960 by Dr. T.W. Northcross whose daughter was eight years old at the time. The case is a legal labyrinth. It has been litigated into the present, and studying it—at least in the present moment—is difficult because the Federal District Court of Western Tennessee has lost all of the desegregation and busing orders from the 1970s. Nevertheless, a brief summary of the case and its effects on the urban landscape of Memphis are possible through newspaper articles on the subject and the papers of the judge in the case, Robert M. McRae, Jr, at the University of Memphis Special Collections. The early rulings in the case called for one grade at a time per year to be desegregated. Thirteen black students, whose parents consented, were selected to desegregate four schools in the city. Some of those first students were the children of Memphis civil rights activists such as Rev. Samuel Kyles and lawyer A.W. Willis, Jr.¹¹¹

After the Supreme Court ordered in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that busing students to achieve integration was the best way to desegregate

¹¹⁰ “After March Prevented, Scattered Incidents of Violence Occurred,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 11, 1969. “Speeches, Rain Mark Peaceful March,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 12, 1969.

¹¹¹ John Branston, “Integration and Innocence,” *Memphis Flyer*, May 19, 2004.

school districts, first District Judge Bailey Brown and later Judge Robert McRae ordered busing in Memphis. The Circuit Court reversed these orders, and it was in turn reversed by the Supreme Court and remanded to the charge of the District judge. The first busing plan came in 1971, but thanks to foot-dragging, no real busing happened until the spring of 1972. Judge McRae's modified Plan A handed down and approved by the Memphis School Board in April 1972 paired or clustered schools together so that some students previously enrolled in one were bused to the other and vice versa. Frayser High School was paired with Manassas High School, located on the north edge of the Pinch District around four miles south-southwest of Frayser High. The plan called for transforming Frayser High from all-white to 58.3 percent white and Manassas High from all-black to 58.7 percent black. Trezevant Junior High in Frayser was paired with Cypress to the south. In Whitehaven, Hillcrest High School was paired with Corry High School located directly southeast of Forest Hill Cemetery around four miles north of Hillcrest, and Geeter in the black section west of Whitehaven and Fairley directly in Whitehaven were paired in hopes of turning Geeter 59 percent black and Fairley 54.1 percent white. Similarly, Walker, Graves, and Raineshaven Elementary in the Whitehaven area were clustered, with the intention to turn all three into just over fifty percent black.¹¹² For the next school year, Judge McRae selected a plan from several devised by a bi-racial team from the Memphis School Board. He dubbed the plan, Plan Z, in an attempt to establish it as the final solution.¹¹³ The NAACP appealed Plan Z asking for an even greater expansion of busing, but the Supreme Court upheld McRae's plan.¹¹⁴ Plan Z enlarged the number of students bused, but it ensured that

¹¹² "Rundown of Schools Involved in Ruling," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 21, 1972.

¹¹³ *Northcross v. Board of Education*, 489 F.2d 15 (6th Cir. 1973).

¹¹⁴ Jimmie Covington, "NAACP Appeal is Denied; City's Current Busing Plan Upheld by Supreme Court," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 23, 1974.

no student would be bused during both his junior-high and high-school years. The plan removed some of the pairing and clustering of Plan A and simply added “satellite zones” to districts that were reduced in size. For example, at Frayser High the former school district was narrowed geographically in the Frayser area while a satellite school zone north and east of the Pinch District was included in order to achieve greater racial balance.¹¹⁵ While not unanimously lauded among African American Memphians, **Figures 42 and 43** visually demonstrate the feelings about busing among many blacks and whites at the onset of busing.

The initial response from middle-class whites in Whitehaven and Frayser to the Plan A of the *Northcross* case was an all-out attack on busing and public education. Paralleling the “Black Monday” protests of late 1969, white families across the city, but highly concentrated in Whitehaven and, especially, Frayser, kept their children out of schools in the fall of 1972 when the busing orders went into effect.¹¹⁶ White Memphians created what became a large organization, Citizens Against Busing (CAB) after the original District Court decision in 1971. The group was formed to spearhead efforts to curtail busing or simply to stop it completely. CAB organized private schools for the portion of the nearly 8,000 Memphis students whose parents withdrew from public education who could not get in to or afford the private schools that already existed. Across Memphis, CAB opened twenty-six schools by the spring of 1973 with an enrollment of 5,139.¹¹⁷ All of the CAB schools of the early 1970s operated in church buildings, mostly Baptist.¹¹⁸ (**Fig. 44**) In the

¹¹⁵ “High School: 1973-1974, Plan Z,” UMSC, MS 386, Box 4, Folder G-12.

¹¹⁶ “Discontent in Schools Grows Sharper after Seven Months of Extensive Busing,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 16, 1974.

¹¹⁷ Lynn Lewis, “5,139 Students in CAB Schools,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 16, 1973.

¹¹⁸ “CAB Schools Elicit Varied Ratings,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 20, 1973. “Baptist Churches to Open Schools,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 5, 1973.

1970-1971 school year, Memphis public schools had a total enrollment of 148,015. Nearly 8,000 students dropped from the rolls after Plan A began in the beginning of the spring of 1972. After the expanded Plan Z went into effect in the fall of 1973, around 20,000 students dropped from the rolls. By 1974, Memphis, Tennessee had the largest private school system in the country. Between 1973 and 1980 the white student population of Memphis Public Schools dropped from 71,369 to 27,173.¹¹⁹ In Frayser for the 1973-1974 school year, Baptist churches organized together to create a private school system in response to busing.¹²⁰ This problem has persisted into the present as 89 percent of those enrolled in the Memphis school system in 2011 were African American even though blacks make up only 63 percent of the population within the city limits and 52 percent of the population of Shelby County.¹²¹

In addition to enabling the vast increase in private schooling, CAB organized public protests against busing. Whites had formed small counter protests to some of the marches for civil rights in the 1960s, but busing led to the first large-scale protests by whites in Memphis regarding racial issues. **(Figs. 45 & 46)** In March of 1972, CAB organized a 500- to 600-person bus burial protest, where organizers completely buried an old school bus underground before they had to dig it up because of city ordinance against parking a vehicle somewhere for more than ten days.¹²² **(Fig. 47)** After Plan A went into effect, CAB organized a city-wide school boycott, which saw 52,717 students absent the first day of classes in the spring of 1972 and nearly 39,000 students absent for the start of classes in

¹¹⁹ Marcus D. Pohlmann, *Opportunity Lost: Race and Poverty in Memphis City Schools*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 82.

¹²⁰ Anne Woolner, "Frayser Baptist Churches to Open School System," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 4, 1973. "Baptist Churches to Open Schools," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 5, 1973.

¹²¹ John Branston, "Battering Ram: The Tragedy of Busing Revisited," *Memphis Magazine*, March 2011.

¹²² Richard Lentz, "Ordinance Mars Cab Bus Burial," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 23, 1972.

the spring of 1973.¹²³ (**Fig. 48**) Pickets of white parents often coincided with the school boycott, mirroring the tactics used during the “Black Monday” protests. (**Fig. 49 & 50**) CAB organized busing assignment burnings where hundreds of white families burned their letters showing their newly assigned schools in trash bins.¹²⁴ (**Fig 51**) They even organized a mock funeral for neighborhood schools.¹²⁵ (**Fig. 52**) CAB went so far as to call for an economic boycott across the city, instructing people to boycott all stores on Thursdays.¹²⁶

The political response to busing paralleled the public protests by CAB. Mayor Wyeth Chandler spoke to several large CAB gatherings in the early 1970s along with former mayor Henry Loeb, expressing their solidarity with busing foes and pledging their support to the effort to curb and oppose busing in any way possible.¹²⁷ Chandler pledged to oppose a tax increase for the public system because the city should not give further support to a public school system that bused.¹²⁸ The mayor went so far as to support publicly CAB’s school boycott effort.¹²⁹ For example, the school board repeatedly delayed in their contract negotiations with the busing companies, citing the difficulty in gauging the number of students who were actually going to participate since so many children were in the process of leaving the public school system.¹³⁰ Statewide, Tennessee voters approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting busing while at the same time choosing George

¹²³ Jerry L. Robbins, “Officials Say Bus Boycott Unsuccessful,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 26, 1973.

¹²⁴ “Anti-Busing Forces March in Protest,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 14, 1972.

¹²⁵ Tom Stone, “200-Auto Motorcade Drives Against Busing,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1972. Beth Tamke, “‘Funeral’ Observes Death of Schools,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 20, 1972.

¹²⁶ “CAB Pushes Once-A-Week Shopper Boycott,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 29, 1972.

¹²⁷ Brown Allen Flynn, “Busing Foes Get Support from Loeb and Chandler,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 18, 1971. Phillip B. Lamb, “CAB Rally Plans Action to Halt School Busing,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 1, 1972.

¹²⁸ Jerry L. Robbins, “Mayor Opposes Use of Tax for Schools,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 3, 1972.

¹²⁹ “Mayor Would Back Boycott,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 2, 1972.

¹³⁰ Jerry Robbins, “School Board Postpones Action on Bus Contract,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 10, 1972.

Wallace for the Democratic nomination.¹³¹ Nationally, the president of CAB, Ken Keele, met with President Nixon to discuss a national constitutional amendment.¹³²

The most profound effect of busing on Memphis during the early 1970s was that it accelerated white flight. The first wave of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s occurred in south of the downtown and in parts of midtown. New suburban neighborhoods “out east,” in Frayser, and in Whitehaven absorbed the middle-class whites fleeing the city for the comforts of the suburban shopping mall and what they perceived as economic security, but that security was short-lived. **Figures 53 – 57** illustrate Whitehaven’s growth as an all-white suburb during the first wave of white flight during the postwar years. Busing along with encroachment of blacks on the edges of formerly all-white suburbs, however, hastened a second wave of white flight. In Whitehaven, in particular the black neighborhoods of south Memphis spread below the interstate loop and west of Whitehaven. This encroachment along with the incentive that busing provided created a wave of white flight that started in the early 1970s and continued during the 1980s. Whites in Whitehaven left for the incorporated suburbs east of the interstate loop where they could place their children in public schools without the threat of busing. Even during the height of the busing controversy, the newspapers noted busing’s effect on a new wave of white flight. One school board official went so far as to say, “It seems like everybody in Memphis moved over the Christmas holidays.”¹³³

¹³¹ “Wallace, Anti-Busing Bill, Nixon Win in Tennessee: Vote Favors Amendment by 4 to 1,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 5, 1972.

¹³² “CAB President to Meet Nixon,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 8, 1972.

¹³³ Jerry L. Robbins, “School Officials Report Heavy ‘White Flight,’” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 4, 1973.

The censuses show the extent to which white flight occurred during the 1970s in suburban neighborhoods that had been new in the 1950s and former enclaves of middle- and upper-middle-class whites. In the area of Whitehaven, the 1970 census shows that the total population of Whitehaven, 17,287, up 185 percent from 1960, had a total black population of 0.25 percent. In the 1980 census, the black population of Whitehaven climbed to 47.3 percent with a total population of 29,864 residents. By the 1990 census, the population had declined over 154 percent to 19,365, and the percentage of African Americans increased to 83.7 percent of the total population. In Frayser the numbers are a little less dramatic, but, nonetheless, show a consistent and growing white flight through the 1980s. The 1970 census shows a total population of 36,599—which remained consistent through 1990—and had a 3.7 percent African American population.¹³⁴ In 1980, the black population rose to 28.1 percent. By 1990, the total black population of Frayser was 50.4 percent. During the second wave of white flight from the first wave suburbs, many white Memphians moved to incorporated suburbs on the eastern edges of Memphis including Bartlett, Germantown, and Collierville. **Figures 58** and **59** show the far southwest portion of Bartlett, closest to Memphis, and demonstrate the second wave of white flight during the 1970s and 1980s. This portion of Bartlett was nearly completely fields and farmland in 1971. Looking at aerial photographs from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the area appeared to be developing suburban neighborhoods at a fast pace, and, by 1990, the area was fully developed. In the 1980 Census, Bartlett had a population of 17,170, which was fifty percent larger than in 1970, and by 1990 it jumped to 27,960. By the late

¹³⁴ For calculating the total population of the Frayser area, I use census tracks 100-103.

1970s, Memphis urban landscape was significantly less densely populated and more racially divided because of the effects of two waves of white flight.

In Memphis, increasing suburbanization fostered by city planning and spurred on by a failed public housing program and strife over the racial character of neighborhoods led to increased white flight, greater and greater residential segregation, and an ever more sparsely populated urban area. This first wave of white flight coincided with the urban renewal program around the downtown, which exacerbated white flight, residential segregation, and decreasing population density. It also coincided, as Chapter 3 details, with the Sanitation Workers' Strike, which along with the urban renewal plan and the increasing distance that many middle and upper-middle class whites lived from the downtown sped up the decline of the downtown that urban renewal had hoped to reverse. The Sanitation Strike in several ways enabled the Beale Street urban renewal project, which coincided with the second wave of white flight. The Beale Street project and the second wave of white flight are largely responsible for the urban landscape that exists today in Memphis as Chapters 4 and 5 detail.

Chapter 3: A New Space for Downtown Memphis: The Civic Center Plaza and the Sanitation Workers' Strike

Introduction

For several months in early 1968, the Civic Center Plaza in Memphis, Tennessee, was one of the most recognizable places in America because of the demonstrations during the Sanitation Workers' Strike and the march after the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. As the two previous chapters have demonstrated, the pressure of conflict over urban space within Memphis remained steadily high, from the bombing and threats in the A.B. Hill neighborhood to the fight over privately owned land within the Railroad and Jackson Avenue urban renewal project areas to the downtown lunch counters and the white flight that fueled suburban growth. During the Sanitation Workers' Strike, the newly created public space of the Civic Center Plaza became ground zero in the fight over a host of urban and racial issues. At first, the sanitation workers used the space as a site of protest over a city government who refused to recognize their right to collective bargaining. The plaza, as well as Main Street between Beale and the plaza, soon became a place of public demonstration for the black community as a whole when the strike turned into an emblem of the larger struggles of the entire community. During the strike, it began to become evident that the intransigence of the new mayor and city council was illustrative of what many referred to as the "plantation mentality" of the white power structure in Memphis.¹ After the obstinacy of Mayor Henry Loeb created a situation that garnered national attention from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the newly created

¹ See Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 216-287.

Civic Center Plaza turned out to be the central locus of large demonstrations in late March and early April of 1968. During the strike, there was a battle over public space and the right to public protest. Memphis devolved into a police state on several occasions during the strike when hundreds of Memphis Police Department (MPD) officers and thousands of National Guard troops and their tanks patrolled the streets with a 7 PM curfew in place. At one point, police barricaded sanitation workers and protesters inside the Civic Center Plaza alleging fears that demonstrations might become riotous—well before the riot of late March. The new plaza was a space designed as a public gathering space. In the planning documents, architects likened it to Italian piazzas and the Plein and urban centers of Holland. Even though planners believed that the plaza “should exemplify strength, dignity, and authority, and at the same time, inspire security and a sense of *pride* and *participation* in all who use the building,” the white power structure saw African Americans using their new plaza for protesting inequality in city government as an unacceptable use of the city’s public space.² Strangely, it never seems to have occurred to planners or civic leaders that their new plaza could be used for demonstrations of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. Because Memphis had avoided the troubles of Little Rock and Birmingham and had quietly integrated most of public space in the city, these leaders had convinced themselves that that there was no chance of a serious racial confrontation.

The impetus behind building the Civic Center Plaza came from the Bartholomew firm who advocated a new government center. The civic reformers in Mayor Orgill’s circle embraced the idea. As suburbanization geographically expanded during the 1950s and 1960s, city leaders became increasingly concerned with maintaining the relevance of the

² UMSC, *Memphis Press-Scimitar* morgue file 3720, “Program and Schematics, Memphis City Hall,” 1961, 2. Emphasis added.

downtown in the life of the city, and many felt that a new government plaza would do just that. Urban renewal was the chief tool leaders hoped to employ in order to improve the downtown area. After the urban renewal projects in the residential areas of Railroad Avenue, Jackson Avenue, and Riverview, city leaders set their sights on two project areas in and around the downtown that would occupy the MHA and the City Planning Commission throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. One project area was the Medical Center development, which spanned three urban renewal project zones (R-18, R-68, and R-75) a few blocks east of the CBD between Union and Poplar Avenues. The other area was what MHA officials called the Court Avenue project spanning four zones (R-19, R-37, R-49, and R-105). The four Court Avenue projects were the only forays into downtown urban renewal—excepting the west end of the Beale Street project. MHA planners and the City Commission used the Court Avenue project to provide the land to build the new plaza to replace the city's cramped office space in the Shelby County Courthouse and federal building.

When the sit-ins began in Memphis in the early 1960s and the first marches for school desegregation happened in 1963, Memphis had no large open space where African Americans could protest their government for redress of grievances. Marches down Main Street and small marches in front of the Shelby County Courthouse were the only spaces where visible protests took place. During the sit-ins, the majority of protests were small battles inside specific restaurants or public spaces paired with demonstrations on Main Street. When the Sanitation Workers' Strike began, however, the city, state, and federal office buildings were newly occupied and the Plaza was open to visitors. Not only did the possibility of the new plaza being an optimal location for public protest not occur to any

of the planners, architects, and city leaders—at least not in any of the public records—planners saw the plaza as an architectural manifestation of liberal government. In their words, the plaza was “not only...a place of business for Citizens and Public Servants, but...a center from which the City might dispense its good will and record of good works to visitor and resident alike.”³

This chapter outlines the development of the Civic Center Plaza from original conception in the city’s 1955 comprehensive plan to the planning documents of the League of Memphis Architects, who laid out the new plaza, and the urban renewal projects that made the project possible, to the actual construction of the individual buildings. Before tracing the history of the Civic Center Plaza, the chapter outlines key developments in local politics after the administration of Mayor Edmund Orgill and then gives an update on the progress of urban renewal in Memphis after the beginning of the Railroad Avenue and Jackson Avenue projects discussed in chapter one. This section introduces the Riverview project—another residential project area—as well as the Medical Center Projects. After sketching the history of the Civic Center Plaza, the chapter concludes by detailing the events of the Sanitation Workers’ Strike and the fight over the right to collective bargaining and over the use of public space.

Memphis Politics after Orgill

After Mayor Orgill’s unsuccessful run for the governorship and his diagnosis of a heart condition, he declined to run for a second term as mayor. His time in office proved

³ UMSC, *Memphis Press-Scimitar* morgue file 3720, “Program and Schematics, Memphis City Hall,” 1961, 2.

to be a disappointment to the African American community who helped put him there. Orgill was unable to promote Dr. J.E. Walker to the board of directors of the John Gaston Hospital. The governor's race forced Orgill to issue a statement in support of segregation. The City Commissioners elected in 1955 had no allegiance to Orgill and all had been in the Crump organization at one point or another. Henry Loeb, the Phillips Academy- and Brown University-educated son of Jewish immigrants—though he converted in 1963, joining his wife's Episcopal church—and owner of a laundry business, was a political opportunist who attacked the remnants of the Crump machine after Crump's death, winning over some of the same support Orgill received, but Loeb never joined the CRC, often refused to go along with Orgill's agenda, and publicly clashed with the mayor.⁴ Orgill failed to move the city toward the city manager form of local government. The issue of taxes proved to be the most divisive issue in local politics. Orgill advocated raising the property tax to fund schools and other projects including the annexation of Whitehaven, but the Commission defeated his efforts.⁵ Mayor Orgill's one lasting achievement—while in office—would prove to be urban renewal and the Bartholomew Plan. In fact, the mayor's papers at the University of Memphis, which contain a broad range of national architectural and city planning publications, prove that Mayor Orgill was deeply concerned with comprehensive city planning issues.

When Orgill's health forced him to withdraw from the race, his campaign committee retooled itself into the Citizens Association (CA), run by Orgill's former

⁴ Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 81-82. Also see ⁴ Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 36. In addition, a letter dated June 20, 1957 indicates the personal hostility between Mayor Orgill and Commissioner Loeb: UMSC, MS 87, Box 34, Folder III.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86-91.

campaign manager and chemical corporation owner, Dr. Stanley J. Buckman. The CA's goals were to put forward the "good government" goals that Orgill wanted: a new form of city government, city-county consolidation, comprehensive planning, and annexation. To appeal to white voters, however, the CA endorsed segregationist positions. Black democrats, meanwhile, formed their own all-black ticket for the city commissioner positions. Russell Sugarmon, Jr. and Benjamin Hooks, two prominent middle class leaders and local attorneys, along with Roy Love and Henry Clay Bunton, two ministers, formed the all-black ticket. With white leaders not wanting to split the white vote and allow members of the black ticket to win, Buckman was able to recruit three of the previous commissioners, Crump men Claude Armour and John T. Dwyer along with Henry Loeb, as well as two new politicians, James W. Moore and William W. Farris, to run under the CA ticket. Both the moderate *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and the conservative and segregationist *Commercial Appeal* endorsed the CA slate of candidates. Loeb, who had vowed to beat Orgill in the 1959 election, was the CA's choice for mayor.⁶ In addition to the CA securing the only slate of serious white candidates, the representatives in the State Senate from Shelby County altered the process through which Memphis elected its commissioners. Previously, the top four vote-getters won the positions on the commission, but the Shelby County representatives changed the law to have each post voted on separately in order to secure the City Commission for whites.⁷ The CA candidates won decisively against the black candidates and a small number of weak white candidates, proving that nearly a decade of organizing through civic clubs and other means was not enough for blacks to achieve any semblance of political power in Memphis. The MCCR

⁶ Ibid., 100-102.

⁷ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 217.

became the outlet for Orgill and other whites who were more liberal on racial issues to deal with those issues. The political landscape kept integration far away from local politics. The CA supported only white candidates who were on board with the “good government” reforms originally sought by the CRC.⁸

Orgill’s failure to achieve even a few token moves toward integrating Memphis’s governing structure led African Americans to form an increasingly independent approach to politics. Many African Americans began to see the MCCR as uninterested in desegregation but only an institution assembled to avoid problems and bad publicity.⁹ In addition to keeping stories of the slowly expanding list of public places that were being desegregated with the help of the MCCR out of the press—and only after the sit-ins of the early 1960s—the MCCR kept stories of police brutality and subsequent protests on the part of the African American community out of the press.¹⁰ Among the harshest critics of the MCCR was Rev. James Lawson and Vasco Smith, president of the Shelby County Democratic Club and husband of Maxine Smith, who was a strong activist, future Executive Director of the Memphis chapter of the NAACP, and future first black member of the Memphis Board of Education. Lawson and Smith, among others, saw the MCCR as being more interested in studies than action. After presenting the MCCR with Lawson’s “Freedom Manifesto” in 1967, the MCCR rejected his proposals leading Smith to leave the organization.¹¹ After the election of segregationist Loeb as mayor in 1959 and the defeat of the slate of black candidates for the City Commission, the politics of race became increasingly polarized in Memphis.

⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁹ Ibid., 220. and Honey, *Jericho Road*, 81.

¹⁰ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 38.

¹¹ Ibid., 155.

With mounting frustration over the pace of desegregation fostered by white politicians and groups such as the MCCR, students from Owen Junior College and LeMoyne College began their own sit-in movement in Memphis in response to the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. The movement was both spontaneous and rooted in a history of activism on the part of civic clubs, the NAACP, and a newer group called the Memphis and Shelby County Improvement Association, the latter of which formed after the protests surrounding the white-only fundraiser for St. Jude Hospital at the Ellis Auditorium in January of 1960. These groups supported the students' efforts but were not instrumental in starting the sit-in movement in Memphis. The first sit-in occurred on Friday, March 18, 1960, when seven Owen students sat at the white-only lunch counter of McLellan's variety store on Main Street. Next, thirty-six students from both LeMoyne and Owen—the two colleges merged in 1968—concentrated their efforts on desegregating Memphis's public libraries. After the students were arrested, over 2,000 supporters rallied at the courthouse for their trials. The next day, more students sat in at the library and the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery. The sit-ins spurred a vast increase in membership to the NAACP, adding 2,600 membership applications in the short period after the sit-ins began. The focus shifted back to downtown lunch counters in mid-May. When the summer began, high school students joined the sit-ins downtown.¹² Benjamin Muse, in his report on Memphis's race relations written for the Southern Regional Council, said that the sit-ins in Memphis during the early 1960s might have been more extensive than in any other Southern city.¹³

¹² Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 225, 232-241.

¹³ ¹³ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 2. Benjamin Muse, *Memphis*, (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1964), 45.

The first term of Henry Loeb as mayor (1960-1963) was fraught with conflict. The mayor unsuccessfully opposed the urban renewal plans for a new civic center and fought against expressway construction, arguing that the projects were unnecessary and would cause taxes to rise. The other CA-sponsored members of the City Commission continued to support urban renewal and highway construction.¹⁴ Loeb, however, resigned from office and chose not to run for reelection in 1963 because he needed to take over the family business after the death of his father.¹⁵ The race for mayor in the 1963 election was between Commissioner William Farris, who was supported by the CA, and William B. Ingram, Jr., who was a city judge famous for dismissing nearly half of all traffic cases brought up by the MPD. Ingram ran as a segregationist to working-class whites and as an integrationist when among African Americans. With the coalition of working class whites, conservative middle-class whites, and blacks, Ingram, who ran against the establishment, the press, the police department, and the Chamber of Commerce, won the mayor's race in 1963.¹⁶

The reformers found Ingram's term in office to be an ideal time to promote a change in the form of local government, a movement that would have profound effects on the Sanitation Workers' Strike of 1968. With strong support from the press for a change in the form of government, a new organization was formed called the Program of Progress (POP), whose job was to help Memphis transform its city government. Notably none of the reformers from the CRC were on the POP committee. African Americans strongly supported a change in the form of government because the commission form required at-large elections for all commissioners, which prevented blacks from having any

¹⁴ Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 111.

¹⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 45.

¹⁶ Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump*, 111.

representation in local government. The twenty-five member POP committee consisted mainly of black politicians, Republican Party leaders, and members of the Chamber of Commerce. Since the six African Americans adamantly opposed any system that used at-large elections, the five Republicans backed their position. The *Commercial Appeal* and other organizations supported the a strong mayoral position, and the POP completed a new city charter that created a mayor-council form of government with a majority of the council seats tied to specific districts. The city council would be a thirteen-seat body with seven districts and six seats that were voted on city-wide. The Chamber of Commerce along with the NAACP endorsed the POP plan in June of 1966, and Mayor Ingram, who saw the attempt at reform as a plot against him, hesitatingly agreed to put the plan up to a referendum vote. In November of 1966, the city passed the referendum by sixty percent.¹⁷

The November election of 1967 chose the council and mayor of a newly inaugurated form of local government. Three African Americans were elected to the city council along with establishment whites largely associated with the CA, but the choice of mayor would prove disastrous. Mayor Ingram ran for reelection against four candidates. A.W. Willis, Jr., was the candidate of the black establishment. The old reformers including the *Press-Scimitar* backed Hunter Lane, Jr., whose father had been on the CRC. The *Commercial Appeal* and most of the CA endorsed Sheriff William Morris, but conservatives and white segregationists put Henry Loeb, who had come back to Memphis politics, into a runoff with the mayor, who, after the defeat of Willis, received the support of most black Memphians. The staunch segregationist and Barry Goldwater Republican, Loeb, however, received nearly ninety-percent of the white vote and became the mayor of

¹⁷ Ibid., 112-115.

Memphis again.¹⁸ Memphis politics had shifted decidedly in the racially polarized era of the post-Goldwater 1960s South, and the hope of white moderates and liberals of containing racial hostility would soon collapse after the inauguration of the man the black community would come to call “King Henry.” (**Fig. 1**)

Urban Renewal Projects after Railroad and Jackson Avenues

After the early hearings on the Railroad and Jackson Avenue projects, the MHA slowly began to enact the first urban renewal plans. During the early stages of the Railroad and Jackson Avenue projects, the MHA went forward with plans for another urban renewal project, the Riverview project (R-15). Like the Railroad Avenue project, the Riverview area was not immediately adjacent to the downtown. The Riverview zone was also an exclusively residential area. This zone was located along the Mississippi west of Kansas Street between Georgia Avenue and McLemore Avenue. Once again, the MHA selected a largely African American neighborhood for the urban renewal wrecking ball. The sign of protest pictured in **Figure 2** was emblematic of the feelings of many African Americans—especially those in urban renewal zones—who were growing increasingly opposed to the goals of urban renewal. Despite a large segment of land within the project zone going to build an interstate interchange, the area was redeveloped as housing for middle-class whites. Even a ten-story high-rise “luxury” apartment building was constructed on the river bluff. (**Fig. 3 and 4**)

In addition to the Riverview project, the MHA began the first of three urban renewal projects referred to as the Medical Center Projects. These three project zones resulted in

¹⁸ Ibid., 116-117.

the construction of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Baptist Memorial Hospital, the Regional Medical Center, the Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, and the Southern College of Optometry, and, on land in both the Medical Center area and the Beale Street II area, the Shelby State Community College (later named the Southwest Tennessee Community College). The central feature of the Medical Center area is Forrest Park, a controversial site in Memphis. At the height of the Lost Cause furor that coincided with the Populist Revolt in the American South, the bodies of Nathan Bedford Forrest—the Confederate general, slave trader, and first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan—and his wife were disinterred from their graves in Elmwood Cemetery and reinterred near downtown Memphis in 1905 at what became Forrest Park, where they remain to this day under a triumphal equestrian monument. **(Fig. 5)**

The Medical Center project zones were not without their share of controversy. Many complaints were made over the seizure of private land for the purpose of building the new Baptist Memorial Hospital. The most controversial aspect of the project, however, was the Memphis Steam Laundry Building. In fact, a group attacking urban renewal in the early 1970s used the Memphis Steam Laundry Building in advertisements railing against renewal. **(Fig. 6)** Built in 1927 in an elaborate Venetian Gothic style, the Memphis Steam Laundry was located in the northern portion of the Medical Center area. **(Fig. 7)** The MHA deemed the building incongruent with their zoning plans for the project so it was set for acquisition. The MHA began condemnation proceedings in 1965 and spent six years in

court cases that took the suit to the Tennessee Supreme Court. In the end, the MHA was forced to pay \$2.6 million to the Memphis Steam Laundry to condemn their building.¹⁹

During the Medical Center projects and the planning stages of the Beale Street projects, urban renewal came under increasing attack amongst real estate brokers across the city. The Memphis Real Estate Board (MREB) began to announce their opposition to the way the MHA was carrying out urban renewal. In a hearing before the City Commission in 1964, Charles M. Crump, son of “Boss” Crump and chairman of MREB, attacked the MHA for acquiring property from private owners to sell to another specific, predetermined private party. One example he cited was a quarter of a block of land within the Court Avenue area that was condemned and acquired by the MHA. The 1962 MHA Annual Report noted that the land would be used for a planned addition to the Claridge Hotel fourteen months before bidding for the land had begun. When bidding began, Claridge, the only bidder, easily completed the preplanned purchase.²⁰ The MREB did not appreciate the city picking the winners and losers within urban renewal areas. The MREB also did not like that so much of the land in and around the downtown was tied up under the possibility of urban renewal. This took a significant portion of the land for realtors and investors off the market because even if the property would eventually not be included in an urban renewal project, no party would buy a piece of property if it had the possibility of later being condemned through urban renewal.²¹

¹⁹ Roy B. Hamilton, “Judge Rules MHA Must Pay Laundry Bigger Sum,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 6, 1967. Roy B. Hamilton, “‘No Backing Out,’ Polk Tells MHA,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 27, 1971. Orville Hancock, “City, Laundry Agree on \$2.6 Million,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 19, 1971.

²⁰ “City Commission Hearing, City of Memphis, December 1, 1964,” SCA, UR Box 20, page 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

In addition, MREB complained that the MHA's predicted increase in tax revenues within the urban renewal zones were far off the mark. MREB cited the Railroad Avenue project, which was the only fully complete project in 1964, as an example of the gap in tax revenues. The MHA reports revealed that, before renewal in the Railroad Avenue area, the city received \$7,745 in tax revenue. The reports predicted the post-renewal tax receipts to be around \$30,000. In the first year after all the property in the area had been condemned, cleared, and sold, the tax receipts were \$11,958, which MREB felt was "a long way from \$30,000."²² In 1972, however, the Railroad Avenue project brought in an estimated \$45,000 in tax revenues.²³ MREB also complained that the MHA had not released any statistics on the relocation of families displaced by urban renewal and was displeased with the MHA for having what they described as luxury apartments built in the Medical Center Project area while areas like Railroad Avenue had no residential redevelopment. They said that this strained an already dismal housing market for low-income families, but MREB's concerns over urban renewal stemmed from the extent to which renewal was cutting into the real estate industry's business and not their concern for the housing of poor African Americans.²⁴

Despite this opposition, urban renewal continued unabated in the 1960s and early 1970s. The plans for the Civic Center projects, which occupied the MHA for much of the 1960s, began in the 1950s. During the Orgill administration, discussions began for the building of a new government center in the downtown to house the offices and courtrooms of the federal, state, county, and city governments, which were then spread around the

²² Ibid., 16-17.

²³ Orville Hancock, "Urban Renewal 'Surgery' Cuts Path Through Downtown Area," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 15, 1972.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

downtown. After the end of the urban renewal programs in mid-1970s, four different project areas referred to as the Court Avenue Urban Renewal Project areas I-IV (R-19, R-37, R-49, R-105) were pursued by the MHA to redevelop downtown Memphis. The first project area was a 36-acre project where 141 substandard structures were eliminated through renewal. **(Fig. 8)** Attesting to the diversity of uses in the CBD, MHA applications show that nearly sixty percent of the Court Avenue I area was residential.²⁵ The federal, state, county, and city governments purchased land through the MHA that had been seized and cleared through urban renewal to build the Civic Center Plaza. In addition, private real estate investment groups and other companies purchased land within the Court Avenue area for redevelopment.

The Civic Center Plaza

In November 1958, the Memphis City Commission established the Civic Center Advisory Committee (CCAC), which was given the authority to “make an independent study of problems incident to the creation of a new Civic Center and make recommendation to the City Commission” dealing with the size, location, components, and general design of the new Civic Center. The committee was also charged to oversee the construction after the City Commission adopted the master plan.²⁶ Mayor Orgill urged William Kent, the first chairman of the CCAC, to make good connections with Walter Simmons and Will Fowler to ensure cooperation between the urban renewal plans of the MHA and the plans for the

²⁵ “Final Project Report, Memphis Civic Center: Project I Court Avenue Urban Renewal Area,” May 15, 1961, SCA, UR Files, Box 222, page 5.

²⁶ UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIII A, Resolution, November 25, 1958.

new Civic Center.²⁷ Shortly after the CCAC began, they commissioned the League of Memphis Architects (LMA), which specifically formed through the Memphis chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to design the new Civic Center Plaza. The city paid the LMA \$30,000 for overhead costs while the architects donated their time free of charge. Peter B. Andrews was the project manager with John M. O'Brien as assistant manager and chief designer for the ten-man design team. The program included a new city hall, an administration building for the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division, a federal office building, a state office building, a county office building, and new parking garages.

The seeds of the CCAC-approved LMA plan came from Harland Bartholomew's 1955 Comprehensive Plan. In the plan, Bartholomew advocated for the construction of a new civic center: "From the analysis of existing public buildings it is quite evident that certain of these structures are entirely inadequate to serve even the present needs of Memphis and Shelby County."²⁸ Bartholomew went on to encourage the city to build a new city hall, federal building, state building, a new building for Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division, an expansion to the police station and jail, and new quarters for the Board of Education, the Parks and Recreation Department, the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department, and the City Beautiful Commission. At the time, the city offices were cramped within the Shelby County Courthouse building, a sprawling bureaucratic stone structure clearly based on Robert Mills's Treasury Building in Washington. (**Fig. 9**) The offices of the State of Tennessee in Memphis were in rental spaces in several locations. The federal building, located on Front Street directly below Confederate Park—currently

²⁷ Ibid., Letter from Mayor Edmund Orgill to William R. Kent, December 19, 1959.

²⁸ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Report upon the Comprehensive Plan: Memphis, Tennessee*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1955), 75.

the location of the University of Memphis Law School—was already insufficient for the space demands in 1955. The old federal building, constructed in 1929, was similar to the Shelby County Courthouse. **(Fig. 10)** The Bartholomew plan sited the new civic center between Poplar and Adams Avenue and Lauderdale Street (present-day Danny Thomas Boulevard). **(Fig. 11)** Bartholomew argued that placing the center on the east side of the courthouse would keep the plaza outside the congestion of the downtown.

The Bartholomew plan used the planning and design idiom most in fashion during the mid-1950s, choosing a Corbusian tower complex surrounded by green space as the model for the complex. **(Fig. 12)** In keeping with the trends of the International Style and Corbusian planning principles, Bartholomew also shared the belief in the redemptive possibilities of Modernist architecture. In the plan, Bartholomew argues that the new civic center plaza would “make an imposing, well-planned array that would enhance the appearance of the city and strengthen the pride of the citizens of Memphis.”²⁹ In addition to ensuring the plaza would be a Modernist office complex with green space, the Bartholomew plan also introduced the idea that the new plaza would help rejuvenate the downtown area: “The Civic Center would be an important factor in stabilizing and increasing property values in this part of Memphis.”³⁰ City leaders—with the exclusion of Mayor Loeb who opposed the project as too expensive—as well as downtown business owners bought into the Bartholomew plan’s view that the plaza would improve a shrinking and deteriorating downtown.

In August of 1959, the City Commission and City Planning Commission in coordination with the CCAC and the MHA chose the four blocks bounded by Poplar

²⁹ Ibid., 76.

³⁰ Ibid.

Avenue, Second Street, Adams Avenue, and Front Street for the new plaza shifting the Bartholomew Plan's site to the west side of the Shelby County Courthouse. In keeping with the Bartholomew plan, the LMA plan also employed the Corbusian office complex surrounded by green space as the planning idiom. **(Fig. 13) Figure 14** shows the LMA's site plan for the complex. In the northwest corner is the planned site of the new federal building. The state building occupies the northeast corner, while the new city hall with the protruding city council chamber sits in the southwest. The southeast corner consists of the already existing headquarters of the Memphis Police Department with a proposed expansion on the north side as well as a new parking garage to be located on the site of the E.H. Crump Insurance Company Building (originally constructed as the North Memphis Savings Bank Building in 1901). Three small structures surrounding the central fountain were planned: two separate concession stands and a proposed "Information and Display Pavilion." One concession pavilion was to be a glass-enclosed, light concrete, 3,500-square-foot structure to house a cafeteria with an outdoor café. The other concession pavilion was to be a waiting station for the bus system that would be the only vehicular traffic through the plaza. It was also planned to contain a coffee bar and a newsstand. LMA planners sited another, larger parking garage just north of Poplar Avenue attached to the Ellis Auditorium, while they placed the Memphis, Light, Gas, and Water Division Building directly south of the plaza across Adams Avenue. Finally, the decorative DeSoto Memorial Tower was located west of the plaza over a large three level parking garage sunken into the sloping hillside of the Memphis bluff.

Despite the fact that the buildings in the Bartholomew plan appear to be steel-framed, concrete and glass boxes, the League of Memphis Architects believed that

buildings as important as the city hall and the federal building should be clad in stone, a decision that, in the finished buildings, would lead to several unusual Modernist structures. Despite the fact that the LMA advocated the use of stone finishing for the buildings of the new plaza, LMA drew much of their design inspirations from the Modernist buildings of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The LMA replaced the steel I-beams of Mies's glass and steel structures with marble-clad beams, essentially creating a Mies building in stone. **Figures 15 and 16** show the similarities between Mies's Lafayette Park Pavilion Apartments in Detroit and the new Federal Building in Memphis. The Lafayette Apartments, similar to the earlier 860-880 Lakeshore Apartments in Chicago, are an excellent example of the style of buildings, highly popular and influential during the Postwar years, that the architect emulated with the federal building with the addition of marble cladding. Other planning documents show that it was the intention all along to use a contemporary design idiom that was clad in stone. It says that the building "should be consistent with the techniques of our times" but that the building's "materials should be of a quality that recognizes the relative permanency of the building."³¹

One of the major features of the LMA plan that was not built is the DeSoto Memorial Tower, a thin, nearly 400-foot high spire that was to serve as a visitor viewing platform and dominant element of the city's skyline. LMA planners saw the tower as an element that would serve as an iconic landmark for the city of Memphis.³² The proposal describes the tower as "symbolic of the city's location on the Mississippi River, and commemorating the discovery the great waterway by DeSoto in 1541, the Tower will be

³¹ UMSC, *Memphis Press-Scimitar* morgue file 3720, "Program and Schematics, Memphis City Hall," 1961, 2.

³² Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 264.

visible for many miles as one approaches the city from any direction.”³³ **(Fig. 17)** The LMA designers chose to position the tower’s wider sides facing north and south so that it would be easier to see driving along Riverside Drive. The plan described the tower as one of the two dominant elements that anchor the entire design along with a central fountain. **(Fig. 18)** A large cylindrical light well surrounding the tower would create a large white beam at night that would exaggerate the tower’s height. **(Fig. 19)** City leaders chose not to implement the plan for the tower or the central reflecting pool. Mayor Loeb, who demagogued the issue of taxes during his entire first term, was the leading voice of Memphis politics when the Civic Center began construction, and there was no political will to build a functionless, symbolic structure like the DeSoto Tower or the large reflecting fountain because of their expense.

The larger design aspirations of the planners, including their hopes for the plaza’s social function, deserve extended attention because they are so divergent from how city leaders would use the space and the southern portion of Main Street that leads into the plaza during the Sanitation Workers’ Strike. The earliest and strongest evidence of how planners hoped the plaza would function in the life of the city comes from Thomas F. Faires, the president of the Memphis chapter of the AIA, the President of the LMA’s Executive Committee, and one of the members of the design team. Faires delivered a speech on August 3, 1959, to the Memphis Chapter of the AIA that addressed many of the primary goals of the LMA for the new plaza. His main plea was for a plaza devoid of automobile traffic. He cited an article in *Progressive Architecture* on contemporary city planning in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century planned Dutch cities. In his speech, Faires

³³ League of Memphis Architects, “Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3,” UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

said that “these old hard-headed Dutchmen followed the same principles we are following today, and their present-day ancestors have had the foresight not to run their Main Streets through their civic centers just to accommodate automobiles.”³⁴

In addition to the Dutch Plein, planners saw the Civic Center Plaza as an antecedent of the agora of Periclean Greece. LMA planners described the plaza as making “possible an attractive meeting place for the public.” They go on to list groups that were appropriate for gathering in the new plaza: “officials, employees, shoppers, tourists, businessmen, [and] churchgoers.” Planners go on to cite “recent examples in American cities which have established the great social value of open space” to include Rockefeller Center in New York, Penn Center in Philadelphia, the Golden Triangle in Pittsburgh, the Charles Center in Baltimore, and the Civic Centers in Detroit and Omaha.³⁵

For the execution of the separate buildings themselves, however, the CCAC and other governmental clients hired individual architects to carry out the plans under the general, though nonbinding, guide of the LMA plan. The state of Tennessee selected the firm of Francis Gassner, Thomas Nathan, and Robert Browne Hill with the help of the firm Haglund and Venable to design the state building as well as the Shelby County Administration Building on the far northeast corner of the plaza. Architect Alfred Lewis Aydelott was chosen as the architect of the new city hall as well as the new federal building. Aydelott had already designed the Shelby County Office Building at 157 Poplar Avenue across Second Street from the plaza in 1959 (currently the headquarters of the Election Commission). (**Fig. 20**) Aydelott made several significant alterations to the LMA plan for

³⁴ Thomas F. Faires, “Talk by Thomas F. Faires, President of the Memphis Chapter, the American Institutes of Architects and the League of Memphis Architects,” August 3, 1959, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

³⁵ League of Memphis Architects, “Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3,” UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

the plaza. Where the LMA plan placed the fountain as a central element in the plaza, Aydelott removed the fountain and placed a small reflecting pool on the northeast corner of City Hall between it and the federal building. A subsequent proposal by Commissioner Claude A. Armour to create a large green space near where the proposed fountain was to have been was also rejected by the State Building Commission.³⁶ The concessions building, which was to have been on federal property was eliminated as was the separate City Council Chamber portion of City Hall. The LMA plan, though calling for a bus lane, planned for the plaza to be pedestrian only, the key element of the design for the LMA. Aydelott, after pressure from downtown businessmen, the Traffic Advisory Committee, and the Fire Department pushed the City Commission to vote to keep Main Street open, maintaining normal traffic patterns on Main Street running through the plaza.³⁷ The final plan did close the bisecting Washington Avenue from Front to Second Streets.³⁸ The Plaza would not be pedestrian-only until sixteen years later when the Mid-America Mall closed a large portion of Main Street to automobiles between Exchange and McCall. After the Shelby County Administration Building was finished in early 1960, an addition was made to the Police Building on southeast corner of the plaza, which was completed in 1961. The Federal Building opened in 1963 on the northwest corner. Construction was completed for the City Hall in 1966. The building is located on the southwest corner of the plaza. The Tennessee State Office Building opened in 1967, and it is located between the Federal Building and the Shelby County Administration Building, which opened in 1969. Both

³⁶ Clark Porteus, "Plans O.K.'d on State Building: Armour's Proposal for Park In Civic Center Is Eliminated," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 4, 1964.

³⁷ John Spence, "Lots of Changes in City Hall Design: Aydelott Plan Deviates Markedly from League of Architects," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 9, 1961.

³⁸ Clark Porteus, "Plans O.K.'d On State Building."

Aydelott and the other architecture firms hired to design these buildings chose to work with a mid-century, Modernist design language, closely related to the Miesian office tower but expressed in marble.

“There Is No Justice for Blacks at City Hall”: The 1968 Sanitation Workers’ Strike

Chapter 1 described the extent to which white leaders worked with the editors of Memphis’s two main newspapers to avoid publicity for the slow steps made toward desegregating the public spaces of Memphis. The press kept the extent of the sit-ins and demonstrations of the early 1960s out of the white press, too. In Muse’s SRC report, he states that most whites did not know the extent of the sit-ins and protests during 1960-1961 because the white press minimized what actually happened.³⁹ Because of the press’s silence, the Sanitation Workers’ Strike and the attendant protests took white Memphians by surprise. Green describes the strike as having “burst the belief, shared by most white Memphians, that the city had succeeded in eluding the racial conflict that had convulsed other southern cities in the decade following *Brown*.”⁴⁰ The printed program of the “Memphis Cares” integrated Sunday afternoon, April 7, memorial service in honor of Dr. King indicated the extent to which many white Memphians were surprised by the racial strife during the strike: “We live in Memphis. It has been a good city, but far from perfect – much less perfect than many of us realized.”⁴¹ In addition, Green demonstrates that the Sanitation Workers’ Strike did not emerge within a vacuum but rather as a culmination of

³⁹ UMSC, MS 93, Box 1, Folder 2. Benjamin Muse, *Memphis*, (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1964), 45.

⁴⁰ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 254.

⁴¹ J. Edwin Stanfield, *In Memphis: More Than a Garbage Strike*, Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1968, April 28, 1968 supplement, 5.

many battles for workers' rights during the 1960s that were connected with the larger Civil Rights movement.⁴² The extent of the support for the sanitation workers within the black community also took whites by surprise especially since many had assumed that the strike only occurred because of outside union agitators.

In December of 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. announced that the SCLC would embark on a new crusade called the Poor People's Campaign.⁴³ After the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, throughout 1966 and 1967 when the SCLC turned its attention North especially to Chicago, King became convinced that the country's poor, cutting across all racial lines, needed a movement to spur greater government action.⁴⁴ He deemed Johnson's Great Society a failure "shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam."⁴⁵ King's sharp line on Vietnam and his connection of the failures of American domestic policy on President Johnson's foreign policy led King and the SCLC to become increasingly isolated. The FBI, under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, helped to disseminate propaganda against King, turning what had been the conspiracies of fringe groups such as the John Birch Society and Southern groups such as the White Citizens' Council or Pro-Southerners into the mainstream.⁴⁶ **(Fig. 21)** Hoover already had a long history of going after King. In late 1963, the FBI wiretapped King's office, while FBI agents sent anonymous letters to his home urging him to commit suicide or risk being

⁴² Ibid., 258-275.

⁴³ For more on the Poor People's Campaign see Gerald McKnight. *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

⁴⁴ Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike, and Martin Luther King*. (New York: Carlson, 1989), 14-16. For more on the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts see Nick Kotz. *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws that Changed America*., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

⁴⁵ David Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography*. (New York: Praeger, 1970), 365. For more on King's opposition to the Vietnam War see Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King and the War in Vietnam," *Phylon* 45.1 (First Quarter, 1984), 19-39.

⁴⁶ Adam Fairclough, "King and the War," 31.

exposed as sexually promiscuous.⁴⁷ In February of 1968, when the Memphis sanitation workers went on strike, King was busy with stops on his Poor People's Campaign. He was kept abreast, however, of what was happening with the strike in Memphis thanks to James Lawson, a local civil rights leader, the pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church in Memphis, and a member of the black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, who telephoned King about the events in Memphis.⁴⁸

King previously had been to Memphis several times. He was a guest on Nat D. Williams radio show, "Brown America Speaks," in 1954 to discuss the *Brown* decision.⁴⁹ Notably, King spoke at the "Freedom Rally" at Mason Temple in 1959 to support the slate of African American candidates for the City Commission. King also came when a white World War II veteran shot and wounded James Meredith, the first black student to enter the University of Mississippi, just after setting out on his self-described "march against fear" through Mississippi from Memphis to Jackson. Lawson's church held a rally the next day on June 7 where King spoke before organizing the March Against Fear. **(Fig. 22)** Many other Memphis civil rights activists participated in the March Against Fear including many who would play pivotal roles in the events of the Sanitation Workers' Strike.⁵⁰ King returned to Memphis in September of 1966 for the Progressive National Baptist Convention where he spoke about the "invisible wall" that isolated and demeaned African Americans while the government was "more interested in winning the war in Vietnam than in winning the war right here."⁵¹ King wanted to be a part of the sanitation strike because

⁴⁷ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 90-91.

⁴⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 76-82 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 174-180.

⁴⁹ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 178.

⁵⁰ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 83-86.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

it fit into the themes of his Poor People's Campaign, telling Lawson that "you all are doing in Memphis what I hope to do with the Poor People's Campaign."⁵² His aids in the SCLC, however, strongly discouraged King from getting involved since it could have gotten King off his schedule. Despite his staff's protestations, King had the Poor People's Campaign planning conference moved from Jackson, Mississippi, to Memphis so that King could address the movement. On March 18, King arrived in Memphis and spoke to a large crowd at Mason Temple, but King's involvement, while taking on added meaning historically because of his impending murder, was only a small part of the story of the Sanitation Workers' Strike.⁵³

The process of unionizing the Memphis sanitation workers was long in coming. For years the workers had no union and, as a consequence, had extremely low wages, poor working conditions, and outdated equipment. Some sanitation workers made as little as \$0.94 an hour. For a sense of perspective, the average pay of sanitation workers in Chattanooga was \$1.60, while the average in Chicago was \$2.90.⁵⁴ James Robinson, for example, after fifteen years in the sanitation department made \$1.65 an hour in 1968, which was five cents above the federal minimum wage. More than the wages, however, the working conditions were terrible. Residents were not required to bag their garbage or take it to the curb.⁵⁵ Workers did not receive pay if the weather kept them from working, even though the salaried white supervisors did. Adding to poor working conditions was the state of much of the equipment that the sanitation workers used. Workers had no raingear or uniforms and had no place to change or shower after work. They carried the garbage in

⁵² Ibid., 305.

⁵³ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁴ Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 224.

⁵⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 58.

open tubs that the men often carried on their heads.⁵⁶ Trucks had worn brakes and equipment that malfunctioned. The faulty equipment would set the events in motion that led to the strike.⁵⁷

T.O. Jones, a sanitation worker, labored tirelessly to unionize the sanitation department in order to improve their quality of life. He, along with the aid of Unity League President, O.Z. Evers, helped form Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in Memphis. In the summer of 1963, Jones and a small group of men formed the Independent Workers Association (IWA), but the city sent informers into an IWA meeting, who provided a list of thirty-two names including Jones's, which led the sanitation department to fire all thirty-two. All of the men would be rehired except Jones, who chose not to return but to continue to push for unionization.⁵⁸ In the fall of that year, Jones successfully petitioned AFSCME to accept their fledgling union for membership, but the City Commission voted four to one not to recognize the union.⁵⁹ In August of 1966, the union went on strike, but it fell apart before they established the picket lines. In a display of how virulently opposed the city of Memphis was to unionization, the Chancery Court held an injunction against the strike and a subsequent ruling that stated that city employees were not allowed to strike.⁶⁰ African Americans in unions were particularly in a tenuous position. Many trades such as the construction industry barred blacks from union membership. In fact, the racism rampant in several American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

⁵⁶ Ibid., 75. After the aborted strike of 1966, the city replaced the tubs with three-wheeled pushcarts, replaced the open-bed trucks with mechanical packers, and gave out raingear.

⁵⁷ See Ibid., 67,

⁵⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 68 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 32.

⁵⁹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 73.

⁶⁰ Beifuss, *At the River*, 25-27.

chapters drove African Americans away from apprenticeships. Less than one percent of the local carpenters' union was black, and it had only one black apprentice, but twenty years earlier, nearly 300 African Americans had been bricklayers and carpenters. Eighteen craft unions had very few blacks on their roles and there was not a single black electrician in Memphis in the 1960s.⁶¹ Echoing Laurie Green's interpretation of the place of many African Americans in Memphis life, strike historian, Michael K. Honey, describes the sanitation workers as living "in a netherworld between the plantation and the modern urban economy."⁶² But Honey's assessment was not simply based on the poor working conditions of the sanitation workers. Many of the sanitation workers were rural migrants who had lost their jobs as farm laborers, in large part due to mechanization. For example, five percent of cotton was harvested by machine in 1950. This became fifty percent in 1960 and ninety-five in 1970.⁶³

In January of 1968, the new mayor, Henry Loeb, along with the new form of government that placed the mayor as the sole individual in charge of the executive functions including the Department of Public Works (DPW), was sworn into office. Under the new system, the director of public works became an appointed position, directly controlled by the mayor instead of a commissioner elected by the people of Memphis. The new director of the DPW was Charles Blackburn, who had no experience in public service but spent his career in insurance and as a manager of a linen supply company.⁶⁴ He deferred all decisions regarding the sanitation workers' complaints leading up to the strike to the new mayor. Loeb's anti-union credentials were already well-established at the start of his

⁶¹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 51-52.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁴ Biefuss, *At the River*, 27.

second term as mayor. During his first term, when Jones and Evers first organized nearly half of the sanitation workers into an early union, Loeb said that the city would never recognize any union and discussed a law that would ban all city employees from unionizing. At the time, rumors circulated that the city would fire anyone who joined a union.⁶⁵ In keeping with his demagoguery on taxes, Loeb, after taking office for his second term, put added pressure on the DPW. When DPW employees had to work into the night to clear roads, Loeb required that they show up for work the next day and were not given overtime. When workers retired, died, or were injured, Loeb forced the remaining workforce to take on the extra work to cut costs and bring down the city's debt and deficit which had ballooned due to urban renewal.⁶⁶

Under Mayor Ingram's administration, Public Works Commissioner Pete Sisson made several concessions to the complaints of the sanitation workers and Jones's union. In addition to updating the tubs in which workers carried the garbage and providing new raingear, Sisson allowed the sewer and drainage workers either to work in the rain or to wait until storms cleared with no loss in wages. Loeb and his new DPW director reverted to the old policy of paying only two hours' wages to workers and sending them home for the day in stormy weather.⁶⁷ Loeb and Blackburn's regression to old work policy, however, is not what kindled the will to strike among DPW employees. On February 1, 1968, two young sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, who had been assigned to one of the six remaining older trucks still in use after Commissioner Sisson purchased new trucks in 1966, were crushed to death by the hydraulic ram in the back of the truck.

⁶⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 99-100 and Biefuss, *At the River*, 21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 100.

February 1 saw a cold rainstorm, which led Cole and Walker to stand inside the “wiener barrel,” as the men called it, instead of standing on the steps on the outside of the truck. Unlike the new trucks, the barrel trucks were open on the sides where workers threw in the trash while the hydraulic ram mashed the trash to the back. **(Fig. 23)** The ram went into action when a shovel crossed with the wires on the ten-year-old truck, which shorted the mechanism. Suddenly, the hydraulic ram began compacting with Cole and Walker in the ram’s path. The driver stopped, but the button to stop the ram was outside the cab of the truck, and he was too late. One of the men nearly escaped but was caught by his raincoat.⁶⁸ A witness said that the worker who almost evaded the ram was “standing there on the end of the truck, and suddenly it looked like the big thing just swallowed him.”⁶⁹

In the week following Cole and Walker’s deaths, the city offered only back pay, an additional month’s salary, and \$500 for their burial to their families.⁷⁰ Further enraging the workers, the sewage and drainage crew received their paychecks, only to discover that they were paid only two hours’ wages for the day of missed work due to inclement weather.⁷¹ The sanitation workers were now ready to strike. At a meeting at the Memphis Labor Temple on February 11, 700 to 900 workers met for an airing of grievances. At the meeting, the workers asked Jones to meet with Blackburn to discuss their proposal before any decision was made regarding a strike. While the workers waited at the Labor Temple, Jones and a group of union stewards met with Blackburn and two superintendents. The only thing that Blackburn could offer was that he would speak with the mayor the next day and declined to address the workers in the hall. When Jones returned to the hall, many of the

⁶⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 1-2, 101 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 29-30.

⁶⁹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 2. and Beifuss, *At the River*, 37-38.

⁷⁰ Beifuss, *At the River*, 30.

⁷¹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 102.

workers already had left, but those who had stayed called for a strike. For the workers who did not know that the union was on strike, union stewards met them at the gates the next day to tell them not to work. P.J. Ciampa, the regional director of field operations for AFSCME, was not in attendance, so even the local union bosses did not know of the strike until the day of the strike, which meant that the workers decided to strike without realizing that the union could provide them some financial support during it. On Monday, February 12, the city counted 930 out of 1,100 workers absent, even though, at a meeting on Sunday between Loeb, Blackburn, and two lawyers who worked for the city, they decided that on the chance that a strike did occur, it would be small.⁷²

That night, Ciampa along with three other AFSCME representatives, Joe Paisley, Jesse Epps, and Bill Lucy met with Jones and determined that the strikers were serious and ready to do what it took to make it through a strike, but, despite that fact, the union leaders and the workers themselves did not call it a strike. Because the 1966 injunction made strikes by public employees illegal in Memphis; instead it was called a “work stoppage.” Meanwhile, Mayor Loeb directed the Memphis Police Department’s Intelligence Bureau to start surveillance of Local 1733. Memphis’s Intelligence Bureau, like its many counterparts in cities across the country was a “Red squad,” set up to maintain files and information on labor, civil rights, antiwar, and communist organizations. The bureau shared its information with the FBI, who began their own surveillance soon after the strike began. The recently arrived AFSCME officials, along with Jones, met with Loeb on February 13, where Ciampa told Loeb that the men would return to work if Loeb would recognize AFSCME as the bargaining agent, but Loeb responded that he would not talk to

⁷² Ibid., 103-105. Beifuss, *At the River*, 31-35.

anyone until the men were back at work. (**Fig. 24**) Loeb then went to the press after the meeting to explain that he was not going to bargain with people who were breaking the law.⁷³

From the beginning, local activists outside the unions and the DPW workers got involved with the strike. Cornelia Crenshaw, whose case with the MHA appears in chapter two, was the first to speak at the first meeting of the workers at the hall of Local 186 of the United Rubber Workers (URW) after the strike was called. Crenshaw recruited women as typists, telephone callers, picketers, and fund-raisers to help support the sanitation workers.⁷⁴ After the meeting, the workers decided to embark on a protest march. From the URW hall in north Memphis, the striking workers marched five miles to the brand new Civic Center Plaza. The estimates suggest that over 800 workers marched in the plaza. As the City Council was in session that afternoon, the workers entered into the new council chamber escorted by forty to fifty police officers. Lucy made Loeb aware of the situation, and the mayor came into the chamber and asked everyone to walk to South Hall. The workers, along with Loeb, walked through the plaza to the old auditorium. (**Fig. 25**) The meeting with Loeb was fruitless. Loeb said that city workers could not strike: “This you can’t do!” The workers, however, responded with laughter and heckling. This meeting would have profound effects on Loeb’s response to the strike: “You are putting my back up against the wall, and I am not going to budge.” Only the murder of Dr. King would halt, in any way, Loeb’s intransigence.⁷⁵ That the capitulation of Loeb occurred only after the political pressure from Washington became too much to bear in the wake of King’s murder,

⁷³ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 105-113 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 37-40.

⁷⁴ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 114.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114, 116-117.

should not diminish the vital roles that local civil rights leaders, activists, union organizers, and the sanitation workers themselves played in the struggle for economic and racial justice. Even after the city recognized AFSCME and agreed to wage increases, the workers, organizers, and activists had to apply constant pressure, including the threats of further strikes for the city to actually meet the agreements they made with the workers.

Public opinion amongst whites was strongly behind Loeb, thanks in no small part to the support of the press. Both the *Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal* opposed the striking workers and backed the mayor. This quote from a *Commercial Appeal* editorial is emblematic of the white press's opposition to the strike: "The bluster, swagger and [sic] insolence of the men purporting to represent the city garbage workers cannot be construed as 'bargaining.' They 'negotiate' with Mayor Henry Loeb and the City of Memphis somewhat like the Viet Cong and Hanoi do with South Vietnam and the United States."⁷⁶ The strong opposition of whites and the white press, who said that Loeb spoke "for all of us," emboldened the striking workers and the larger black community. White students and boy scouts worked in white neighborhoods to pick up the trash. The city quickly hired scabs to replace the striking workers, though they only got to ten percent of the workforce. It is believed that the John Birch Society was responsible for "Ciampa Go Home" bumper stickers, which emerged soon after the strike began.⁷⁷ With an animated black community, the NAACP entered the fight without any coordination from AFSCME, which preferred to avoid racial issues. The NAACP, through the leadership of Maxine Smith and Rev. Samuel Kyles, the chair of the labor and industries committee, joined in with the sanitation workers

⁷⁶ February 16 *Commercial Appeal* article "Loeb Takes Right Course," quoted in Honey, *Jericho Road*, 132. For more on the effect of the press on the perception of the Sanitation Workers' Strike see Ibid., 119-134 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 55-57.

⁷⁷ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 136.

applying the full pressure of tactics learned during the student movement of the early 1960s. On February 17, the first mass meeting between the union and the strikers and the larger community occurred at the Mason Temple where black ministers and the labor leaders spoke. **(Fig. 26)** Local congregations donated food and money to give to the workers. On February 19, the NAACP organized an all-night protest vigil on the new Civic Center Plaza in front of City Hall. The reaction to NAACP involvement led to a quick backlash among not only local white Memphians, but among state legislatures across the South. The FBI's surveillance continued, fueling conservative elements in the national press who did not see the strike as having any racial issues, despite the fact that all the sanitation workers were black.⁷⁸

On February 19, AFSCME International President Jerry Wurf, after arriving the night before, addressed the sanitation workers at the URW hall pledging money and support to maintain the strike. That night the union organizers joined with the NAACP for the all-night vigil at the Civic Center Plaza, but the protest was relatively small. After the 19th, a regular schedule emerged for the strikers and supporters. They held a union meeting at noon and then marched downtown from Clayborn Temple. **(Fig. 27)** The NAACP, encouraged by the union, staged a boycott of downtown businesses. Wurf took over from Ciampa and led the talks with Loeb, but after Wednesday, February 21, Wurf broke off the talks. Wurf said of Loeb's handling of the strike that "it was clear that white workers would not have been treated this way." Loeb "thought that these goddamned people were inferior; he understood that portion of his constituency that one would refer to as the cracker constituency, the redneck constituency, and pandered to them and at the expense of [the

⁷⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 144-149. and and Beifuss, *At the River*, 58-59

sanitation workers].”⁷⁹ The next day, when union leaders attempted to sway the City Council, the council members asked for some workers to speak. After some discussion, the union leaders brought the workers from the URW hall into the new chambers. Nearly 700 sanitation workers entered the council chambers auditorium, which had a fire code limit of 407. When councilman and future mayor, Wyeth Chandler, suggested the meeting move to the Ellis Auditorium, O.Z. Evers urged the workers to stay in the council chambers until they recognized the union. An occupation then began in the plush new hall. Reverend Zeke Bell pointed to the new city shield hung above the council chamber with its idealized pictures of steamboats and cotton and set them against the city’s history of slavery and exploitation. He also warned that the toilets in the chamber would not accommodate the crowd, a statement that flooded the papers the next day as if the black sanitation workers were going to relieve themselves in the brand new City Council chambers. To get the men to leave, the members of the labor and industries committee voted two to one to bring a resolution to the full council to recognize the union.⁸⁰

The workers did leave, but the council voted, the next day on February 23, against the amendment and passed another that stated that “the mayor has the sole authority to act in behalf of the city as its spokesman.” The workers had assembled at Ellis Auditorium, near City Hall, to celebrate what they thought was going to be a victory. After the council voted for the amendment giving Loeb all the power for decisions regarding the strike, the nearly 1,000 people assembled moved to the steps of City Hall. From the Civic Center Plaza workers were ready to march to nearby Clayborn Temple, located a few blocks below Beale Street, but police arrived and blocked everyone inside of the Civic Center Plaza.

⁷⁹ Wurf quoted in Honey, *Jericho Road*, 169. See Beifuss, *At the River*, 88-92.

⁸⁰ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 191-198 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 93-103.

After a series of phone calls and a quick meeting with Loeb, the Assistant Police Chief, U.T. Bartholomew, said the crowd could march down the west side of Main Street four abreast. Wurf encouraged a longer walk to Mason Temple to help their anger to wane. The marchers set off from the plaza down Main Street. **(Fig. 28)** Between Union and Gayoso Avenues, however, police cars appeared about halfway back from the front of the march. They drove the cars bumper to bumper close to the marchers to force them to the sidewalk. When one police car ran over the foot of Civil Rights veteran, Gladys Carpenter, things got out of control. After a group of marchers began to rock the police car, the police tried to disperse the crowd. The police, armed with billy clubs and cans of mace, a substance originally developed by the military but used in the 1960s by urban police departments for riots, charged the marchers spraying copious amounts of mace, in many cases directly into the faces of the marchers, including Ciampa. **(Figs. 29 – 32)** Rev. Lawson believed the officers on the ground planned the police attack beforehand. The official police reports show that Bartholomew ordered the charge when marchers would not stay four abreast.⁸¹

If the strike had not clearly been a civil rights issue before the events of February 23, the black community along with labor leaders, began to see it in those terms. Wurf said, “it wasn’t hard for me to sense that I was in the middle of a race conflict and a rights conflict, perhaps that was at least as important as the union conflict.”⁸² Judge Robert Hoffman, who had made the 1966 injunction against the union made a new ruling, without a hearing, that declared it illegal for any person to “authorize, induce, or engage in a strike against the city of Memphis.”⁸³ With this order in place, union organizer Jesse Epps called

⁸¹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 199-206 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 103-118.

⁸² Wurf quoted in Honey, *Jericho Road*, 210.

⁸³ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 216.

a meeting of all of the black ministers in Memphis, who would then need to take over a leadership role in the strike. Nearly 150 appeared for the meeting in which they organized a group called Community on the Move for Equality (COME). Through this new organization, black ministers called not only for justice for the striking workers but also jobs for African Americans in both the public and private sectors. With Rev. Lawson selected to lead COME, black churches across Memphis began the grassroots effort of organizing support for the strike, including financial support. A new demonstration pattern emerged after the violence of February 23. On February 26, two marches per day began. One was in the morning, and involved a march from Clayborn Temple to the Civic Center Plaza, and the other was in the afternoon from the URW hall to the plaza after a mass meeting. Marchers were instructed to follow the police policy that demonstrators only march in single file with two car lengths between each person.⁸⁴ **(Figs. 33 & 34)**

Demonstrations continued into March, including a march on the fourth, in which a large contingent of white AFL-CIO members participated, but there was no change in position on the part of Loeb or the City Council. On March 5, 121 people were arrested inside the City Council chambers after another sit-in led by Lawson and other ministers such as Rev. Henry Starks and Rev. Ezekiel Bell.⁸⁵ From February 23 to the murder of Dr. King, a struggle emerged, mainly along generational lines, between the tactic of non-violence of the Civil Rights Movement and the militancy of the emerging Black Power movement.⁸⁶ Demonstrations, including protests at white shopping centers in white east Memphis, kept up unabated through March. On the eighteenth, thanks to Rev. Lawson, Dr.

⁸⁴ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 216-224 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 125-134.

⁸⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 240-265 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 136-137, 199-204.

⁸⁶ For more on the struggle between the rising Black Power movement and the black ministers who adhered to non-violence see Honey, *Jericho Road*, 211-239, 327-331 and Beifuss, 165-171.

King arrived in Memphis to lend his support to the strike.⁸⁷ Between the violence in Memphis on February 23 and his arrival in Memphis on March 18, Dr. King was savaged in the national press, especially in the South, in part, because of his speech in New York on February 23 honoring W.E.B. Du Bois, who had joined the Communist Party in 1961. Headlines in the *Birmingham News* such as “King Shows Kindly Disposition Toward Reds” and “King, Red Ex-aide Team Up Again” were illustrative of the barrage of negative press surrounding King largely as a result of FBI propaganda.⁸⁸

Somewhere between 15,000 and 19,000 people packed into Mason Temple to hear Dr. King address the struggle in Memphis.⁸⁹ **(Figs. 35 & 36)** King told the sanitation workers that they were “reminding the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages.” King’s rhetoric turned into a wholesale indictment of American society:

I come by here to say that America too is going to Hell, if we don’t use her wealth. If America does not use her vast resources of wealth to end poverty, to make it possible for all of God’s children to have the basic necessities of life, she too will go to Hell. I will hear America through her historians years and years to come saying, “We built gigantic buildings to kiss the sky. We built gargantuan bridges to span the seas. Through our spaceships we were able to carve highways through the stratosphere. Through our airplanes we were able to dwarf distance and place time in chains. Through our submarines we were able to penetrate oceanic depths.” But it seems that I can hear the God of the universe saying, “even though you’ve done all of that, I was hungry and you fed me not. I was naked and ye clothed me not. The children of my sons and daughters were in need of economic security, and you didn’t provide for them. So you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness.” This may well be the indictment on America that says in Memphis to the mayor, to the power structure, “If you do it unto the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 286 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 253-254.

⁸⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 287-288.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁹⁰ Full transcript of the speech see UMSC, MS 178, Box 22, Folder 121.

When King came around to addressing the particulars of the situation in Memphis, he invited the entire African American community to action, a call to arms that would have significant ramifications on the strike in the days to come: “In a few days you ought to get together and just have a general work stoppage in the city of Memphis. If you let that day come, not a Negro in this city will go to any job downtown. And no Negro in domestic service will go to anybody’s house, anybody’s kitchen. And black students will not go to anybody’s school, and black teachers, and they will hear you then. The city of Memphis will not be able to function that day.”⁹¹ After the speech, King consulted with union and ministerial leaders and decided to return to Memphis to lead the general strike on March 22.⁹²

Despite the fact that, according to Honey, some white downtown businesspeople feared that Dr. King’s intervention into the strike would damage Memphis’s “image of racial moderation and discourage northern investments,” Loeb and the council continued their hard-line stance in the face of economic and potential labor boycotts. Scab labor continued to escalate, and despite a reduced schedule, garbage in white neighborhoods continued to be picked up.⁹³ The strike received a setback when the time came for King’s mass work stoppage. A freak snowstorm blew through the South dropping over sixteen inches of snow on Memphis. The event was postponed and only one man, a white worker from the UAW in Detroit, marched in the snow on the March 22.⁹⁴ **(Fig. 37)** After a round of failed negotiations between the union representatives and the city, COME announced that March 28 was the rescheduled date for the King-led work stoppage and that Friday the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Honey, *Jericho Road*, 304 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 259-260.

⁹³ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 307-310.

⁹⁴ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 323 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 268-271.

twenty-ninth, Rev. C.L. Franklin and his famed daughter Aretha, who had been born in Memphis, would lead a rally at Mason Temple.⁹⁵

At 8:00 AM on March 28, demonstrators began to assemble at Clayborn Temple. **(Fig. 38)** Hundreds of sanitation workers carried new signs that famously said, “I Am A Man.”⁹⁶ **(Fig. 39)** Dr. King had been in New York working on organizing the Poor People’s Campaign, and arrived in Memphis late with his plane arriving at 10:30 AM. When he appeared at the march he was pressed by a large number of young people. The COME ministers locked arms to clear a space for King, who was increasingly apprehensive about the state of the crowd. **(Fig. 40)** Large numbers of high school students had arrived at the march, many of whom were under the impression that the police had killed a fourteen-year-old girl, Jo Ann Talbert, at an altercation in front of Hamilton High School. **(Fig. 41)** The police had not killed Talbert but, in fact, clubbed her, requiring twenty-three stitches. King along with other Memphis ministers eventually began to lead the march of 10,000 to 15,000 people down Hernando and onto Beale Street. As King and the ministers turned from Beale to head up Main Street to the Civic Center Plaza, they heard store windows along Beale Street being smashed by many of the young people who had shown up agitated and angry. Congressional hearings—along with King’s SCLC aides and Bill Lucy—found that police agents under the orders of the FBI helped start the riot in order to destroy the leadership of Dr. King.⁹⁷ Lawson stopped the march and convinced King to leave for his safety. Several ministers led King down McCall St. (now Peabody Place), and a policeman escorted them

⁹⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 327-328 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 273-274.

⁹⁶ For more on the full implications of the “I Am A Man” Protest see Steve Estes, “‘I Am a Man’: Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike,” *Labor History*, 41:2, 153-170.

⁹⁷ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 363 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 277-295. The House Select Committee on Assassinations’ *Final Assassinations Report* concluded that the FBI might have helped start the riots on March 28, 1968.

to the Holiday Inn Rivermont. Lawson attempted to regain order, but the rioting had begun and, the police, whose presence had been inconspicuous before the march, came in full force with clubs, mace, tear gas, and guns. **(Figs. 42 – 46)** Chaos and looting ensued on Beale and Main Streets. **(Fig. 47)** While many of the rioters and looters escaped, police laid siege to the peaceful demonstrators including a packed Clayborn Temple, filling it with tear gas.⁹⁸ **(Fig. 48)**

Later in the afternoon, an unarmed—at least according to twelve eyewitnesses reported by the *Commercial Appeal*—sixteen-year-old African American boy, Larry Payne, was shot in the stomach at point blank range with a shotgun by a police officer at Fowler Homes. Payne had emerged from inside a Fowler Homes basement door after the officer chased looters into the public housing project. A grand jury would later fail to indict the officer who shot Payne.⁹⁹ Earlier in the day, the mayor phoned Governor Buford Ellington, asking him to declare a state of emergency. Later, nearly 4,000 National Guard soldiers entered downtown Memphis on tanks and trucks wielding bayoneted rifles.¹⁰⁰ **(Figs. 49 & 50)** The violence was curbed downtown by 2:00 PM, but southern Memphis was not quieted. By nightfall, more violence erupted when police tried to enforce a new curfew. The next day, Dr. King left for Atlanta, while the COME leadership planned a nonviolent march downtown. The Tennessee legislature passed a bill that allowed the state's mayors to declare civil emergencies, giving Loeb the authority to enforce a curfew for up to fifteen days, close stores, prevent people from being on the street without a permit, and banning the sales of gasoline, liquor, and firearms. Another law passed that allowed

⁹⁸ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 335-358 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 295-311.

⁹⁹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 359-360 and Beifuss, *At the River*, .321, 345-346. Leslie Jones claimed that Payne whipped out “the biggest knife I ever saw.”

¹⁰⁰ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 352.

the state to indict someone who played a leadership role in a demonstration that preceded a riot. On the evening of March 28, Memphis had been placed under martial law by a segregationist mayor armed with the nearly all-white Tennessee National Guard, tanks, and military weaponry, which was controlled by Loeb's MPD's tactical squads. The mayor instituted a 7:00 PM to 5:00 AM curfew. Anyone on the street without a permit would be arrested. While white eastern Memphis carried on as usual, areas around and south of downtown were on lockdown. Police stopped any black face on the street, often searching people's homes without a warrant. Beale Street especially was under the tight control of the National Guard and police.¹⁰¹ When striking workers met on the March 29, they decided to continue demonstrating despite the martial conditions downtown. Sanitation workers marched under the bayoneted guns and tanks of the National Guard in single file with the "I Am A Man" signs from the day before, now around their necks. (**Figs. 51 & 52**) The workers were joined by a few supporters for a march over the weekend and into the next week, carrying signs that read, "Keep Your Money in Your Pockets," to promote the boycott.¹⁰²

On Saturday, March 30, Jesse Epps flew to Atlanta from Memphis to ask Dr. King to return and help the cause, saying that King was "stuck in Memphis [as much] as we are, and you can't leave Memphis no more than we can." After a fractious meeting with the SCLC staff, everyone agreed to head to Memphis to organize a large, nonviolent protest march.¹⁰³ By April 2, Loeb lifted the curfew, and the National Guard left town. The SCLC staff arrived in Memphis on April 1 and 2, and April 8 was selected as the date for a massive

¹⁰¹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 377-378, 383-386 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 319-334.

¹⁰² Honey, *Jericho Road*, 389-390.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 378-381.

march nationally supported by AFSCME, to draw people from all over the country to Memphis. Dr. King arrived back in Memphis on April 3.¹⁰⁴ On his first visit to Memphis during the Sanitation Strike, King, who in the past often stayed at the black-owned Lorraine Motel located six blocks south of Beale Street on Mulberry Street, stayed in the Peabody Hotel downtown. After the aborted demonstration on March 28, King stayed at the Holiday Inn Rivermont. The press, through the influence of an FBI memo, criticized King's stay at the Holiday Inn, which had been out of necessity since at the time he could not reach either the Peabody or the Lorraine, because they said it was hypocritical for him to call black Memphians to boycott white-owned businesses while he stayed at the Holiday Inn. This time King and his staff chose to return to the Lorraine Motel with its exposed balconies, a decision that would have disastrous consequences.¹⁰⁵ **(Fig. 53)**

In a hearing in front of Federal District Court Judge Bailey Brown to determine whether to level an injunction against King and his SCLC staff from organizing a demonstration, Memphis City Attorney, Frank Gianotti, said that the city was "fearful that in the turmoil of the moment someone may even harm King's life, and with all the force of language we can use we want to emphasize that we don't want that to happen." Brown issued a ten-day restraining order against King and his SCLC staff, which he later reversed on April 5 after a hearing on the morning of April 4.¹⁰⁶ On the night of April 3, a mass rally was to take place at the Mason Temple. King wanted Ralph Abernathy to speak, while he would speak the next night. After Abernathy arrived and saw the disappointment of the 2,000 to 3,000 workers and supporters who came in stormy April weather to hear King, he

¹⁰⁴ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 394-397 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 352-355.

¹⁰⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 364-365 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 355-356.

¹⁰⁶ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 410-411, 428 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 357-358.

called the Lorraine and convinced King to come and speak. King's now famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech that he delivered, without written notes, during a thunderstorm at 9:30 that night began with an expansive historic view of the freedom struggle of blacks in the United States and in Africa. **(Fig. 54)** As with his speech on March 18, King eventually turned his attention to the specific situation in Memphis. Clearly still bothered by the news coverage of the riots on March 28, King said that the media focused all its attention on the window-breaking. "They very seldom got around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers are on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them, and that Mayor Loeb is in dire need of a doctor." He summoned the crowd to participate in the march on Monday, April 8.¹⁰⁷ King famously ended his speech by referencing the threats against him: "And then I got into Memphis [earlier in the day]. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?"¹⁰⁸ He then portentously concluded his speech:

But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm so happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!¹⁰⁹ **(Fig. 55)**

The events of the fourth would both prove King's speech prophetic and do more to hasten the end of the strike than the scheduled march on Monday.

¹⁰⁷ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 415-426 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 362-369.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr. *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 222.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

Just before 6:00 on the evening of April 4, as Dr. King stood on the balcony speaking and joking with members of his SCLC staff before leaving to have dinner at Rev. Kyles's house, Dr. King was shot in the throat. The bullet severed his jugular and spinal cord.¹¹⁰ The police, which a reporter estimated to be nearly 150 officers, surrounded the Lorraine Motel very soon after the shot. **(Fig. 56)** Their quick response was because several members of the Intelligence Division of the MPD, along with members of the FBI, kept King under surveillance and were in the immediate vicinity. Shortly after King's death, Memphis police helicopters flew over the black areas of the city to look for potential rioters. Loeb reinstituted martial law in Memphis bringing back in all of the 4,000 National Guard troops and reinstating the 7:00 PM curfew. As Honey described the situation in Memphis, "as on the previous weekend, whites remained safely walled off from riots by geography, the military, and the police." The violent response to Dr. King's murder, however, was quite small in comparison to many cities across the country. Washington, DC, saw the worst riots, but Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, and Baltimore were nearly as serious. Riots broke out in 125 American cities in the wake of King's murder, leaving forty-three dead—including one in Memphis—and well over 20,000 arrested. Over 72,000 Army and National Guard troops were deployed as martial law descended on American cities in the wake of King's death.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 433 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 380-385. The white man who eventually confessed nearly a year later—in order to avoid the death penalty—to shooting Dr. King, was not apprehended by the police until sixty-five days later in London's Heathrow Airport. With a fake Canadian passport, he was preparing to board a jet to Rhodesia, the present-day Zimbabwe that was, at the time, governed as a white supremacist republic. Whether the man who confessed to killing Dr. King actually pulled the trigger, either operating on his own or through a network of individuals, we may never truly know. The family of Dr. King does not believe that he had anything to do with the murder. In the very least, the House Select Committee on Assassinations found that a conspiracy was probable.

¹¹¹ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 434-446 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 385-411.

In Memphis the next day, 300 black and white ministers met at St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral. Many of the white ministers in Memphis, after the death of King, finally were ready to help end the strike. For several white ministers participation in this meeting would cost them their jobs.¹¹² After the meeting, 150 of the ministers marched through downtown to the Civic Center Plaza and into the mayor's office. They pled with Loeb to agree to dues check off and union recognition. Loeb sat quietly behind his desk with his shotgun on the floor resolute in his immovable position. **(Fig. 57)** Immediately following the meeting MSU's Presbyterian chaplain, Dick Moon, told the ministers and the mayor that he was going to stay in the mayor's office without food until Loeb changed his mind. Only a Roman Catholic nun joined Moon from among the clergy. Students from MSU and Southwestern later joined in support. Meanwhile, the sanitation workers marched downtown, and Civil Rights and union leaders planned to move forward with Dr. King's march on April 8.¹¹³

In preparation for the April 8 demonstration, Lawson and SCLC staff members worked with the police and the National Guard to explain their plans. A ten-foot-high platform was constructed directly in front of City Hall. Marchers carried signs that read "Honor King: End Racism" while many of the sanitation workers still carried their "I Am A Man" signs. Demonstrators marched from Clayborn Temple through black neighborhoods, down Beale Street, and stopped at Main Street to await the arrival of Coretta Scott King and her children. **(Fig. 58)** When they arrived, the march resumed up Main Street and into the Civic Center Plaza. **(Figs. 59 – 61)** The side streets along the march route were blocked by tanks and National Guard troops with police helicopters

¹¹² Honey, *Jericho Road*, 471.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 455-458.

circling overhead. Marchers—estimated to be between twenty- and forty-thousand—filed silently into the Civic Center Plaza to support the cause of the sanitation workers and to honor Dr. King. Several individuals spoke at the demonstration including AFSCME's Wurf. Finally, Coretta Scott King spoke to the crowd, optimistically pointing to a time in the United States when society would be transformed, where justice and equality would truly reign. There was no violence or disturbances during the April 8 rally, and violence across Memphis decreased significantly as well.¹¹⁴

On the day after the large demonstration, sanitation workers resumed daily meetings and marches through the downtown. Meanwhile, President Johnson sent an emissary, Undersecretary of Labor, James Reynolds, to go to Memphis and mediate between the union and the mayor with explicit instructions from the president to end the strike. When Reynolds arrived, he found a mayor who still would not give in at all on his position with the union. He conducted negotiations between Loeb and Wurf, but they were going nowhere. After the murder of Dr. King, six different conventions cancelled their meetings in Memphis. Meanwhile, the black community continued to put pressure on businesses downtown, especially on the day before Easter, which was traditionally a big shopping day. The *Commercial Appeal* reported that the downtown had lost a third of its business in the previous month. Jesse Epps took protests to suburban shopping malls. On April 9, Loeb ended martial law in Memphis.¹¹⁵ The workers resumed daily meetings at the URW union hall and marches from Clayborn Temple through the downtown. At a rally at the Metropolitan Baptist Church, Ralph Abernathy proposed a plan to march through upper-class white areas during the night, expand the boycotts to the suburbs, and close the

¹¹⁴ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 474-482 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 442-449.

¹¹⁵ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 467-468, 483, 486-487 and Beifuss, *At the River*, 451-452.

downtown, but union negotiators had reached a tentative agreement with the mayor to end the strike that same night. The deal included having a federal credit union accept union dues, an agreement with the City Council that recognized the union, a raise for sanitation workers paid for by Abe Plough, the owner of a large pharmaceutical company, and a provision that stated, “The City shall make promotions on the basis of seniority and competency.” AFSCME took the proposal before the COME members at the Peabody Hotel who approved the results. Finally, the union leaders took the proposal before the workers, who had gathered at Clayborn Temple and were preparing for a march downtown. The proposal passed a unanimous vote of the sanitation workers. The victory of the compromise proposal—which Mayor Loeb did not have to sign, allowing him to maintain his intransigence—would be the first in several victories, including a strike of workers at the public John Gaston Hospital, which won workers their union recognition, and the successful boycotts of “Black Monday” in 1969, which gained black representation on the Memphis School Board. Seventeen AFSCME chapters opened in Memphis by the mid-1970s, organizing low-wage workers in many different jobs. Teachers, firefighters, and police went on strike in 1977 and 1978, gaining them increased wages and bargaining power, but private unions in Tennessee did not see any improvements in the “right-to-work” South.¹¹⁶

At the end of the Sanitation Workers’ Strike, it was clear that the city’s plans for a new government center unwittingly created a public space in downtown Memphis where African Americans could directly and visibly protest their local government. Strikers and their supporters turned the downtown from a bastion of the white power structure of the

¹¹⁶ Honey, *Jericho Road*, 485- 504.

city into an area increasingly regarded as the domain of blacks. As the *Commercial Appeal* editorialized seven years after the strike, whites began to view the downtown as a black space, “steeped in crime and therefore much of Memphis’s white population avoids it.”¹¹⁷ Just as African Americans in Memphis gained a voice in city government, federal courts began forced integration of city schools, and working-class blacks gained unionization in government jobs through massive public protests downtown and boycotts across the city, whites began an exodus of Memphis’s already large city boundaries into suburbs increasingly far from the city’s center. The main results of the Sanitation Workers’ Strike on the urban landscape of Memphis were forming the final blow to an already suffering downtown retail market and hastening the approval of the urban renewal project to clear the neighborhoods around Beale Street.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Weiler and Jefferson Riker, “‘The Downtown Problem’: Acceleration in Decline of Memphis Traced to 1968 Events,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 28, 1975.

Chapter 4: Destroying the Home of the Blues

Beale Street and Urban Renewal

Introduction

The importance that Beale Street and the surrounding area had for African Americans in Memphis during the first half of the twentieth century is quite difficult to appreciate judging from present-day Beale Street. The Beale Street of the early twenty-first century is a Disneyfied, phony, two-block version of what it once was. Today, crowds of tourists, typically white, and locals fill the two blocks of Beale Street between Second and Fourth Streets, cordoned off by wooden police barricades at either end. Because of the open container law, that part of Beale Street requires a photo identification check during nighttime hours. Today, Beale Street has restaurants, bars, and nightclubs that feed off those tourists and locals. It now has the Gibson Guitar Factory, the Rock and Soul Museum, and the FedEx Forum basketball arena, home of the NBA franchise, the Memphis Grizzlies. All of these tourist attractions opened at least a decade after urban renewal, and in many cases, it took three decades before anything replaced the empty fields surrounding the thin strip of old commercial structures that lined the small “blue light” district of Beale Street.¹ One of the early redevelopers still on Beale is the blues club Rum Boogie Café, which opened in 1985. Blues great B.B. King opened the B.B. King Restaurant and Blues Club in 1991. In 1997, Elvis Presley Enterprises opened Elvis Presley’s Memphis, a restaurant and club. In 2000, the Smithsonian Institution, with the help of local boosters,

¹ The MHA used the phrase “blue light district” to denote an entertainment district. They did not imply the contemporary definition of blue light district, which refers to an area with a high rate of illegal drug crime. Also, not to be confused with red light district, which most often denotes a concentrated area of adult shops and strip clubs.

brought their exhibition on the blues to Beale Street as the Memphis Rock and Soul Museum, originally located on the second floor of the Gibson Guitar Factory off Beale and later moved into museum space adjoining the FedEx Forum, which was built in 2004.

Tourists come to Beale because of its mythologized—yet seminal—role in the creation of the blues and rock ‘n’ roll. This mythology, however, shrouds much of the significance the street had in the everyday lives of many of the city’s black residents. Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall rightly claim that “Beale didn’t birth the blues... any more than Handy fathered them,” but for much of white America today, if they know anything about Beale at all, its importance lies in being the “birthplace of the blues.” Beale has meaning for these Americans solely because of their belief in the blues’ central role, and the Memphis blues’ role in particular, in the creation of rock ‘n’ roll, an idea exemplified and reinforced by the oft-mentioned quote attributed to John Lennon about Elvis Presley: “Before Elvis there was nothing.”² The Tony-Award-winning musical, *Memphis* (2009), adds to the fabled origins of rock ‘n’ roll and its complicated racial history. During Elvis’s zenith, however, the majority of white Memphians found little to appreciate in Presley’s music. Not even the overly mythologized role that Beale Street played in Elvis’s career, nor its larger impact on the genre of rock music, would have provided much appreciation for the area amongst most whites in Memphis.

White Memphians in the first half of the twentieth century often saw Beale as a den of vice and violence. A *Press-Scimitar* feature on Beale Street summed up the view of many whites: “It was famous for its blues bands, but it was notorious for knife fights, nickel pistol shootouts, rape, robbery, bootleg whisky, and the most elaborate brothels in the

² Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America’s Main Street*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1993), 7.

South.”³ William Faulkner’s Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, *The Reivers* (1962), features the area’s bustling prostitution business at the turn-of-the-century, and his early novel, *Sanctuary* (1931), also highlights Memphis’s red light district between Beale and Gayoso in the late 1920s. Would-be Beale developer, Ron Barassi, said of Beale Street, “Nobody can truly say he wants Beale to be put back as it was. It was degradation.” He went on to say, “Beale Street is remembered only for W.C. Handy and the Blues and that is what it should be. Never should it be allowed to become what it originally was.”⁴ W.C. Handy, the famed bandleader, composer, and the so-called “Father of the Blues,” said in contradistinction, “the white people of Memphis have never understood just what Beale Street really meant and means to my people.”⁵ A thoughtful article in the *Commercial Appeal* described the significance of Beale Street in the everyday lives of those who lived, worked, and played there: “The people were the warp and woof of the tapestry of Beale. They walked the street and shopped its stores and gave it more than transient character. The legends were not part of the design. They were mere incidents in a whole lot of living that went on.”⁶ Even while romanticizing Beale, McKee and Chisenhall’s paraphrasing of Nat D. Williams’s descriptions of Beale echo those sentiments, reflecting its importance for African Americans in Memphis during the first half of the twentieth century:

The white man had said the black man couldn’t go certain places, that Beale was the place for blacks; and the black man turned it around and said Beale was the *only* place to be. It was more than a collection of stores and saloons, pawnshops and lodge halls and church headquarters. Beale was Main Street and back alley and the Rialto and Courthouse Square; Christians, hypocrites, heathens, gamblers, the upright, and the uptight; harlots and mothers of the church; professional men in their black suits and dark ties;

³ Johnnie Vaughn, “Some Want Beale Street as It Was, But What Was It?,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 9, 1973.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue*, 2. Citing *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 16, 1955.

⁶ Thomas Bevier, “Where Have the People Gone?,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 25, 1973.

country folks in overalls and flour-sack dresses; easy riders in their boxback suits, Stetson hats, and silk shirts, with glamorous wickedness; wandering minstrels singing their blues; itinerant preachers shouting a hell-fire-and-brimstone blues of their own; conjure men and con men; voodoo and hoodoo women. It was a melting pot of black America.⁷

McKee and Chisenhall attribute both the popularity and the decline of Beale Street to Jim Crow. The increasing spatial restrictions that occurred after the Populist Revolt in the South kept large segments of the city off limits to blacks, which they argue encouraged African Americans to create their own counterpart to Memphis's Main Street, but the slow crumbling of the Jim Crow order after mid-century eroded the need for a central gathering place.⁸ One long-time denizen of Beale claimed, "when integration came, the Beale Streeters went everywhere, and it kilt this place."⁹ Depression and war did not do much to help Beale Street, but its real moment of decline was during the 1950s and especially the 1960s. Williams described part of the reason for the decline of Beale Street. In the postwar years, he wrote about lost leases and high rent forcing black businesses out of Beale Street. Whites with "their pockets stuffed with money from war work" replaced these businesses. Williams also described the conflicted opinion of Beale Street among upper class African American Memphians, which helps explain much of the support among the black political class for urban renewal:

Like the white folk downtown, many of our Negro upper crust view Beale very objectively indeed. They take their out-of-town visitors through the street on slumming tours and laugh just as idiotically at the avenue's gaucherie manners. These folks have long since accepted the view that Chocolate Avenue is a place which is "owned by imported Jews and Italians, policed by poor white trash and enjoyed by cottonpatch Negroes."

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ For more on the Populist Revolt see: John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931. Gerald H. Gaither. *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

That's not the real Beale Streeter's point of view, of course, but it's what a lot of folks say and think.¹⁰

If increasing freedom for blacks in Memphis played a role in a decline in the importance of Beale, the plans of the MHA for the area destroyed what was left. After the productive urban renewal projects the MHA pursued during the 1950s and 1960s—which resulted in the creation of St. Jude's Children's Hospital, the University of Tennessee Medical Complex, and the Civic Center Plaza—the MHA, the City Planning Commission, and the city government set their sights on clearing the land directly south of the CBD. The MHA had considered the neighborhood surrounding Beale Street for some time. In the mid-1960s, the MHA finally began the planning stages of razing the residential areas surrounding the portion of Beale Street between Front Street and Lauderdale Street. The events surrounding the Sanitation Workers' Strike during February through April of 1968 would cause the plans for Beale Street to have even more of a negative resonance within the black community. Shortly after a segregationist mayor's intransigence brought about the circumstances in which Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed, the mayor's city government, backed by federal funding, killed “Main Street of Negro America,” as George Washington Lee famously called Beale.¹¹ (**Fig. 1**)

This chapter traces the history of Beale Street from its origins as a real estate development called South Memphis during the 1840s to its zenith in the 1920s, from its slow decline following the Great Depression to its final destruction by the urban renewal

¹⁰ Fred Chisenhall, “Beale: An Historic Little Oasis Gone Down,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 28, 1980.

¹¹ Ibid., 2. George Washington Lee was a prominent African American insurance executive and long-time promoter of Beale Street. For more on Lee see David M. Tucker. *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971. of Lee's own book on Beale Street: George W. Lee. *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began*. New York: R.O. Ballou, 1934.

wrecking ball after the riots of the Sanitation Workers' Strike. The process leading up to the destruction of Beale Street took years of planning on the part of the MHA. Unlike in some cities across the country, urban renewal was still popular enough in Memphis to maintain the political support necessary to continue large-scale projects into the 1970s. The Jackson Avenue area—with the creation of St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital (**Fig. 2**) along with the Court Avenue and Medical Center projects—was seen as a successful endeavor. Early in the Court Avenue Project, the Cross Country Development Corporation started plans to build a high-rise office building at 100 North Main Street. When built, it had a rotating penthouse restaurant and lounge, a swimming pool on the upper floors, and a gymnasium. In the Riverview project area, the annual income in property taxes the city received went from around \$31,000 to over \$90,000.¹² These successful developments, spurred by urban renewal, led to feelings of goodwill among most of the political class in Memphis, white and black alike. When it came time for the MHA to move forward with their plans for Beale Street, they enjoyed the support of the Downtown Association and both Democratic and Republican leaders in the black community, including Lieutenant Lee, the author of *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began* (1934).

After 1973, the MHA and urban renewal became increasingly unpopular with the public and among local politicians. The MHA handed control of the area's redevelopment to a firm—led by twenty-eight-year-old Ron Barassi—with no black representation. This chapter traces the story of what happened to Beale after the urban renewal wrecking ball finished its work. The real tragedy of Beale Street lies not only in the extent of destruction the MHA decided to carry out—especially the block between Main and Second—but also

¹² Orville Hancock, "Urban Renewal 'Surgery' Cuts Path Through Downtown Area," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 15, 1972.

in the bad fortune of having the completion of the acquisition and destruction phases coincide with 1973, a watershed year in the history of the American economy and the American experience. For historical geographer, David Harvey, 1973 was the year the economy decisively shifted from a Fordist model of accumulation—where the working class consumed the goods they produced, creating a higher standard of living for themselves, aided in the postwar years by Keynesian interventions by the state—to “flexible accumulation.”¹³ In Harvey’s terms, flexible accumulation is a new model for production and consumption, both of which speed up through open global labor markets. This results from the vast increase in subcontracting and outsourcing, the decrease in the power of labor unions caused by the deflation of 1973, and the ability for quick transfers in money and credit. Harvey argues that the severe recession of 1973—caused by the serious deflation that followed the stagflation of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and also led to severe decrease in property values and difficulties for financial institutions—“set into motion a whole set of processes that undermined the Fordist compromise.”¹⁴

For the story of Beale Street immediately after its destruction, the recession of 1973 is of paramount importance because it ensured that the capital needed to redevelop the area was unavailable from both private institutions and public funding. The larger shift toward flexible accumulation is of utmost significance for considering what the plans for Beale Street were and what would ultimately happen to Beale Street in the 1980s and 1990s. The prime argument of Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* is that the change from the

¹³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 125-140.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141-172.

Fordist model to the flexible accumulation model of production and consumption brought a host of cultural changes that he defines as postmodernity.

Drawing from Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry* (1987), Harvey connects postmodern architecture and urban design's penchant for blindly quoting the past to Hewison's insights into what he calls the heritage industry, which other scholars refer to as heritage tourism. For Hewison, the heritage industry comes out of postmodernism's desire "to create a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives [and] our history." He connects postmodernism and heritage tourism, saying postmodern people increasingly "have no understanding of history in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation, more costume drama and re-enactment than critical discourse," a condition that has only increased in the early twenty-first century and is best exemplified by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (2005) in Springfield, Illinois.¹⁵ Christine Boyer, drawing on the—at the time—fertile field of inquiry into postmodernity, including Harvey's work, argued that what characterized postmodern urbanization was a bastardized form of history that saw the city as a *tromp l'oeil*, a stage set. Boyer ties postmodern urbanization into contemporary urban planners' desires to enhance their cities' "imageability, livability, and cultural capital" to increase the city's "marketability," whether that came in the form of tourism or private investment and development.¹⁶ Tourism scholar, John Urry, ties into this scholarship by arguing that spectacle and display are what typify tourism in the post-industrial era.¹⁷ These scholars' assessments of the

¹⁵ Ibid., 87, quoting Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen, 1987.

¹⁶ Christine M. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 4.

¹⁷ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1990.

changes in how people thought about, planned, and interacted with urban space during in the post-1973 global capitalist era set the stage for both the plans to turn Beale Street into a tourist attraction, which this chapter covers, and for Beale Street's transformation 1980s and 1990s into an actual tourist attraction, which chapter five details.

How Beale Street Became What It Was: A Brief Cultural and Architectural History

In the 1830s and 1840s as the original founders and land speculators of Memphis, including Andrew Jackson, cashed in their real estate investments in the growing Mississippi River town, Robertson Topp, another land developer, promoted growth south of William Lawrence's 1819 survey for Memphis. John Overton, another of the original land developers claimed in his real estate advertisements that the growth would reach the greatness of its Egyptian namesake: "This noble river...may, with propriety be denominated the American Nile [and] Memphis must necessarily become a flourishing and populous town."¹⁸ (**Fig. 3**) Topp called the new town below Memphis, South Memphis. The district south of Union Avenue included the area that became Beale Street. In 1845, South Memphis was incorporated as a city in Tennessee. The area around Beale became the premiere location for wealthy whites. In 1850, South Memphis became part of Memphis proper, but the area just east of the bluff continued to be a wealthy enclave. At one point in time, the area was referred to as Sodom because of its extravagance. In return, residents of that district referred to the area north of downtown as the Pinchgut area or

¹⁸ John E. Harkins, *Metropolis on the American Nile* (Oxford, MS: The Guild Bindery Press, 1991), 34.

Pinch district because of its poverty.¹⁹ The Driver-Hunt-Phelan House at 533 Beale Street in South Memphis is the lone mansion from that era that survives into the present. **(Fig. 4)** The house was constructed through the process of bricolage from the 1820s into the 1850s. Beginning in the late 1820s a four-room hall-and-parlor house was completed. Colonel Driver, who bought the house around 1840, moved the small portico from the north side to the east side and constructed a larger portico in its place. A kitchen and service wing were added subsequently, completing the Greek Revival structure. During the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant occupied the house for Union headquarters while he prepared for the battle of Vicksburg.²⁰ Another even grander Greek Revival house, built between 1837 and 1841, was the Robertson Topp House, which served, along with a nearby building, as the Memphis Labor Temple beginning in 1924 but was demolished during urban renewal. It sat just down Beale from the Driver-Hunt-Phelan House. **(Fig. 5)**

Before the Civil War, the area surrounding Beale Street had become the home to many free blacks, and the area increasingly became the central black settlement in Memphis after the war, the location of the historically significant race riots of 1866—which bolstered public and Congressional support for radical Reconstruction.²¹ After the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, the majority of people left in Memphis were black. Thirty thousand people fled the city at the epidemic’s outbreak, but of the 19,000 who stayed in Memphis, over 5,000 died. The epidemic hit whites significantly harder, and much of the

¹⁹ McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue*, 16. Beverly G. Bond and Janannn Sherman, *Images of America: Beale Street*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006), 7. Richard M. Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks: A Walking Tour Down the Home of the Blues*, (Memphis: Arcadia Records, 1999), 1.

²⁰ Lucien M. Dent, “Historic American Buildings Survey, TN-19-3,” Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, 1936. James Patrick, *Architecture in Tennessee: 1768-1897*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 125.

²¹ See Altina L. Waller. “Community, Class, and Race in the Memphis Riot of 1866.” *Journal of Social History*, 18.2: 233-246.

population that remained in the city in the wake of the devastation was black.²² After the epidemic, the area around Beale Street near the bluff between Front Street and Fourth Street became a business district that largely catered to Memphis's African American population. Robert Church, Sr., who became the South's first black millionaire, bought the cheap property in the Beale Street area after the Yellow Fever Epidemic. In 1899, Church built a 2,000-seat auditorium on Beale Street in the newly created Church's Park, built exclusively for an African American population of Memphis that was increasingly excluded from public space in the rest of the city during the Populist Revolt in the South.²³ (**Fig. 6**) Church also opened the Solvent Savings Bank and Trust Company, which provided for the development of black-owned businesses in the area.²⁴ The area around Beale Street remained a vibrant commercial, cultural, and entertainment district catering to the black population in Memphis, nearly fifty percent of the city's inhabitants when the city crossed the 100,000 mark in population in the 1900 census.

In the post-Populist Revolt South, Beale became a refuge for black Memphians who were increasingly subject to injustice and violence at the hands of whites, often with consent and participation of the police. The most famous example of the lynchings in the African American community of Memphis was the case of Ell Persons in May 1917. Persons was accused of raping and murdering a sixteen-year-old white girl. After a twenty-four hour grilling by the Memphis police, Persons allegedly admitted guilt. An estimated five-thousand white Memphians attended the lynching, for which the *Commercial Appeal*

²² Gerald M. Capers, Jr. "Yellow Fever in Memphis in the 1870s," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 24.4, March 1938, 483-502.

²³ For more on Robert Church see Annette E. Church and Roberta Church. *The Robert R. Churches of Memphis*. Ann Arbor: Annette E. Church and Roberta Church, 1974.

²⁴ Bond and Sherman, *Images of America*, 7.

announced the time and location. Vendors even came to sell food and snacks to the crowd. White men doused Persons with gasoline and set him on fire. That evening the charred remains of his head and a foot were thrown into a crowd of blacks on Beale Street. James Weldon Johnson, who was at the time a field secretary for NAACP, came to Memphis and found no evidence connecting Persons to the crime. Between 1890 and 1920, racial violence became increasingly common in Memphis. In 1908, a white man walked into a saloon on Beale Street and shot four black men with no motive other than to kill black men. An all-white jury acquitted the man of the murders. In 1916, as urban migration of rural blacks into Memphis increased, police stopped and searched all new black residents often with the aid of “Negro spotters,” who the police department hired to help them identify new residents. The article, “‘Unhidden’ Transcripts,” details much of the violent racial history of Memphis during the 1910s, including many incidents of police violence. Goings and Smith argue that African Americans in Memphis protested in overt ways including verbal and violent responses to suppression, but they believe that the mass migration of rural blacks into Memphis ended up becoming the most significant means of resistance in the face of institutional racial violence.²⁵

In the increasingly racially divided and violent world of the early decades of the twentieth century, Beale became ever more important for the black community as a place to live work, play, and shop. Often called “Main Street of Negro America,” within Beale Street’s commercial district, which ran from Main and tapered off east of Fourth Street, the buildings housed saloons, gambling houses, theaters, blues halls, and houses of prostitution. They also contained dry good stores, clothing stores, drugstores, jewelers,

²⁵ Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, “‘Unhidden’ Transcripts: Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920,” *Journal of Urban History* 21.3, March 1995, 372-394.

banks, barbershops, and pawnshops. The offices on the upper stories of the buildings housed the offices of black professionals, dentists, doctors, lawyers, real estate brokers, insurance companies, tailors, photographers, and undertakers. As significant as Beale Street was for much of the black community in Memphis from the late 1800s through the 1950s, in the annals of American music history, Beale Street stands out as a central location in the history of the blues. William Barlow convincingly outlines the rich musical culture that surrounded Memphis in the early decades of the twentieth century. From the Mississippi Delta towns of Clarksdale and Hernando to towns north and west of Memphis such as Ripley, Jackson, and Brownsville, the distinctive style of blues that developed on and around Beale Street in Memphis drew from the music cultures from the surrounding hinterland.²⁶

In addition to the country/delta blues artists that flocked to Beale Street—such as Sleepy John Estes, John Lee “Sonny Boy” Williamson, Gus Cannon, Jim Jackson, Memphis Slim, Roosevelt Sykes, Son House, Furry Lewis, Robert Wilkins, and Charley Patton—trained musician, W. C. Handy, became the most important figure in the popularization and the dissemination of the blues throughout the rest of the United States. Handy moved to Memphis in 1909 from Clarksdale, Mississippi, and directed a marching brass band. He then formed a dance band and introduced first white Memphians and later white Americans to his interpretation of the Delta folk blues that he was exposed to early in life.²⁷ In 1909, the year Handy arrived in Memphis, a young E.H. Crump commissioned him to write a song for his campaign rallies. The song was called “Mister Crump” or “Mr.

²⁶ William Barlow, *“Looking Up at Down”: The Emergence of Blues Culture*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, 202-203.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

Crump Don't 'Low It." Samuel B. Charters's *The Country Blues* suggests that Handy might not have written the song, instead Paul Wyer, Handy's clarinet player might have been the composer. Further complicating matters is the possibility that the well-established story that Handy refashioned "Mister Crump" into one of the first, and certainly the most popular, blues songs, 1912's "Memphis Blues," might not be true. Charters argues that the words published for "Mister Crump" do not match the melody of "Memphis Blues," and that the tune that most likely matches the words of "Mister Crump" is the song "Mama Don't 'Low It," attributed to Robert "Washboard Sam" Brown.²⁸ Whatever the case, "Memphis Blues" and the later composition, "St. Louis Blues" (1914), brought a form of the blues to national attention thanks to Handy's compositions' popularity not only with a national audience but also with the songwriters of Tin Pan Alley who would increasingly popularize the blues.²⁹ Handy's success also helped establish Beale Street as an important center for the blues and jazz among nationally known singers.³⁰

In the 1910s and 1920s, Italian immigrants set up theaters and vaudeville houses on Beale. Several theaters operated on Beale during the early twentieth century including the Palace, Daisy, New Daisy, Grant, Pastime, Orpheum, Venus, and Savoy, attesting to the vibrant musical and entertainment scene south of downtown. Among those theaters, the Palace became one of the most important. Opened in 1919, the Palace Theater became the largest venue for black musicians in the segregated South. In the 1920s, the Palace began Amateur Night, which featured numerous local acts competing for cash prizes handed out

²⁸ Samuel B. Charters, *The Country Blues*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 37-40. It is notable that later histories of the blues accept the traditional narrative regarding "Memphis Blues." Barlow, "Looking Up at Down", 209. Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People from Charley Patton to Robert Cray*, (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 59.

²⁹ Barlow, "Looking Up at Down", 123.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

to the best talent. Amateur Night continued into the 1950s. Many of the great blues singers of the twentieth century played, through individual concerts or Amateur Night, at the Palace Theater. Earlier, in 1909, the Barrasso Brothers, Anselmo and F.A., started the Theater Owners' Booking Association (TOBA), which began with over thirty theaters on the circuit and expanded to over 100 during the 1920s.³¹ The history of the Palace Theater building attests to the adaptability and mixed uses of many of the buildings on Beale Street. The façade of the Palace was a commercial building, which was built in the 1870s. When Anselmo Barrasso and Lorenzo and Angelo Pacini—who ran the famous P. Wee's Saloon after Virgilio Maffei—bought the building to start a theater, they left the original building to serve as the theater's façade and lobby, and used its upper floors as offices. Behind the building, they constructed the new Palace Theater in 1919. **(Fig. 7)** The Palace was one of eight condemned buildings on Beale in 1973. The city council saved six of those from demolition, but the Palace was one of the two that the MHA tore down.³² Sometime in the late 1930s or early 1940s, the Palace installed a new triangular neon marquee, which a rare color photograph of Beale Street in the 1940s shows. **(Fig. 8)** In 1949, the theater received extensive renovations costing around \$60,000. The third floor on the façade was removed, the façade and marquee were completely redone, and the interior was renovated. **(Fig. 9)** The Palace, while also a film venue, was primarily a music hall.³³

Among the theaters on Beale that provided much of the entertainment venues from the 1910s to the 1950s, the Daisy Theater, located across Beale from the Palace, was also an important entertainment center for Memphis's African American community. Built in

³¹ McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue*, 15.

³² "Six Buildings Are Sparred by Council," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 13, 1974.

³³ McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue*, 56-58.

1917, the Daisy Theater primarily served as a movie house in its early days. **(Fig. 10)** Sam Zerilla opened the Daisy after his Pastime Theater, one of the first movie theaters to cater to blacks, closed. The building stands out on Beale with the bold lines of its Art Deco façade and gilded half-domed portico entrance. Inside the theater, there was a downstairs and upstairs bar and a semicircular stage. Attesting to the density of the business along Beale Street, two small stores flanked the entrance, one was a candy store and the other a shoeshine parlor. The theater held the 1929 premiere of the sixteen-minute short film “St. Louis Blues,” directed by Dudley Murphey, who five years earlier collaborated with Fernand Léger to make “Ballet Mécanique.” “St. Louis Blues” starred blues singer Bessie Smith, who accompanied W.C. Handy to attend the premiere.³⁴ Together the Palace, the Daisy, and the New Daisy, opened by Zerilla in 1941, were the only film venues on Beale that catered only to African Americans, but other than an occasional independent film produced for black audiences, the films they showed were reels of first-run Hollywood movies that had already made the rounds at white theaters. If black Memphians wanted to see a new Hollywood movie in good condition, they were forced to attend one of the white theaters that allowed blacks to buy tickets and sit in the balcony or “pigeon roost,” but many African Americans in Memphis attended one of the local neighborhood theaters that catered to blacks, showing “race” movies produced outside Hollywood. The Georgia Theater located directly south of the Foote Homes public housing complex is one of several examples of neighborhood theaters that catered to blacks during the era of segregation.³⁵

(Fig. 11)

³⁴ Ibid., 61-62.

³⁵ Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 147.

Beale was a bastion for blues innovation, attracting not only the local talent and blues singers from the Mississippi Delta but also artists from across the country. Muddy Waters, in *Beale, Black and Blue*, recalled his trips to Beale Street and its vibrant musical scene, comparing it to his native Chicago's Maxwell Street: "I'd go out in that little park up there on [Beale Street Park, later Handy Park]. Everybody on a Saturday evening out there, somebody over here playing guitar, somebody singing gospel, like Maxwell Street used to be in Jew Town. This Walter Hornton that's up here now, he's out there blowing the harp, and Honey Boy Edwards, used to play guitar, and little midget Buddy Doyle [who worked closely with Big Walter Horton and Hammie Nixon], he could sing good."³⁶ New Orleans blues great, Big Joe Williams, echoes Muddy Waters's descriptions of the musical vitality of Beale: "[When] I landed in Memphis...that Memphis Jug Band was real popular then.... Beale Street Park that was the music center right then.... There was guitars, harps, bands, everything out there in Beale Street Park. I run in there, and Memphis Jug Band's out there with them tubs and washboard, fiddle, Son Brimmer [Will Shade], Gus Cannon [of Cannon's Jug Stompers], and all them fellows. Robert Johnson was there, he's there, everybody's in that park."³⁷

The park that Muddy Waters and Big Joe Williams described is located on the northeast corner of Beale and Third. The city of Memphis created Beale Street Park after razing the Beale Street Market and Cold Storage Plant in the 1920s. (**Fig. 12**) The Beale Street Market was a large enclosed marketplace with a central domed space surrounded by two blocks of three-story offices. The ground floor of the building contained over thirty stalls for fish, meat, and vegetable vendors. After the building was demolished and shortly

³⁶ McKee and Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue*, 233.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

after the city created the new park, the city renamed the park and dedicated it as Handy Park in 1931. In 1960, the city placed a bronze statue of the famed bluesman—sculpted and cast by Leone Tomassi in Florence—at the center of the park.³⁸ (**Fig. 13**) As the above quotes attest, in addition to the theaters and cafes, open spaces such as Handy Park were also vital to the blues culture of Beale Street.

One of the most significant aspects of Beale Street outside its musical venues were its saloons and gambling houses. One saloon, notable for its musical legend and its notoriety, is longtime Beale haunt, P. Wee's Saloon. (**Fig. 14**) This saloon, which operated at 317 Beale Street—between Third and Fourth Streets—from 1890 until the 1940s when it became a pool hall and then a laundry, was started by an Italian immigrant named Virgilio Maffei. The building itself is very similar to another of Beale's commercial buildings, Lippman's Loan Office at 176-178 Beale Street. (**Fig. 15**) Both buildings' upper stories had ocular vents below similar cornices and windows set within square bays topped by chunky Victorian pediments. On the inside of P. Wee's was a cigar stand and then the bar itself. In the back were pool tables and a place for card and dice games. P. Wee's was one of the many gambling establishments to operate on Beale, generally protected by Crump in exchange for money that went to support his political machine and pay the poll taxes of blacks. Maffei himself was a notorious gambler and hosted games in which he participated. P. Wee's was also the hub for musicians around the turn of the century. It served in effect as a booking agency for local musicians including W.C. Handy.³⁹ Some saloons and restaurants also served as music venues. The Midway Café, located on the southeast corner

³⁸ Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks*, 45-46. and Eugene J. Johnson and Robert D. Russell, Jr. *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 142.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-56.

of Beale and Fourth, became known in the 1920s and 1930s for its blues pianists including Roosevelt Sykes and Memphis Slim. The Midway attested to the fact that venues other than the theaters were important in the development of Memphis's music culture.⁴⁰

Another significant factor in the creation of Memphis's music culture in the late 1940s and the 1950s was the emergence of the new virtual, segregated space of radio. In October of 1948, the small-watt radio station, WDIA, transformed itself in the span of around half a year into a station of all-black programming. The music, once available only at live venues on Beale and on records was now broadcast on Nat D. Williams "Tan Town Jamboree." In creating a virtual black space, "WDIA proved subtly subversive of white supremacy in the years before Memphis's public civil rights protests, weakening segregation even as it nurtured a black world of mass culture," as Laurie Green concludes. The station proved to be immensely popular. By 1954, the station upgraded from 250 to 50,000 watts, reaching as many as 115 counties in the Mid-South delta region. The station hired Rufus Thomas and B.B. King, among others, who played blues and R&B music programming. In addition to WDIA, Dewey Phillips began to popularize the blues, R&B, and eventually rockabilly among whites on his "Red, Hot, & Blue" show on WHBQ.

Music venues and the virtual space of radio was just a small part of life on Beale Street. In addition to the justifiably famous entertainment venues on Beale, many of the buildings along Beale held regular commercial businesses. Among the commercial structures on the street, the Commercial Loan Office Building, which survived urban renewal and is currently the location of the Beale Street Tap Room, is a fine example of the retail buildings on Beale during the second half of the nineteenth century. (**Fig. 16**) The

⁴⁰ See Barlow, "Looking Up at Down", 209 and Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks*, 75-76.

Commercial Loan Office Building, typical of much late-nineteenth-century commercial architecture in cities and towns across the country, is a two-story structure with a cast-iron storefront on the lower level and three arched windows separated by simple pilasters and topped by a strong cornice element. The building was constructed in the mid- to late-1870s and was originally used as a “Game Depot” or meat market. The building exchanged hands a few times, serving as a loan office and a pawn shop before becoming the Commercial Loan Office from 1923 to the early 1960s. African American doctors and dentists occupied the offices on the second floor throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁴¹ The occupancy of the Commercial Loan Office Building is typical of the commercial buildings along Beale, which frequently had loan offices, pawnshops, saloons, restaurants, newspapers, and grocery and other retail shops on the street level, often not owned by African Americans, while the offices of black professionals mainly occupied the upper floors.

One building that stood as an architectural aberration amongst Beale’s commercial structures was the Gallina Building. In the late 1860s, Charles Gallina opened a saloon in a one-story building on the site of the Gallina Building. In 1891, Gallina commissioned J.C. Alsup to design a hotel and saloon on his property near the corner of Beale and Third. The resulting building was a striking brick and stone façade. (**Fig. 17**) During the height of Beale’s prominence, Beale Streeters referred to the Gallina Building as “the pride of Beale Street,” and with fine stone detailing, prominent arches, and terra cotta friezes it is not hard to see why. The hotel that the building housed was a small, twenty-room operation, but the rooms were comfortably finished, including marble-mantled fireplaces. The saloon had

⁴¹ Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks*, 34.

walnut paneling, while the staircases had impressive skylights. After Gallina died, various businesses operated on the first floor including a pharmacy, a clothing store, and a hardware store. Beginning in the early 1940s, a dentist occupied the office on the second floor. Thanks to the unique destruction of urban renewal, the Gallina Building would become one of the most recognizable buildings on Beale Street.⁴²

Along with vibrant and diverse commercial, professional, and entertainment establishments, one of Beale Street's most iconic buildings—and one of the few non-commercial buildings on the street spared by urban renewal—is Beale Street Baptist Church. The area around Beale Street teemed with religious life, but Beale Street Baptist was the only African-American church directly on Beale and was the most significant in the area during Beale's heyday from the 1880s through the 1920s. When completed, it was one of the first church buildings in the South built and funded by a black congregation.⁴³ In 1849, First Baptist Church split, with Peter S. Gayle becoming the pastor of South Memphis Baptist Church, later renamed Beale Street Baptist Church. Many of the members of the new church were freed blacks and slaves. The law before the Civil War required all churches to be led by white preachers even if their congregations were exclusively African American. In 1863, the first Beale Street Baptist Church building was destroyed in a fire started by an angry mob, at which point the church became exclusively African American—the whites started Central Baptist Church, which went on to start a mission church that would become the mega-church, Bellevue Baptist. **(Fig. 18)** The congregation

⁴² Ibid., 37-39.

⁴³ Robert C. Giebner and Richard H. Hulan, "Historic American Buildings Survey, No. TN-181," Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, 1972.

of Beale Street Baptist met in the basement of Second Presbyterian on the corner of Main and Beale—no longer extant.

In 1866, the church bought the lot where the present church is located. Due to the expense of building a large church building, the structure was not complete until 1885, by which time Beale Street Baptist had over 2,500 members. The building, as it stands today, is somewhat different from the nineteenth century structure. The original building's western tower had a tall Victorian cupola topped by a Celtic cross, while a statue of John the Baptist topped a smaller cupola capped the eastern tower. **(Fig. 19)** The cross fell down soon after the building's completion, while the statue of John the Baptist came down after a lightning strike in 1938. After that, the cupolas were removed, bringing the building to its present appearance.⁴⁴ **(Fig. 20)** A large central aisle topped by a shed roof supported by bays of round arches dominates the interior of the church. The central nave is surrounded by smaller aisles and bounded by a balcony on three sides. **(Fig. 21)** The church published the first two black newspapers in Memphis, the *Memphis Watchman* and the *Free Speech and Headlight*. Civil Rights icon, Ida B. Wells, managed the *Free Speech* beginning in 1890. In 1892, Tom Moss, a friend of Wells, was lynched along with two other African American men, after complicated circumstances involving competition between a black-owned and a white-owned grocery store. Afterwards, Wells wrote a series of articles against lynching and the treatment of blacks in the Populist-Revolt-era South. She left Memphis for New York that year, while, not without irony, whites destroyed the printing

⁴⁴ Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks*, 76-78.

presses of the *Free Speech*. Wells would go on to become the most important and influential voice on the problems of lynching in the American South.⁴⁵

Finally, two other Beale Street structures bear mentioning, more for the cultural significance of the businesses they housed than for their architecture. The first is Lansky Brothers. Formerly located at 126-128 Beale, Lansky Brothers opened in 1946 as a uniform supply company. It soon expanded into a larger clothing store, hoping to dress active Beale Streeters. The building itself was a nineteenth-century structure typical of much of Beale Street and Main Street alike. (**Fig. 22**) Before Lansky's opened, the building was home to the restaurant Joe's Lunch Room. Lansky Brothers fame is due to Elvis Presley, Beginning in the early 1950s, Elvis began to frequent Lansky Brothers for his clothing, drawing the ire of his classmates in school for his outlandish apparel. Other musicians frequented Lansky's in the 1950s including Rufus Thomas, B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Roy Orbison. In 1981, at the absolute depths of Beale's post-urban-renewal life, Lansky Brothers moved from Beale Street, ending their legendary presence there—they are currently located in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel.⁴⁶ One Beale Street institution that was able to survive the urban renewal wrecking ball and the harsh aftermath was A. Schwab's dry goods store, two buildings west of the Gallina Building. In 1876, Abraham Schwab, a Jewish immigrant from France, opened A. Schwab's clothing and dry goods store on Beale Street. In 1912, Schwab moved from 149 into 163 Beale Street an old commercial structure from the 1860s—now the oldest surviving commercial

⁴⁵ David M. Tucker, "Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching," (*Phylon* 32.2, 1971), 112-122. Also see Linda O. McMurtry. *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Mia Bay. *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009. and Paula Giddings. *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching*. New York: Amistad, 2008.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

building on Beale. In 1924, A. Schwab's expanded into 165 Beale Street, which previously had been I. Goldsmith and Brothers, L. Bauer and Sons, and a Piggly Wiggly, which was originally founded in Memphis on Jefferson Avenue in 1916.⁴⁷ (**Fig. 23**) Because of its longevity and its antiquated ambience inside, A. Schwab's remains a landmark on Beale Street to this day.

As an interesting side note, for much of the twentieth century, beginning in 1908, Beale Street was officially known as Beale Avenue because the city government passed a law requiring all roadways running north and south to be deemed streets and those running east and west, avenues. In the 1950s, when Danny Thomas came to Memphis to begin the work on St. Jude's Children's Hospital, he complained to the mayor that the place he knew as Beale Street was actually labeled Beale Avenue on the street signs. Thomas lobbied the mayor, even writing a song that began, "I woke up this morning feeling awfully blue, 'cause Beale Street isn't Beale Street, it's an Avenoooo." Mayor Tobey then made a proclamation declaring Beale Street to be Beale Street again, followed by a city ordinance, passed by the City Commission, making it official.⁴⁸ Soon after Beale officially became a "street" again, however, it began to go into decline. The 1960s were particularly bad for the street.

Shortly after the approval of Beale Street as an urban renewal study area, the MHA began appraisals in the mid-1960s. Between this time and 1969, when the final project received approval and the acquisition phase began, property values declined for the first time in Memphis. The worst hit that came to Beale Street was the Sanitation Workers' Strike and the accompanying riots in 1968. Beale saw the worst of the rioting; much of the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁸ James Cortese, "When Beale Became Avenue Danny Almost Hit Ceiling," *Commercial Appeal*, November 6, 1966.

property along and around Beale was looted and damaged. Many landlords and business owners on Beale decided to leave their buildings unrepaired because the MHA had been pursuing urban renewal on and around Beale for some time.⁴⁹ This complicated both the acquisition and the redevelopment phases of the Beale Street project. The riots spurred the national HUD office, which had been very slow to grant the MHA's 1967 application for final approval of their Beale Street project, to action; they suddenly authorized the urban renewal project, pledging \$11 million in federal funds.⁵⁰

Plans for the Downtown after the Sanitation Workers' Strike

By the 1960s, suburban shopping centers had already eclipsed the downtown as the dominant force in Memphis retail sales. In 1948, the downtown accounted for over 72 percent of all retail sales in the city, but by 1965, the downtown accounted for only 21.5 percent of retail sales.⁵¹ Memphis as a whole was doing quite well. Between the mid-1950s and the end of the 1960s, over 1,500 new industrial plants created over 250,000 jobs in the Memphis area.⁵² Nonetheless, after the Sanitation Workers' Strike, conditions were even direr for the downtown area. Looking back from 1975, the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce Downtown Council manager, Norman Brewer, said, "April 4, 1968, that was the day Memphis really got on the downhill slope. For downtown that was the real trauma and it left the impression of downtown as a volatile, unsafe place to be. The events of 1968

⁴⁹ "Riot Cleanup Will Get Boost," *Commercial Appeal*, April 10, 1969.

⁵⁰ "Riot Cleanup Will Get Boost," *Commercial Appeal*, April 10, 1969.

⁵¹ Carl Crawford, "Downtown Area is 'Looking Up' – But Only In Plans," *Commercial Appeal*, November 6, 1967.

⁵² "Wide-Awake Time Down South," *Nation's Business*, February 1971, 54.

fed the racial prejudice which existed here.”⁵³ The *Commercial Appeal* explained the situation of the downtown after the strikes and protests of 1968 and 1969, “But when [black protestors and boycotters] were done, many Memphians were convinced that no one could assure that downtown could be spared such demonstrations again, [and] still the myth prevails that downtown—the blacks’ downtown, that is—is steeped in crime and therefore much of Memphis’s white population avoids it.”⁵⁴ These were the conditions that planners and civic leaders faced in the wake of the murder of Dr. King and the protests surrounding it.

Soon afterwards, Memphis civic leaders put much of their energy into restoring the downtown. During the Sanitation Workers’ Strike, downtown business owners complained to the city government that the economic boycott by blacks on downtown businesses during the strike took a major toll on small businesses downtown. One downtown businessman told City Councilman Wyeth Chandler—who would succeed Loeb as mayor—that if he “could find a way to sell...and leave Memphis” he would.⁵⁵ During the strike, sales downtown had already fallen twenty-five percent before the rioting on March 28, after which they dropped much further. Civil Rights activists had already vowed to disrupt the Memphis Cotton Carnival, which at the time was the largest tourist draw in Memphis. The Cotton Carnival as Michael Honey describes it “romanticized slavery and the virtues of the plantation.” After King’s murder, white authorities cancelled the Cotton Carnival, putting even more strain on the local economy.⁵⁶ Throughout the strike, but especially after the

⁵³ Joseph Weiler and Jefferson Riker, “‘The Downtown Problem’: Acceleration in Decline of Memphis Traced to 1968 Events,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 28, 1975.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Mr. Chandler, We Have Just About Reached the Line,” *Commercial Appeal*, April 3, 1968, quoted in Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 398.

⁵⁶ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 399, 461.

March 28 riots, big business owners began to be concerned about the bad publicity and what it could mean for future financial investment in Memphis.⁵⁷ Collectively, the Downtown Association, The Chamber of Commerce, and a local booster organization called Future Memphis—a group that organized in 1961 with over 100 business and civic leaders—issued a statement calling for law and order and an end to demonstrations.⁵⁸

In response to rioting across the country after the murder of Dr. King, the federal government earmarked \$9 million in immediate aid for clean-up efforts in twenty cities adversely affected by rioting across the country, including Memphis.⁵⁹ Memphis received \$600,000 in federal aid for riot clean up, but the MHA reallocated the funds away from the area hardest hit by the riots, Beale Street, because the area was already receiving federal funds through urban renewal. Instead, the MHA spent the money on clean-up and other efforts in the Kansas, Manassas, and LeMoyne-Owen urban renewal areas.⁶⁰ Clean-up efforts in those three areas included a rat eradication program, school repairs on three area public schools, and contracts for playground equipment for public parks, but no funds went toward rehabilitation of substandard residences—though local residents were given priority for the jobs available through the program.⁶¹

In the wake of the Sanitation Workers' Strike and the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., the city government created a new program called the Manpower Commission, funded by contributions of local business leaders. The goal of the program was to train minority workers as well as to embark on a national advertising campaign for a city whose

⁵⁷ Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand*, (Memphis: St. Luke's Press, 1995), 324.

⁵⁸ Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 413.

⁵⁹ "City Will Share in Nine Millions for Riot Repairs," *Commercial Appeal*, April 9, 1969.

⁶⁰ For more information on the Manassas and LeMoyne-Owen urban renewal areas, see the *How Beale Street Became What It Is*, Part I section below.

⁶¹ "Riot Cleanup Progressing in Three Areas," *Commercial Appeal*, November 20, 1969.

reputation took a major hit when it became the city that killed Dr. King. The program spent \$1 million a year between 1969 and 1972 on promoting business investment in Memphis.⁶² The Manpower Commission would be the first of many programs designed by the Memphis business community to improve the image of the city. The most well-known program was the Chamber of Commerce's Greater Memphis Program (GMP). The program's leaders worked to boost business investments and jobs. In 1973, the Chamber embarked on an advertising campaign to convince the citizens of Memphis that the city was worth fixing. The organization dubbed the campaign "Believe in Memphis."⁶³ The Chamber's paid spokesman, Norman Vincent Peale, explained the campaign: "If you believe in Memphis and talk it up and work it up, a greater Memphis will flow back to you."⁶⁴

As with the Bartholomew plan's call for less density and more suburban growth, the larger goals of the GMP conflicted—even if Chamber leaders believed the opposite—with the goals of the Chamber and the Downtown Association for the rejuvenation of downtown Memphis. The GMP planned "to keep office, industrial, and residential areas as balanced and dispersed as possible on the theory that every new development in the area will benefit the central city—Memphis," instead of creating "bedroom towns with all the transportation, taxation, and loyalty problems associated with a labor force that lives in one community and works in another."⁶⁵ An editorial in the *Press-Scimitar*, "Greater Memphis Needs a Greater Downtown," mildly suggested that the city needed to focus more on revitalizing its downtown area than to keep commerce, industry, and residences "balanced

⁶² "Wide-Awake Time Down South," *Nation's Business*, February 1971, 57.

⁶³ Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 337-339.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 338. Quote from *Commercial Appeal*, January 26, 1973.

⁶⁵ "Wide-Awake Time Down South," *Nation's Business*, February 1971, 55.

and dispersed”: “Residential sprawl may continue on and on, north, east, and south, but the community’s vital services will remain at the center.”⁶⁶

Despite their larger goal of creating an even distribution of business and residence, the GMP leaders believed that downtown Memphis was ready for a renaissance. The group painted a rosy outlook for the whole city after the Sanitation Strike, seeking to turn its “resolution” into a positive sign of a new era of racial cooperation in the city: “They [business leaders] played the key role in working out solutions to a sanitation workers’ strike in 1968 and a dispute over the composition of the School Board in 1969.”⁶⁷ Memphis’s chief administrative officer, Clay Huddleston, in a speech before the local chapter of the American Institute of Banking argued that the downtown of Memphis was at an advantage over other Southern cities such as Dallas, Houston, and Atlanta. Huddleston cited the city’s position on the Mississippi River and the fact that urban renewal had left the downtown “relatively uncluttered” as the chief reasons for downtown Memphis’s edge.⁶⁸ Two reports in 1972, however, cast the high prospects of some into doubt. First, a report by Marcou, O’Leary, and Associates (MOA), a Washington, D.C., consulting firm advised that helping the downtown would require a coordinated plan to bring it back to life. The *Commercial Appeal* paraphrased the report saying, “Downtown Memphis must be conceived as a community in itself, a community different from what it was 25 or 50 years ago and different from those in the outlying reaches of the city.” The firm’s presentation to the Downtown Association even was incredulous about the ability of the MHA to redevelop the Beale Street area.⁶⁹ A note from the MHA in response to

⁶⁶ “Greater Memphis Needs a Greater Downtown,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 12, 1969.

⁶⁷ “Wide-Awake Time Down South,” *Nation’s Business*, February 1971, 54.

⁶⁸ “Huddleston Cites ‘Advantages’ of City over Its Competitors,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 30, 1973.

⁶⁹ “Report Recommends Overhaul for Downtown,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 22, 1972.

MOA said, “Aside from having the downtown people in their pocket, Marcou-O’Leary wants Beale Street, too!”⁷⁰ A second report, funded by the Chamber of Commerce, questioned the ability of downtown Memphis to attract the serious investment needed for it to turn the page: “Downtown...is a dingy, rundown, unclean, commercial area, which, excepting a few scattered pockets of new construction by government entities and commercial banks, totally lacks pride, esthetic appeal, metropolitan excitement, or a feeling of warmth and welcome.” The report went on to criticize the political leadership of Memphis and its provincial character: “Our local government is run by short-visioned, special interest groups of agrarian heritage that have no real knowledge of urban affairs nor vision to its future.... Memphis is nothing more than an over-grown country town.”⁷¹ This report echoed *Time* magazine’s characterization of Memphis, one of many in the national press that spurred the Chamber and other groups into action after the King murder in the first place, which called Memphis a “Southern backwater,” and a “decaying Mississippi River town.”⁷²

Notwithstanding the mixture of optimism and pessimism for the downtown at this time, the Chamber, Future Memphis, and the Downtown Association—with the help of MOA—made robust plans for the future of downtown Memphis. One of the central plans for the downtown after the Sanitation Workers’ Strike and the completion of the acquisition and demolition phases of the Beale Street project and one of the only major plans for the rejuvenation of the downtown area that actually happened in the 1970s was the creation of a downtown mall on Main Street. The proposals for a downtown mall called on closing

⁷⁰ Newspaper files, SCA, UR Files, Box 191.

⁷¹ Jefferson Riker, “Consultant’s Dark Picture Cast Shadow on Downtown,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 2, 1972.

⁷² “The Assassination,” *Time*, April 12, 1968.

Main Street to all vehicular traffic except some form of public transportation. The plan to close the street and the Civic Center Plaza to the automobile was a divisive issue on the City Council. From 1971 to 1974, the Downtown Association hired MOA to make proposals for the downtown mall development. In one of their reports, MOA said that downtown malls often had “captive” shoppers that included “office workers, persons making bus transfers, people using civic and convention facilities (especially tourists), downtown apartment dwellers and other densely populated, close-in neighborhoods.”⁷³ The report mentions that the downtown malls in Kalamazoo, Michigan and Minneapolis, Minnesota were models for the Memphis mall.⁷⁴ Like other malls across the country, MOA advocated closing Main Street to automobile traffic, but leaving the crossing streets open.⁷⁵ In 1977, the city completed the mall on Main Street, called the Mid-America Mall. Chapter 5 provides details about the planning and building process of the Mid-America Mall.

The MOA firm also made a proposal for a riverfront development, an idea for Memphis’s waterfront that continually surfaced from the 1970s to the 2010s without much action.⁷⁶ Tensions had been brewing over who should be in charge of trying to redevelop Main Street. The MHA—which had increasingly become a punching bag for local white populist politicians because of its plans to site a public housing project in a middle-class white neighborhood—wanted to handle the job, especially since the federal funds for further urban renewal projects had ended, but a large contingent within the City Council did not support the MHA and gave a private firm the responsibility for creating the Main

⁷³ “Initial Recommendations for a Main Street Mall,” Marcou, O’Leary, and Associates, 1972, SCA, UR Files, Box 270, page 2.

⁷⁴ For more on pedestrian malls see Kent A. Robertson, *Pedestrian Malls and Skywalks: Traffic Separation Strategies in American Downtowns*, Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1994.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ Jerome Obermark, “Memphis: Complexes Planned to Revitalize Downtown,” *National Real Estate Investor*, December 1973, 100-101.

Street pedestrian mall proposal.⁷⁷ From the beginning, city leaders were not confident that a pedestrian mall on Main would bring shoppers back to downtown. City Councilwoman, Gwen Awsumb, said, “No one is expecting the population of Memphis to return to downtown shopping. That is not going to occur.” City leaders set their hopes on the new convention center, placing their bets that convention-goers could make the pedestrian mall a success.⁷⁸ The Everett R. Cook Convention Center, a \$31 million facility directly north of the Civic Center Plaza, was completed in 1974. The MHA added the land for the convention center in 1966 onto the existing urban renewal project that created the Civic Center.⁷⁹

Despite the new convention center, a gloomy report from the Chamber of Commerce found that Memphis had little chance of becoming a successful convention destination.⁸⁰ The major concern about building a new convention center in Memphis was the state of the city’s downtown hotels. The Gayoso, Chisca, Claridge, King Cotton, and William Len hotels downtown had closed by the early 1970s, and the famed Peabody struggled. In 1953, the Snowden family sold the Peabody to a Tulsa, Oklahoma, company. In 1965, the Peabody’s operators went bankrupt, and the hotel was sold at auction, on the steps of the Shelby County Courthouse, back to the Snowden family. Just a year after the new convention center opened, the Peabody went bankrupt once again. It closed in 1975 and remained closed until 1981.⁸¹ The “Blueprint for Memphis” report funded by Future Memphis, Inc., called for quick investment in hotels surrounding the new convention center

⁷⁷ Jefferson Riker, “Leaders of Renewal Facing Big Decision,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 21, 1973.

⁷⁸ Clark Porteus, “City Council Appropriates \$150,000 for Planning and Design of Downtown Mall,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 29, 1973.

⁷⁹ Charles A. Brown, “Convention Center Project Approved,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 2, 1966.

⁸⁰ Jefferson Riker, “Consultant’s Dark Picture Cast Shadow on Downtown,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 2, 1972.

⁸¹ Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 258.

to make the city a plausible convention destination. At the beginning of 1974, however, no hotel had agreed to build on land the city gained through urban renewal immediately adjacent—east—of the new convention center.⁸² By the summer of 1977, with the convention center still without a hotel, the Boyle Investment Company (BIC), among others, opposed city and county funding of \$25 million, through the Community Resource Coalition, to build a hotel next to the convention center because the city could not attract a suitable private hotel. At the same time, the firm lobbied for public funding for the construction of the Wolf River Parkway—the present-day Wolf River Boulevard—that would connect Walnut Grove Road with Germantown Road, the route of which BIC owners or their relatives owned land along. BIC’s president said he was opposed to “using taxpayers’ money to compete with private enterprise.”⁸³ The Wolf River Boulevard was built soon afterward, but no hotel was built next to the convention center until 1985, over ten years after the Cook Convention Center’s construction.⁸⁴

“Renewing” Beale: “If Beale Street Could Talk, Mr. Handy, Beale Street Would Cry”

The area around Beale Street had long been a target of urban renewal because of the run-down condition of many of the houses and tenement buildings in the area, especially the area east of Danny Thomas Boulevard. (**Figs. 24 and 25**) After the Sanitation Strike, the commercial district of the street, between Main and Fourth had deteriorated even more than it did during the 1950s and 1960s. Like the first urban renewal project in

⁸² Jefferson Riker, “1974 Could Be Exciting as Talk Spawns Action,” *Commercial Appeal*, December 30, 1973.

⁸³ Terry Keeter, “Hot Potato: Hotel, Roadway Issues Stir Controversy of Taxpayer Funding,” *Commercial Appeal*, August 20, 1977.

⁸⁴ Johnson and Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*, 11-12.

Memphis—the Railroad Avenue Project—the preparatory work on Beale Street began long before appraisals, condemnations, and destruction got underway. Even before the MHA began to pursue the possibility of an urban renewal project on Beale Street, there were calls for transforming Beale Street into a tourist attraction to help the declining downtown Memphis. Early in the planning process, the MHA planned on a revitalized Beale Street being both a “blue light” district and a shopping center.⁸⁵ The MHA contracted a local planning firm to execute preliminary drawings of what the MHA’s ideal redevelopment would look like. The MHA and many others saw Beale Street as a potential tourist attraction on the level of the French Quarter in New Orleans. In fact, Mayor Orgill was quoted in 1959 as saying he wanted Beale Street to be redeveloped as an entertainment district akin to New Orleans’s Bourbon Street.⁸⁶ One of the failed developers of Beale Street said, “the atmosphere will be similar to that of the French Quarter in New Orleans or Underground Atlanta.”⁸⁷ In promotional materials for Beale Street USA, one of the potential developers said, “New Orleans has its French Quarter. St. Louis has its Gaslight District. San Francisco has its Chinatown and Gold Coast. New York has its Greenwich Village. And Memphis has Beale Street.”⁸⁸ Clearly, hopes were high among many prominent Memphians for a commercially and financially successful refashioning of Beale Street.

As with many of the previous urban renewal projects in Memphis, the MHA publicly claimed their desire for the residential areas destroyed by renewal to be replaced

⁸⁵ “Transcript of Public Hearing, April 21, 1966,” SCA, UR Box 20, page 6. The MHA says that they have “preliminary thoughts of making this not only a day and night use, but a tourist attraction.

⁸⁶ Eugene J. Johnson and Robert D. Russell, Jr. *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 133.

⁸⁷ “Report Gives Beale Street Plan a Boost,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 6, 1973.

⁸⁸ “Beale Street USA: Where the Blues Began,” SCA, UR Files, Box 302.

by residential redevelopment, and once again, other than a high-rise project for the elderly, none of the houses or apartments were replaced. One of the project's chief planners described the MHA's hopes for the redevelopment of Beale Street:

We are trying to remove blight and slums and deterioration. We are trying to increase and enhance and upgrade the residential living conditions. We are trying to create a pattern of traffic movement that will expedite the development of this whole area. We are trying to conceive in this plan a southern anchor for the central business district to prevent further deterioration both to the south and to the east, and as side effects of these objectives, we think probably the most important thing will be the stimulation of contiguous growth by the completion of the plan, and there is also a side element: This plan will encourage and induce the convention dollar, which is not an idle thought by any means, representing some twelve or fifteen million dollars annually to the city of Memphis.⁸⁹

Much of the MHA's expectations for the Beale project rested on both the redeveloped area's ability to attract tourists and convention-goers and for the new Cook Convention Center's capacity to attract conventions. Their aspirations for the area also included the ability of redevelopment to encourage, at a bare minimum, the maintenance of the status quo for surrounding areas, but unlike the Jackson Avenue project, the Court Avenue projects, and the Medical Center projects, the Beale area did not have a stable government or non-profit organization already in place for redevelopment.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the Beale project, the MHA went ahead with their plans for redevelopment. On December 1, 1964, the City Commission—as Chapter 3 addressed, Memphis would have the commission form of government until after the 1967 November elections—held a long hearing, open to the public, on the possibility of the MHA pursuing an urban renewal project on Beale Street. This hearing was not one of the public hearings mandated by the 1949 Housing Act for the residents and business owners

⁸⁹ "Transcript of Public Hearing," August 8, 1968, SCA, UR Files, Box 20, page 8.

within the renewal zone, which would not start until 1966. From the beginning of urban renewal, the area around Beale was a candidate for renewal, and, in fact, the MHA had studied the area extensively before the 1964 hearing to determine whether to declare it an official study area. Prior to the December 1 hearing, the MHA had concluded what properties within the proposed Beale Street area should be excluded from urban renewal, and had gathered much of the required statistical information about the families located within the project zone.⁹⁰ At the hearing, the primary discussions were between Charles M. Crump, son of “Boss” Crump and chair of the Memphis Real Estate Board (MREB), other real estate interests, the City Commissioners, and the leaders of the MHA, including Ed Barry and Walter Simmons—although Lt. George W. Lee and Russell Sugarmon did make an appearance.⁹¹

As Chapter Three mentioned, MREB became increasingly hostile toward the way the MHA was handling urban renewal, particularly the amount of land tied up in the possibility of future urban renewal and the way the MHA was picking the winners and losers in the acquisition and redistribution of property. In this public hearing, J. James Bailey, a MREB member and spokesperson, voices the board’s opposition to the possibility of an urban renewal project on Beale Street.⁹² One of the primary points of opposition to the Beale Street project was the number of properties that MREB considered to be sound that were within the project zone. MREB was particularly concerned with Goldsmith’s Department Store, the Orpheum Theater, and the Shainberg Store, all off Main Street between Beale and Gayoso. Walter Simmons jumped into the conversation to assure

⁹⁰ “City Commission Hearing, City of Memphis, December 1, 1964,” SCA, UR Box 20, page 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15. When Commissioner Pete Sisson asks Bailey directly if the MREB will oppose urban renewal on Beale he says, “We will be opposed to it.”

MREB that these businesses and many more in the general area would be excluded from urban renewal acquisition.⁹³

One of Bailey's prescient concerns, given what would eventually happen to the Beale Street area after the wrecking ball, was the amount of property within another project zone, the Riverview area, which the MHA cleared but had not sold. "I don't believe we can afford to tear down this much property and take a chance on having it sit vacant and unused and unsold for any length of time."⁹⁴ Another prescient concern MREB expressed was that between the Court Avenue area in the north part of downtown and the possibility of a Beale Street zone on the south end of downtown, Memphis's CBD could not survive the loss of economic trade that would occur in the interim between destruction and redevelopment. The Commissioners at the meeting, especially Public Works Commissioner Pete Sisson, supported the MHA's plans for Beale Street. One of the most important points in getting the Beale Street project done was that it would help the city use federal urban renewal funds to pay for a sewer system in the area that would cost the city \$2.3 million without urban renewal funding.⁹⁵

Other real estate interests and prominent citizens spoke in support of the project. It is not surprising that, at the height of Goldwater Conservatism, arguments on both sides echoed the contemporary arguments between conservatives and liberals on the role of government. The MREB believed that private enterprise was better suited to redevelop the areas affected by urban renewal. Bailey, speaking for MREB, said about the Beale Street project, "private money will buy the land and develop it themselves, and you won't have

⁹³ Ibid., 18-20.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 24-27.

to spend a penny.”⁹⁶ Other real estate interests who spoke buttressed his sentiments. William Goodman, one of the directors of the Downtown Association, countered that government’s intervention in the urban renewal project was the only way to improve the area around Beale Street: “South Main Street, the Beale Street area, and the south Front Street area are all in need of help. The individual owners cannot give that help.... The only way that we can save that [area] is to get Urban Renewal to come in and do their part.”⁹⁷ Joseph Hanover, an attorney with several clients who developed property thanks both to the local government effort and urban renewal, bolstered Goodman’s arguments: “I am not for government running business, but I say when it comes the time that unless we can get the help of the government so that we can progress and build a city like we have in the last twenty years, then I say we shouldn’t overlook that.”

The new skyscraper at 100 North Main Street was a point of contention between MREB, the MHA, and their supporters. (**Fig. 26**) The MHA used a planning drawing of 100 North Main in their 1962 Annual Report claiming that it resulted from urban renewal. MREB representatives pointed out that it was not built on land cleared by urban renewal, but proponents of urban renewal argued that despite the fact that 100 North Main was not on land cleared by urban renewal, it would never have been built without the Court Avenue Project: “Those buildings on Main Street...went there because urban renewal says, ‘Now, we are going to do something with this street; we are going to put it where it belongs.’”⁹⁸

Articulating the paternalism and racism evident whenever the condition of African Americans in Memphis were mentioned, a commercial real estate agent, Chapman Bain,

⁹⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 52-53.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 56.

spoke against the Beale project because the dilapidated condition of the business district at Beale was perfectly suitable for blacks: “Beale Street is not a poor shopping area. It is a pretty good shopping area, considering the fact that the majority of the shoppers, as everyone knows, are our colored friends.”⁹⁹ Despite that agent’s comments, a couple of their “colored friends” were permitted to speak before the Commission, including George W. Lee, Republican leader and businessman. In asking the commissioners to approve the urban renewal project on Beale, Lee’s eloquence on the importance of the area—not only among African Americans but also for historical reasons—was inspired. As with his advocacy for renewal at Railroad Avenue during the first public hearing on urban renewal, Lee believed in the MHA’s ability to spur restoration and improvement, but did not foresee the devastation that occurred after Beale’s destruction in the early 1970s:

In thinking of the Beale Street Project, you can’t measure it by dollars and cents. No balance sheet of profit and loss can determine its utility. It can only be measured by the immeasurable, intangible forces upon which our entire American civilization rests. Beale Street has a history, and I think while determining this question, we ought to turn momentarily from humanlike values, profit motives, to historical values. The historical values of that little crooked street that dips its feet in the swirling vortex of the Mississippi River, and runs for miles straight through the busy heart of great Memphis and then loses itself in the mudflats of East street, can’t be determined by realty values. Its values are measured in the music it cradles, music that goes around the world and then echoes back to a crossroad shack in the delta bottoms. Music that the great critics of America have said that the only original art score produced in America was cradled on Beale Street. Music that the harp can’t tell in its own futile terms, but must borrow from travesty and fervent plaint, the wails from which W.C. Handy drew his own great songs. Music that is the only original music that America has produced was cradled on Beale Street, the ‘Memphis Blues,’ the ‘Beale Street Blues,’ the ‘St. Louis Blues,’ they are more than songs; they are living symbols that touch the very heart of man, songs that come in quick tears and laughter from the aching heart of man, and when many of the monuments erected to civilize the ways and history of our country have crumbled to dust, the ‘Memphis Blues’ will rise like the winged music to eternity and will civilize a particular kind of life, an era, a gorgeous and melodramatic era that has

⁹⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

sent the name of Memphis around the world. They speak about losses to be sustained and real estate expenditures. I speak of wealth that will slough into Memphis like waters in the woodland, when sightseers come here, and we redevelop Beale Street and sightseers come here from all over the world to gaze upon what once represented its vanished glory.¹⁰⁰

Several other property owners on Beale Street spoke after Lee in support of his assessment, but Lee's belief was that urban renewal would "beautify [it] and make it blossom like a rose and people from London, from all over the world, will come here because they know Memphis by the great music that was born there."¹⁰¹ His predictions proved correct, but they came more than thirty years too early. Beale's success as a tourist destination would not begin until the mid- to late-1990s.

Russell Sugarmon, one of the founders of the Shelby County Democratic Club, a civil rights activist, and state congressman, also spoke in support of urban renewal at Beale.¹⁰² Sugarmon attacked Bain's characterization that Beale Street was good enough for blacks, comparing that type of thinking to an article in the *Press-Scimitar* describing the supposed happy life of black sharecroppers in rural Mississippi. His conclusion was that, "if the Negro has to have an alternative of private paternalism or federal paternalism, our people will pick the federal paternalism"—though he went on to say that urban renewal was not paternalistic.¹⁰³ His support, like George W. Lee's, was based on the hope of a transformed and improved Beale Street: "This urban renewal area...will enable us to utilize the best of the past as we build a better future for the whole city."¹⁰⁴ Both the Republican and Democratic leaders in the black community as well as white leaders of the Downtown

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 57-59.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰² For more on Russell Sugarmon see Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2007, especially 30-31.

¹⁰³ "City Commission Hearing, City of Memphis, December 1, 1964," 64.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 66.

Association were squarely behind the Beale Street urban renewal project, and the City Commission, despite the lone objections of the MREB, approved the proposal to designate the Beale Street area as an official study area for urban renewal.¹⁰⁵

Planning for the Beale project commenced in 1965, but in 1966, the MHA began to move forward, holding the first public hearings for land acquisition within the Beale Street project. The earliest areas to see acquisition under urban renewal were blocks nineteen and twenty of the 173 acre project area, the two blocks between Main and Second south of Beale Street.¹⁰⁶ (Figs. 27 and 28) The city planned to put the new building for the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division on this block. MHA planners called the development “the keystone, the public sparkplug that will enable us to develop our reuse planning for this area.”¹⁰⁷ During the early planning stages, planners intended for the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division building to be located within the Civic Center Plaza. Planners moved the building south of downtown in an effort to spur the revitalization of the southern portion of downtown just as the new Civic Center Plaza was spurring revitalization of northern downtown.¹⁰⁸ The city selected Thorn, Howe, Stratton, and Strong as architects for the new building, which completed construction in 1970. The designers set the building back from the street, a move that Johnson and Russell argue reflects a “suburban concept of downtown.”¹⁰⁹ The building, which replaced the Randolph Building, a three-bayed, seven-story masonry office building constructed in 1891, is a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁰⁶ These two blocks were combined, under urban renewal, into one large block. Previously Mulberry Street separated them.

¹⁰⁷ “Transcript of Public Hearing, April 21, 1966,” SCA, UR Box 20, page 5.

¹⁰⁸ The Downtown Association encouraged the MHA and the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division to move its building to the southern part of the downtown in hopes that it would help revitalize the area. “Transcript of Public Hearing,” August 8, 1968, SCA, UR Files, Box 20, page 62.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson and Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*, 138.

heavy, Brutalist structure. It was so out-of-place on Beale Street that, in 1980, the city erected a statue of Elvis, sculpted by Eric Parks, in the small park known as Elvis Presley Plaza directly in front of the building to help it fit in. (Figs. 29 and 30) In 1967, the city expanded the early acquisition area to include the southern half of block eight, which was bound by Main, Beale, and Second.

At the February 10, 1967, public hearing, Alvin Lansky pleaded with MHA officials. He asked that the current business owners be given preference over relocating in new buildings, instead of kicking out several small businesses to make way for larger companies and the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division. Lansky also cautioned the MHA against tearing down so much of Beale Street because its history would be swallowed by new development, and it would cease to have any meaning as an historical site:

What is Beale Street? If you tear it up, it is no longer Beale Street, and no longer a tourist attraction. You can hear Beale Street spoken of almost all over the world as an historical site. As I understand the plan, you have one or two buildings which are to be built and which will put out of business a group of merchants who have been here for years.... I think we should try to restore this famous landmark, Beale Street. If you tear down all the buildings, you will no longer have it; and Beale Street will lose its meaning and cease to be a drawing card, and it will cease to be a famous landmark.¹¹⁰

The South Main Beale Street Area Merchants Association, headed by Alvin Lansky, ran a full-page ad in the *Commercial Appeal*. The ad asks Memphis citizens if they believe that it is “right” for the MHA to condemn private businesses only to resell the land to other private businesses, concluding that “this sort of thing has been going on without organized opposition.”¹¹¹ One of the storeowners in the area, David Shendelman, proprietor of The Men’s Store, provided the first public criticism of the Beale project in the white press. In

¹¹⁰ “Transcript of Public Hearing, Held on February 10, 1967,” SCA, UR Box 20, pages 27-29.

¹¹¹ “Property Owners! Taxpayers!! Citizens!!: Do You Think It’s Right,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 5, 1967.

his editorial on March 6, 1967, Shendelman appealed to the rising tide of libertarianism in the South during the 1960s: “If the federal government can do this to me, then the federal government can take away your business, your home, or anything else they want.”¹¹² The real estate editor of the *Commercial Appeal*, however, responded to the complaints of local merchants by suggesting that those merchants might not appreciate Beale Street quite as much if they had to live in the “slum-like” conditions that surround it: “The complaining merchants should realize that, although they conduct their business in this section, they leave it at night to go to clean homes in another section.”¹¹³ Business owners in the “blue light” portion of the street such as Robert Henry, the owner of Henry’s pool hall, expressed positive sentiments at the idea of redevelopment: “It’s not the way it used to be, and it won’t ever be again. Course, I’d love it no matter what. I want them to upgrade it. Make it mean something again.”¹¹⁴

The MHA’s plans for the redevelopment of Beale Street centered around a proposed tourist attraction that would turn the increasingly abandoned commercial strip of the street into a “blue light” district. Original plans called for the “blue light” area to follow a short section of Beale from Second Street to Hernando, but the MHA changed the plans to extend the area preserved through to Fourth Street. MHA officials said that ending the “blue light” area at Fourth would prevent them from widening the street between Hernando and Danny Thomas Boulevard because the new plans provided for a semicircular street—to be called Handy Circle—that wrapped around Beale from McCall Avenue to Linden Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets. An MHA official said, “Owners of buildings

¹¹² “Beale Merchant Protests Urban Renewal Takeover,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 6, 1967.

¹¹³ Barton Fruhman, “Awards Fail to Hide Blight,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 5, 1967.

¹¹⁴ Donald Tate, “Yes, Let’s Upgrade Beale, Says Beale Oldtimer,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 7, 1967.

classed as conservable...between Fourth and Turley...should be happy.... This means we won't have to lop off the fronts of any of the buildings."¹¹⁵ (**Fig. 31**) The purpose of Handy Circle, according to planner Walter Ewald, was to avert automobile traffic to "create a mall treatment along Beale Street."¹¹⁶ In addition to the proposed tourist "blue light" redevelopment, the MHA planned for the area to receive residential construction to house up to 1,600 families, replacing the destroyed housing that displaced 1,400 families.¹¹⁷ Just as with the vast majority of urban renewal in Memphis, the residential portion of the plan did not come to fruition.

For coordinating the acquisition of property and relocation of families and business affected by the Beale Street urban renewal project, the MHA set up an office at 140 South Fourth Street.¹¹⁸ The MHA's plans to clear the neighborhood surrounding Beale Street, however, as Eugene Johnson and Robert Russell, Jr. describe, was like "saving Bourbon Street by tearing down the Vieux Carré."¹¹⁹ (**Fig. 32**) It is abundantly obvious that the MHA desired to do just that. In fact, the precedent for using urban renewal to clear a culturally vibrant area filled with vice and closely associated with the development of an original style of music comes from New Orleans. The famed Storyville area of New Orleans was a vibrant red light district directly above Rampart Street north of Canal. Storyville and the nearby Congo Square (now part of Louis Armstrong Park) are closely associated with the development of jazz in New Orleans. The urban redevelopment program of the Public Works Administration destroyed the area during the New Deal, after pressure on the city from the Army and Navy forced the closure of the red light district

¹¹⁵ "MHA Revises Beale Project," *Commercial Appeal*, March 19, 1967.

¹¹⁶ "Transcript of Public Hearing," August 8, 1968, SCA, UR Files, Box 20.

¹¹⁷ Bill Evans, "\$20 Million Beale St. Project Finally Gets Federal Go-Ahead," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 22, 1969.

¹¹⁸ "Transcript of Public Hearing," April 21, 1966, SCA, UR Files, Box 20.

¹¹⁹ Johnson and Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*, 136.

during the First World War. As with the Storyville area near the French Quarter, the MHA wanted to sanitize the Beale Street area by eliminating the black neighborhood surrounding it to make it palatable to the white tourists they were hoping to attract.¹²⁰ The deputy executive director of the MHA, Randall Johnson, admitted to the *Commercial Appeal*, that the city wanted the neighborhoods surrounding Beale Street to be cleared because “the city feared it would deter white tourists from coming to its new version of Beale Street.”¹²¹

After several years of planning and some rejection, the federal HUD office, spurred by the events of the Sanitation Workers’ Strike, approved the MHA’s plans for renewal on Beale Street in late 1968.¹²² The federal green light included nearly \$14 million in funds for the project.¹²³ Shortly after the approval of the Beale project, the MHA moved forward, trying to expedite property acquisition on the east end of the Beale Street I project because the city received HUD funding for turnkey housing for the elderly.¹²⁴ Turnkey projects, in which private developers and contractors build housing that is turned over to the local housing authority, became popular during the first term of the Nixon administration. At the same time, the task of relocation and acquisition began for the MHA, a process that, for the entire project, would take nearly three years before all of the condemned buildings were

¹²⁰ For more on Storyville see: Catherine Vesey and Frédéric Dimanche, “From Storyville to Bourbon Street: Vice, Nostalgia, and Tourism,” (*Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 1.1, 2003), 54-70. Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974.

¹²¹ Joseph Shapiro, “Beale Street Revival Aspirants Usually End up Singing Blues,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 6, 1979.

¹²² “Beale Project Approved,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 19, 1968.

¹²³ Bill Evans, “\$20 Million Beale St. Project Finally Gets Federal Go-Ahead,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 22, 1969. “Beale Street Go-Ahead,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 25, 1969.

¹²⁴ Bill Evans, “MHA To Ask Forced Sale Of Property On Beale,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 15, 1969.

ready for demolition, though an MHA official claimed the relocation process would “be less difficult than...the past.”¹²⁵

A few months before the official approval from HUD, the MHA conducted the required public hearing for the whole Beale Street project on August 8, 1968. The hearing illustrates the increasing unpopularity of urban renewal. Both business-owners and real estate brokers openly attacked the MHA and urban renewal itself. One speaker urged everyone, including the MHA board members, to read the virulently anti-urban renewal and pro-private enterprise screed, *The Federal Bulldozer* (1964).¹²⁶ Again, the Lansky brothers attacked the MHA for what it was doing to Beale Street, not only between Main and Second but for what they thought was likely to happen between Second and Fourth: “You know and I know that what you are going to do is take a bulldozer and run it right through the whole street. You can’t do anything but that, and I can’t understand that.”¹²⁷ Fortunately for the Lanskys, the MHA removed their building from the areas to be acquired, but most of the other buildings between Main and Second were demolished.

The August 8 hearing was the first time the MHA addressed those with residences within the project zone. The MHA urged everyone to remain in their dwellings until the full procedure of relocation took place because if they moved before that time, they would receive no financial help for relocation. The vast majority of the discussion revolved around businesses located within the project zone, a sign that residents of the area—unlike

¹²⁵ Bill Evans, “Plans Ready for Relocating Beale Area Residents,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 25, 1969.

¹²⁶ Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964. The book is a two-part work consisting of Anderson’s Ph.D. dissertation for the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies, which uses empirical, statistical evidence to build a case against urban renewal, while the second part is a long-winded conclusion that private enterprise can do all that the urban renewal program has failed to do. Anderson would go on to a long career in Republican politics, including serving Richard Nixon as a special assistant and Ronald Reagan as a senior policy advisor to the 1976 and 1980 campaigns and as chief domestic policy advisor during Reagan’s first term in office.

¹²⁷ “Transcript of Public Hearing,” August 8, 1968, SCA, UR Files, Box 20, page 24.

the early projects—recognized the futility of fighting urban renewal. As with the earlier public hearings, the August 8 hearing brought forth several prescient statements about the possible future of Beale Street. L.T. Barringer, owner of a cotton firm on Front Street located within the project zone said of the possible results of urban renewal on Beale: “It’s going to look like a prairie down through there. It’s going to take years to get a lot of your construction back, unless they get some good architects and go down there and draw the mall, it won’t look anything like Beale Street where it will stay there and more or less be a monument, but, gentlemen, it’s going to be history.”¹²⁸ A real estate broker, Chapman Bain, made another incisive observation about the MHA’s aspirations for Beale: “I know an individual will rarely tear down property or existing property before he has a commitment, and I do understand that we could tear this down without any leases whatsoever for the benefit of incoming tenants. Are we taking a chance at calculated risk that nobody will want to move into this area whatsoever as a result of this? Do we have any assurance that as a result of the racial problem that we know we have had in the Beale Street area that this thing will ever come to fruition whatsoever?” The MHA first replied that it “was not the time or the place” to respond to those concerns. Then Mr. Ewald gave a short and rather unsatisfactory reply: “The city of Memphis either stands still and we leave the south part to disintegrate or deteriorate further, or we go ahead and we have been encouraged by planning and there has been a definite marketability report prepared.”¹²⁹ Richard Kremer, who appeared before the MHA on behalf of several business-owners in the area, especially the Lanskys, raised the issue of the riots and the findings of the Kerner Commission (formally known as National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders). The commission

¹²⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 84-85.

found that rioting grew from the absence of opportunities for urban blacks, caused by flawed education, housing, and other social services. Kremer suggested the MHA reconsider their plans for Beale Street based on the report's findings. The response from the MHA about the riots was that "a congestion of people living down there in houses that are in back of dwellings and over stores and underneath basements" contributed greatly to the rioting, a problem the Beale Street plans would help eliminate.¹³⁰

As with the public hearings, the urban renewal project at Beale and the MHA received increasingly negative press coverage. The matter-of-fact and sometimes overtly positive coverage of the 1960s faded into increasingly critical articles.¹³¹ As late as January of 1971, the press on the Beale Street project had been mostly positive, but the bad publicity began in 1971, with investigative articles on the cozy relationship between realty appraisers and the MHA's redevelopment. In 1972, articles such as "Brass Balls Reflect Beale Street Blues" appeared, referring to the symbol of the pawnshops that lined the street. In 1968, the *Commercial Appeal* suggested that the only people opposed to the project were the street's pawnshop owners.¹³² The article quotes one of the owners of a prominent pawnshop on the street: "Nothing they've done has helped."¹³³ In early 1971, the Lakeland

¹³⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹³¹ H.A. Gilliam, Jr., "Beale Project Would Be a Bright Beginning," *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1968. Jefferson Riker, "There'll Be Easy Livin' Again if Plans for Beale Street Work Out," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 14, 1969. This article is a prime example of the sometimes overtly positive press coverage that the Beale Street project received in the late 1960s and in 1970. The article says, "Beale Street, even in despair, has a certain dignity.... Even the prostitutes have an élan seldom matched west of Hamburg's Reeperbahn."

¹³² H.A. Gilliam, Jr., "Beale Project Would Be a Bright Beginning," *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1968.

¹³³ Jefferson Riker, "Brass Balls Reflect Beale Street Blues," *Commercial Appeal*, April 23, 1972. Thomas Bevier, "Conflict Question Raised in Appraising Renewal Property," *Commercial Appeal*, November 19, 1971. A positive article in the *Commercial Appeal* appeared as late as January 11, 1971: James H. Denley, "Beale Street Urban Renewal Project Is Moving Along at Speedy Tempo," *Commercial Appeal*, January 11, 1971. For more negative press in 1971 see "Beale Street Renewal Interest Lags," *Commercial Appeal*, December 7, 1971. Eldon Roark, "Help! Tommy Is in a Quandary! Let's Pull Him Out!," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 24, 1971.

Jockey Club ran a large advertisement in the *Commercial Appeal* attacking urban renewal in their efforts to gain support for legalizing horseracing.¹³⁴ In 1973, however, the negative press coverage hit its peak. (**Fig. 33**) An article in the *Commercial Appeal* quoted a homeowner in the Beale Street project zone about how she felt after the MHA's acquisition: "I felt like a dog when I had to leave." The article bemoaned the loss of community on Beale Street after renewal, and provided a level of criticism and caution that did not exist in the press when the project was in the planning stages: "When the business and political interests began thinking about the rebirth of Beale, they judged that only the legends should endure. Only the myth was marketable; the people would have to go. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps there is power enough in the name of Beale alone to assure profit. But it will never again be the Beale Street that anybody who ever lived there knew."¹³⁵

When the MHA had finished the acquisition phase of the project and completed the demolition (see **Figs. 34** and **35**), all but a small strip of old buildings on Beale between Second and Fourth Streets, other scattered buildings the MHA allowed to survive, and the new Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division stood within the project zone. **Figures 36 – 38** show the extent of the destruction on Beale Street. By 1979, comical photographs such as **Figure 39** appeared in the Memphis newspapers. Images like these, taken six years after the last buildings on Beale were demolished, proved to Memphians that not only urban renewal but the downtown area as a whole had failed. The aerial photographs of **Figures 40** and **41** illustrate the changes in the densely populated area of Beale Street in 1962 and the urban wasteland of Beale in 1977.

¹³⁴ "A Message to Taxpayers: Going Broke Getting Free(?) Money," *Commercial Appeal*, February 14, 1971.

¹³⁵ Thomas Bevier, "Where Have the People Gone?," *Commercial Appeal*, July 25, 1973.

Toward the end of the Beale Street projects, the federal funding became more and more scarce. The federal program had already begun to change under Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The Housing and Urban Development Act and the New Communities Act of 1968 shifted the emphasis in federal urban aid programs away from existing neighborhoods and urban centers to the creation of completely new neighborhoods by providing grants and federal loans to developers creating "new communities." The MHA, because of decreasing federal funding for urban renewal programs, started the Neighborhood Development Program (NDP), which shifted the large-scale redevelopment that had characterized the Jackson Avenue, Court Avenue (Civic Center), and Medical Center projects toward slower phased redevelopment. Under the NDP, work on the Beale Street II and Kansas Street projects was completed in small sections on an annual basis. Other areas not included in official urban renewal areas received attention from the NDP. One benefit of this slower approach to relocation, destruction, and redevelopment within urban renewal zones was that it put less of a burden on both public housing and the private housing market to absorb the large numbers of low-income families who needed housing after the displacement of urban renewal.¹³⁶

How Beale Street Became What It Is, Part I: "What Need Is Some Urban ReOLDal!"

While the MHA engaged a local contracting company to demolish the neighborhood and many of the commercial buildings around Beale Street from 1971 to 1973—of the 625 buildings within the Beale Street project zone, only 65 remained—(**Fig. 42**), the MHA was faced with deciding who should redevelop Beale Street. Their choices

¹³⁶ "Urban Renewal Facelift Is Painful Process," *Commercial Appeal*, January 31, 1973.

were few.¹³⁷ The decision likely had little effect on what happened to the area—though it would have profound effects on racial tensions regarding a project that, at its inception, had the support of both Republican and Democratic black leaders. As this chapter’s introduction indicated, the redevelopment of Beale Street coincided with the worst recession between the Great Depression and the Great Recession. Building construction and development projects in Memphis from 1973 to the early 1980s were flat. Practically nothing was built in the downtown area without significant aid from government. The first three years of the 1970s saw an explosion in housing construction. From 1971 to 1973, the city issued 30,000 permits for apartment units, while the period of 1965 to 1970 saw an average of only 3,800 units per year. The recession that began in 1973, which caused inflation—the FHA and VA interest rate ceiling in 1974 was 9.5 percent—and threatened financial institutions across the country, combined with overproduction in housing construction. Those forces hit Memphis—as they did many cities across the country—hard. The suburban office parks and downtown office towers that sprang up during the late 1960s and early 1970s were left with high vacancy rates. The downtown area also struggled in the early 1970s because retail sales downtown plummeted to only five percent of sales within the city. When the economy improved in the later 1970s, the suburban shopping centers and office parks came back to life, but downtown office buildings continued to see significant vacancy rates. Beale redevelopers would face these conditions shortly after the MHA awarded the contract in 1973.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Joseph Shapiro, “Beale Street Revival Aspirants Usually End up Singing Blues,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 6, 1979.

¹³⁸ Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 237-257.

Early in the Beale project's planning stages in the mid-1960s the MHA prepared an ideal scheme for Beale Street's redevelopment. Because the MHA had the authority to decide the redevelopment company and to approve development plans as they saw fit, the MHA was careful to set out model guidelines well before the time came to choose a developer. Working alongside the planning company Ewald and Associates Land Planners and the local architect, Mel O'Brien, the MHA outlined their view of how Beale should be developed after the clearance of urban renewal. The highlights of their initial plan included the creation of a "blue light" district from Second to Third Streets retaining rehabilitated existing structures; a preserved and "improved" Handy Park; a multi-level shopping mall a half block north of Beale beginning on Main Street and ending three and a half blocks to the east with pedestrian connection bridges over Main, Second, and Third Streets; high rise apartments on the west end of the project along a Mississippi River waterfront that included parks; a new parkway connecting the new I-40 bridge to the Memphis-Arkansas Bridge (now I-55); and the symbolic and recognizable "beacon building" topped by a restaurant.¹³⁹

Figure 43 shows an aerial view of the area with all the components the MHA sought in a redevelopment scheme, while **Figure 44** shows the portion of the Beale Street area the MHA planned to allow to survive.

The Ewald plans that the MHA commissioned also have an interesting story to tell regarding race. Judging from the figures in the architectural drawings, white planners' visions for the redeveloped Beale Street are apparent. No longer content to allow Beale Street to remain even a diminished form of "Main Street of Negro America," white planners and civic leaders unmistakably desired Beale to become much whiter, presaging

¹³⁹ William J. Miles, "Tight Money Crowds Beale Dream," *Commercial Appeal*, September 27, 1966.

failed Beale developer, Ron Barassi's declaration that Beale never "be allowed to become what it originally was."¹⁴⁰ The individuals in the drawings of **Figures 45** and **46** illustrate the type of patrons planners envisioned in the redeveloped "blue light" district. **Figure 45** shows white tourists in front of a bandstand along the street, while **Figure 46** shows a white tourist with camera in hand below W.C. Handy's statue in Handy Park. **Figure 47** illustrates a conception of what a relocated Charlie Vergos's Rendezvous barbeque restaurant might look like along Beale, where all of the patron's of the restaurant are white. **Figures 48 – 50** demonstrate planners' vision of the place of African Americans along Beale Street. **Figure 48** depicts the Daisy Theater, which in the days of Jim Crow catered to African Americans. All of the figures in the architectural rendering seem to be African American, suggesting that the planners could not imagine whites using a theater that catered to blacks during segregation. **Figures 49** and **50** are a much more overt image of what planners thought the role of blacks on the new Beale Street should be. It shows a young African American male appearing in a stereotypical 1940s and 1950s servile bellhop-type uniform—a common advertising trope during the 1940s for companies such as Borden's evaporated milk or General Motor's AC sparkplugs—selling flowers to white tourists. The boy lifts his hat in deference as the woman pays him for flowers as a black laborer exits the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division building in the background. White planners from the beginnings of the project and—as Chapter 5 will demonstrate—in the actual execution of the redevelopment in the 1980s and 1990s envisioned a much tamer and much whiter version of Beale Street, a cordon sanitaire as Johnson and Russell suggest.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Johnson and Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*, 134.

The bold and expensive vision of Beale's redevelopment rendered by Ewald and Associates belies the MHA's own trepidations concerning the ability to find a developer with access to the capital investment necessary to redevelop Beale Street. The MHA publicly admitted fears over the ability of the project to attract the necessary investment as early as 1966.¹⁴² Similar concerns lingered over the project even after the land was nearly cleared in 1971.¹⁴³ Interest from developers in the early 1970s up to the time the MHA selected a firm to redevelop Beale in 1973 was minimal. One group that organized after the area became slated for renewal was Beale Street Blue Light Corporation (BSBLC). Investors, landowners, and black civic leaders formed the group in April of 1971, choosing William M. Morris, Sr., at the time a partner with the Memphis firm Management Consultants, as the President of the corporation. In 1973, the BSBLC published a proposal, "Beale Street: To Reclaim Its 'Blues,'" outlining their vision of what Beale Street had been in the past and what they hoped a post-urban renewal Beale would become. They said that the "element of history transposed to a contemporary Memphis is what Beale Street Blue Light Corp. hopes to reclaim in redeveloping Beale. We wish to restore for all time its blues, its history, its marvelous contribution to American music, its folkways that have since been integrated into the mainstream of American life. We want to make Beale Street viable once again. We are Memphians, and we think we can make Beale live once more as a vital part of modern-day Memphis."¹⁴⁴ BSBLC's plan for achieving their goals was to concentrate on rejuvenating Beale Street as an entertainment center: "The street's flavor as a center of black life must be retained and translated into an entertainment area with general

¹⁴² William J. Miles, "Tight Money Crowds Beale Dream," *Commercial Appeal*, September 27, 1966.

¹⁴³ "Cash Lack Changing Hue of Beale's 'Blue Light,'" *Commercial Appeal*, February 11, 1971.

¹⁴⁴ "Beale Street: To Reclaim Its Blues," February 1, 1973, Beale Street Blue Light Corporation, SCA, UR Files, Box 58.

appeal to tourists as well as Memphians.” The plan emphasized the group’s intention of achieving an appropriate level of historic preservation by showing a keen sensitivity to the area’s history. Their solution for doing this was to gut most of the buildings within the “blue light” district leaving just the facades to serve as the starting point of reconstruction.¹⁴⁵

Racial tension mounted, however, when the MHA selected R.P. Barassi and Associates’ Beale Street Area Development Corporation—later called Beale Street USA—to redevelop Beale Street instead of BSBLC. City Councilman, Fred Davis, requested that the decision of MHA Chair, Ethel Venson, be delayed and overridden by the city government. Davis said, “There is very strong apprehension in the black community about this. Beale Street was made by black folks, and when black folks aren’t happy about what is happening, I think that’s a legitimate reaction.” MHA deputy director, Sam Null, explained the MHA’s decision: “We felt [Barassi and Associates’] management setup was better, their financial situation was better, and they wanted to do the whole thing at one time, not in a piecemeal fashion.”¹⁴⁶ In August of 1973, the Black Political Council (BPC) formed a group called Concerned Citizens to Save Beale Street to determine how to wrest control away from Beale Street USA because of the company’s lack of black representation. Lt. George W. Lee, who publicly backed the urban renewal plans in the 1960s, said, “We must not let them rob us of our black heritage.” One of the leaders of the BPC, Charlie Morris, said, “Who else than black people themselves—the sons and daughters of those who brought Beale Street into historical being—are more aesthetically equipped to recreate and reconstruct the unique nature of Beale Street?” O.Z. Evers,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Leon Munday, “Barassi Chosen to Develop Beale Project,” *Commercial Appeal*, April 14, 1973.

president of the Unity League of Memphis and one of the organizers of the sanitation workers, echoed Lee's and Morris's complaint: "We feel that if any profit is to be made out of Beale Street, it should go to black people who made the street famous and should be shared with those white merchants who have operated businesses there for 30 or 40 years. It is our street. We made it famous and it will be us who make it survive in years to come."

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Further complicating matters in the controversy over selecting the Barassi firm as the redevelopers of Beale was an \$85,000 HUD grant announced in November of 1972 to the Match Institute of Washington. Former state representative and failed mayoral candidate, A.W. Willis, along with Lewis R. Donelson III, the former City Council President and conservative, though pragmatic, Republican who made enemies with Mayor Loeb during the Sanitation Strike, sent a proposal directly to HUD headquarters in Washington that proposed the street be redeveloped as "a Negro cultural and historical center." The City Council, in a 8-0 vote, urged the MHA to back the proposal.¹⁴⁸ The MHA and the regional HUD office in Knoxville took umbrage with HUD's decision to allow what they believed to be a "back door" proposal.¹⁴⁹ The MHA's decision, however, to select the Barassi firm's bid before the Match Institute finished their HUD-funded study, proved to be a huge political misstep. It galvanized black leaders across the city to fight the Barassi firm's redevelopment of Beale at the same time the MHA had been becoming

¹⁴⁷ Johnnie Vaughn, "Black Council May Go to Court for Beale," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 2, 1973.

¹⁴⁸ Clark Porteous, "City Council Urges MHA to Back Expansion of Beale Street Development Plan," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 26, 1972.

¹⁴⁹ Orville Hancock, "Three Beale Renewal Plans Spur Tones of Disharmony," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 20, 1973. James Denley, "3 Groups Look for 'Blue Light' on Beale Work," *Commercial Appeal*, February 2, 1973. James Denley, "Beale Street Song Waits for Singer," *Commercial Appeal*, February 4, 1973.

increasingly unpopular with whites because of where it chose to place public housing projects.

Beyond concerns over no black representation in Beale Street USA, another concern was Beale Street USA's actual plans for the street, which many believed were placeless and did nothing to enhance what little was left of the history of Beale Street. Local architect Harold Thompson said, "This plan could be built on Poplar, out east, or anywhere without change."¹⁵⁰ In their opening presentation to the MHA, Beale Street USA pledged that in order "to build this into a saleable idea a developer must be prepared to capture the history, charm, myth, and image that people everywhere attribute this area which is celebrated in song and story." In order to accomplish this, Beale Street USA promised that their development plans would include the entire urban renewal area surrounding the "blue light" district in order not to "doom it to financial strangulation" caused by being surrounded by empty space.¹⁵¹ The proposal for Beale Street USA's redevelopment off Beale included a music hall of fame below Handy Park, but developers said that "those in the music industry should build it."¹⁵² Eventually Beale Street did see a music museum. In April 2000, the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum—a project that developed out of a Smithsonian exhibition—opened off Beale and, in 2004, moved to a new location off Beale on land cleared by urban renewal thirty years earlier. In addition to the hall of fame, the Barassi firm proposed a luxury hotel east of the hall of fame and an office building north of Beale Street on Gayoso—near the present-day Peabody Place. For

¹⁵⁰ David Flynn, "Current Beale Street Plan to Be Battled by Group," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 7, 1973.

¹⁵¹ "A Presentation to the Memphis Housing Authority: Beale Street Area Development Corporation," SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

¹⁵² Orville Hancock, "New Report Gives Green Light to Beale Blue Light Plan," November 5, 1973.

the “blue light” district itself, they proposed turning the street into a pedestrian only mall-like development including “colorfully designed and textured paving, pool, fountain, benches, flower-boxes, plantings and trees, and other mall furniture.” Throughout much of their proposal, the Barassi firm—clearly aware of their firm’s lack of black representation—tried to demonstrate its knowledge of Beale Street’s history, including many of the black-owned businesses, which once lined the street.¹⁵³

In order to “preserve any bit of historical flavor of the area,” the MHA planned to hire an architectural historian to analyze what needed to be saved. MHA Planning Director, Randall Johnson, said that “such a historian may see things there that the ordinary layman would not.”¹⁵⁴ The MHA, through urban renewal funds, spent nearly \$50,000 on the study of the buildings on Beale Street to aid developers in restorations of the historic structures, but their motivations for hiring an architectural historian were not out of the best interest of the area. The National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (NACHP), acting through HUD, ordered the MHA to halt all redevelopment plans until the completion of an “architectural-historical analysis.”¹⁵⁵ In May 1966, the Department of the Interior designated Beale Street a National Historic Landmark, which gave the NACHP authority over what happened to the portion of Beale selected as an NHL. This put a stop to Beale Street USA’s attempts at redeveloping Beale. The MHA selected the firm, Architects-Engineer Associates of Nashville, to lead the study. Charles Waterfield, the principal in charge of the Beale project, was a member of the Tennessee Commission on Historic

¹⁵³ “A Presentation to the Memphis Housing Authority: Beale Street Area Development Corporation,” SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

¹⁵⁴ Orville Hancock, “MHA Official Says Land Prices on Beale Street Inflated by Property Owners,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 16, 1973.

¹⁵⁵ “The Blue Light District of Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee: An Architectural and Historical Survey,” SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

Preservation, and as the *Commercial Appeal* phrased it, “is considered an ‘architectural historian.’”¹⁵⁶

After the completion of the historical study, in late 1974, the city government transferred the rights of redevelopment of the Beale Street “blue light” district from Beale Street USA to the Beale Street National Historic Foundation (BSNHF).¹⁵⁷ The Barassi firm, however, was awarded a management contract with the BSNHF. The change in the leadership in charge of redevelopment meant less racial tension, because the BSNHF contract insisted on “heavy black participation in all aspects of the project.” Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce CEO, Ronald Leigh, said, “The foundation...will serve to improve relations among the races in Memphis.” After the political pressure that the MHA was under—from the BPC, the national HUD office, and the city council, for awarding the Barassi firm the contract before the completion of the Willis/Donelson-backed plan—became too great and the NACHP halted redevelopment, all of the parties involved began a period of six-month negotiations over how to move forward. Their solution of the BSNHF created an organization made up of thirty-three members appointed by the mayor and approved by the city council. Many believed that a nonprofit foundation, which would be able to accept both private and public funding, would be able to carry out the redevelopment of Beale Street.¹⁵⁸ Because of the nonprofit’s ability to accept federal funding, the organization received a \$1.7 million grant, through the MHA, from the federal government to aid in developing a pedestrian mall along Beale Street.¹⁵⁹ One of the first

¹⁵⁶ “\$48,900 Is Authorized for Beale Street Study,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 20, 1973.

¹⁵⁷ Jefferson Riker, “Beale Street Development Shifts to Nonprofit Group,” *Commercial Appeal*, April 27, 1974. “MHA Actions Provide Push to Beale Pact,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 24, 1974.

¹⁵⁸ Jefferson Riker, “Beale Street Development Shifts to Nonprofit Group,” *Commercial Appeal*, April 27, 1974.

¹⁵⁹ “City Hall Potpourri,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 1, 1974.

private developments on Beale Street began in 1973 when George Miller, a black theater owner, announced he would build a movie theater, with the assistance of a Small Business Administration loan, on the east end of the Beale I project on the northeast corner of Beale and Fourth.¹⁶⁰ The black-owned Tri-State Bank decided to build its new headquarters, which the MHA previously removed through urban renewal, at the west end of Beale project zone, at the northeast corner of Main and Beale.¹⁶¹

Despite the positive early signs, the plans for the redevelopment of Beale Street languished. As early as May 1974, the members of the city council publicly disparaged the chances of redeveloping Beale Street: “Beale Street is going to be a failure. It is not going to fly. It looks as though we are trying to bail somebody out, it’s a failure. No responsible banker or financier is going to put money into it.”¹⁶² During the interim period between Beale Street USA’s involvement as developer and BSNHF, it was becoming increasingly apparent that one of the real issues behind the switch was that Beale Street USA was having difficulty finding funding: “We were stopped because of the way the money market is. No one wanted to drop [\$250 million] into something that wasn’t definite,” said Ron Barassi.¹⁶³ In early 1975, the city asked HUD to help find a way to finance the redevelopment of Beale so that BSNHF could purchase the land from the MHA, which federal law barred from giving the land away.¹⁶⁴ Two months later, the city approved nearly \$1.5 million for land purchases in the “blue light” district for BSNHF to purchase the land from the MHA.¹⁶⁵ After the historical report required by the NACHP, the federal agency

¹⁶⁰ Johnnie Vaughn, “\$250,000 Loan for Beale Street,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 10, 1973. “Theater at Beale, Fourth Planned By Black Showman,” *Commercial Appeal*, December 11, 1973.

¹⁶¹ “Tri-State Bank To Build At Main, Beale,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 29, 1973.

¹⁶² “City Hall Potpourri,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 8, 1974, quoting City Councilman, Billy Hyman.

¹⁶³ Leon Munday, “Plans for Beale Given Help,” *Commercial Appeal*, August 20, 1974.

¹⁶⁴ Jefferson Riker, “Some Progress Shown in Exercise in Politics,” *Commercial Appeal*, January 26, 1975.

¹⁶⁵ Jefferson Riker, “City OK’s Aid to Beale Plan,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 5, 1975.

ruled that the redevelopers must abandon the plans for the multilevel pedestrian shopping mall because it put no importance on preserving the historical authenticity of Beale Street.¹⁶⁶

Land within the Beale Street II Area (R-119)¹⁶⁷ was tied up because of changes in HUD policy regarding low-income housing. Because of its proximity to the proposed “blue light” district on the west part of Beale, the land in Beale Street II could not be redeveloped as low-income housing due to noise requirements. In addition, HUD Secretary George Romney, who, to the chagrin of the Nixon Administration, spent much of his time trying to integrate the suburban landscape of American cities, passed new requirements that discouraged redeveloping inner-city urban renewal zones as low-income housing.¹⁶⁸ For example, one of the public housing projects the MHA was able to build in the early 1970s—despite significant opposition from the local neighborhood group and Mayor Loeb—was on Winchester Avenue between Getwell and the airport well outside of the interstate loop.¹⁶⁹ Because it could not be used for public housing, the Memphis Publishing Company—which printed the *Commercial Appeal* and the *Press-Scimitar* purchased a significant portion of the land in the Beale Street II project for the construction of a new facility.¹⁷⁰

After the Beale Street projects, the federal urban renewal program was phased out after President Richard M. Nixon’s reelection in 1972. The federal HUD office told the MHA that there would only be enough money for one full project and one scaled-back

¹⁶⁶ Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 278.

¹⁶⁷ Two project zones were declared in the Beale Street area, the first (R-77) was on the western end of Beale Street, and the second (R-119) was located east of Danny Thomas Boulevard to Orleans Street.

¹⁶⁸ Orville Hancock, “Urban Renewal ‘Surgery’ Cuts Path Through Downtown Area,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 15, 1972.

¹⁶⁹ “The City’s Housing Crisis,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 7, 1970.

¹⁷⁰ “Where New Presses Will Roar,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 6, 1973.

project between the Medical Center III zone and the Beale zone. The MHA chose to split the Beale project into two zones and execute the more eastern portion later.¹⁷¹ At the start of the new term, all federal housing funds were frozen. The 1974 budget gave no funding for urban renewal, essentially ending the program.¹⁷² The federal program became increasingly unpopular with Republican politicians—presaging the tax demagoguery that dominated politics after the election of Ronald Reagan—who argued that lower taxes were more important than funding federal programs that went to serve urban areas. Despite the publicity campaign the MHA put on in early 1973, which touted an increase in local tax revenues and over \$200 million in investments, Memphis's Republican congressional representative, Dan Kuykendall, argued that urban renewal had not been a success in Memphis: "It has been more urban removal than urban renewal [in Memphis]."¹⁷³ By 1978, the federal government moved the responsibility over the remaining urban renewal property still owned by the city and the debt associated with it to the Community Development Division, taking it out of the hands of local city planning groups like the MHA. By that time, there were still sixty-two acres of land remaining in the hands of the MHA that had not been sold, the vast majority of which was within the two Beale Street projects—with a small amount in the Medical Center projects.¹⁷⁴ The MHA's efforts in public housing were also diminishing during the 1970s. The MHA was increasingly at odds

¹⁷¹ "Editorial," *Commercial Appeal*, September 14, 1969.

¹⁷² Orville Hancock, "MHA Chief Hopes Budget Cuts Will Not End Urban Renewal," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 30, 1973.

¹⁷³ Ibid. *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 30, 1973; and Lee Stillwell, "Kuykendall Backs Cuts In Budget," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 30, 1973. The MHA Executive Director, Orelle Ledbetter, responded to Kuykendall's critique in an Op-Ed in the *Press-Scimitar* pointing to all of the progress created by urban renewal: "I submit that even a short tour through downtown would show him that it has been tremendously successful." Orelle Ledbetter, "Ledbetter Answers Kuykendall on 'Failure' of Urban Renewal," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 6, 1973.

¹⁷⁴ Christopher Jennewein, "City New Landlord for Urban Renewal," *Commercial Appeal*, January 30, 1978.

with the city government over locations for housing projects. From the election of Loeb through the 1970s, the city government threatened the MHA with drying up their financial support of urban renewal if the MHA sited a public housing project in an area they did not want it.¹⁷⁵

When the 1974 Nixon budget essentially ended urban renewal, the MHA shelved four of its planned project areas for good. Those project zones included the area south of LeMoyne-Owen College, the area east of the Jackson Avenue project zone around Manassas Street, the Boxtown area south of Peebles Road between Weaver and Ford Roads in southwest Memphis, and the area around Douglas Park north of Chelsea Avenue.¹⁷⁶ The MHA had completed most of the preliminary work, including the \$3,164 per acre survey and planning stage on the LeMoyne-Owen project (at 54 acres) and the \$4,730 per acre survey and planning work on the Manassas Street project (at 144 acres). (**Figs. 51 and 52**) The early applications for those projects were nearly completed when the Nixon administration announced that there would be no new funding for urban renewal projects beginning in 1974. The Boxtown area never received the go-ahead from the regional office to proceed with the survey and planning stages, but was further along than the Douglas Park area.¹⁷⁷ Presently, all four of these areas have seen little redevelopment and have changed little from their state in the early 1970s. At the end of the urban renewal program, the federal government spent \$71 million in Memphis with an additional \$17 million coming from the city.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ "Urban Renewal Facelift Is Painful Process," *Commercial Appeal*, January 21, 1973.

¹⁷⁶ Orville Hancock, "4 Urban Renewal Projects in Memphis Face Budget Ax," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 29, 1973.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Thornton, "MHA to Seek Boxtown Grant," *Commercial Appeal*, June 17, 1971.

¹⁷⁸ Orville Hancock, "City Government to Take Reigns of Urban Renewal Projects," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 19, 1974

Chapter 5: Pyramids, Blues, and Barbeque

The New Tourist Landscape in the Ruins of Urban Renewal

Introduction

Amid all of the devastation that occurred in and around downtown Memphis after the Sanitation Strike, the failed Beale Street urban renewal project, and the crushing economic blows to downtown caused by the complete collapse of the retail and hotel business due to the city abandoning its core, Memphis saw one of the best days in the history of the city on August 16, 1977—though no one knew it at the time. On that afternoon, Ginger Alden, the singer's girlfriend, found Elvis Presley dead on his bathroom floor in Graceland; the apparent cause was complications resulting from drug abuse. The crowds of people that came that day to pay their respects and grieve over a fallen idol foretold the future popularity of Graceland as a tourist attraction. (**Fig. 1**) The crowds that came the next year to mark the singer's first birthday after his death assured Graceland's potential to become one of the iconic tourist attractions of the United States. (**Fig. 2 & 3**) After Elvis's death and the 1979 death of his father who was his estate's executor, his ex-wife Priscilla served as trustee for her eleven-year-old daughter's inheritance, but the property taxes and upkeep on Graceland—as well as \$15 million in back taxes resulting from Colonel Tom Parker's mismanagement—were quickly dwindling the estate and were pressing it toward bankruptcy. Priscilla decided to open Graceland as a tourist attraction in June of 1982. The venture paid off handsomely, making Graceland, at various times since its opening, the most- or the second-most-visited house in the United States behind the White House. Memphis had been a city where a prominent businessman could declare in

the city's largest newspaper that "the biggest attraction we have here is the river and so once you see it you move on. That's it. So why should anyone want to come to Memphis who wasn't already here."¹ After the rise of Graceland, half a million or more tourists came to Memphis every year just to visit the house and grave of Elvis Presley. (**Fig. 4**)

With the newfound quantity of tourists coming to the city thanks to Graceland, Memphis was finally in a position to begin realizing what many civic leaders had hoped for since at least the 1950s. In Mayor Orgill's papers on city planning is a report, "A Plan for the Memphis Central Business District," from the Memphis and Shelby County Planning Commission, written by Barry Alexander of Harland Bartholomew and Associates. The plan calls on the city to "create amenities making the core [CBD] an economic, cultural, social, and psychological focus for the metropolitan area." Mayor Orgill's highly detailed and animated notes to the report concluded that doing so would attract tourists, visitors, and conventions.² In the late 1960s and 1970s, the central idea for creating the demand for tourism in Memphis was turning the city into a destination based mostly on Memphis's music past and its long list of iconic blues, rock 'n' roll, and R&B musicians. The process would not be quick or easy. After the weeds began to grow in the urban renewal zones across Memphis, over two decades of federal and local money spent, vast empty spaces surrounded the Beale Street project. Speaking about the general results of urban renewal in Memphis, Memphis State University professor, F. Jack Hurley commented to the *Commercial Appeal*, "The city has spent \$26 million over the past 20

¹ Joseph Weiler and Jefferson Riker, "'The Downtown Problem': Acceleration in Decline of Memphis Traced to 1968 Events," April 28, 1975.

² "A Plan for Memphis Central Business District," May 1959, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder X A

years to recreate the look of Hiroshima in 1946.”³ Throughout the rest of the 1970s and much of the 1980s the land surrounding Beale remained empty. By the end of the 1970s, Memphis was a city ripped apart by three decades of racial turmoil. It was divided as never before by race and class. Busing, racial fears of downtown and south Memphis, and rapid suburbanization helped to spread the inequality and racial division over larger and larger tracts of space.

This chapter details the creation of a tourist landscape in Memphis, one of the main emphases of local government, the Chamber of Commerce, and city planners during the 1980s, which in some cases emerged directly from the ashes of urban renewal. The chapter examines different projects that the city and private developers undertook in order help make the vision of Memphis as a tourist destination a reality. As Chapter 4 indicated, what happened to Beale was illustrative of what many scholars who have studied postmodernity have found to be endemic to it. As referenced in Chapter 1, postmodernity, according to David Harvey, reflects a change within modernity in regimes of accumulation, from Fordism to flexible accumulation, a key insight to bear in mind when discussing postmodernism. For Harvey the tendency in Postmodern architecture for producing “extensive and often eclectic quotation of past styles” as well as Aldo Rossi’s belief that architecture should produce monuments that are expressive of collective memory—whatever that might vaguely be—are linked to the rise of heritage tourism where “reconstructed and rehabilitated urban landscapes that echo past forms [and] directly

³ Joseph Shapiro, “Beale Street Revival Aspirants Usually End Up Singing Blues,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 6, 1979.

produced copies of past urban infrastructures” become typical of a tourist industry rooted in the “manufacturing of heritage.”⁴

Tied up in all of this is nostalgia. In *Postmodern Urbanism* (1999), Nan Ellin argues that the reaction to the universalism and placelessness of Modernism led to a nostalgia for the cities of the past.⁵ Christine Boyer believes that this nostalgic turn towards history has led to a “memory crisis” in the Postmodern city where a bastardized form of history has made the city and its citizens have collective forgetfulness in a city “dominated by private voices selling fictional styles of life and imaginary behaviors.”⁶ Mary McLeod ties much of Postmodern architecture, especially during the 1980s, into a nostalgia for the past.⁷ John Frow ties this Postmodern nostalgia for imagined pasts into tourism. He argues that nostalgia is at the heart of making the tourist object a sign of itself, an idea he derives from the discussion of the “most photographed barn in America” in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* as well as from Jean Baudrillard.⁸ More to the point, especially as it relates to Beale Street, Susan Stewart explains how nostalgia can lead to a yearning for an imagined past: “Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality.”⁹ It is precisely the longing for a “future-past” that Eric Avila documents at the creation of Disneyland in 1950s Los

⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 83-87.

⁵ Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁶ Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 4.

⁷ Mary McLeod, “Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstruction,” *Assemblage* 8 (February 1989): 13-58.

⁸ John Frow. “Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia.” *October* 57 (1991): 123-51.

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 23.

Angeles. For Avila, Disney's Main Street, USA represented a "nostalgic retreat." In Memphis, this nostalgic retreat can be seen, on a much smaller scale, at Beale Street. It is no coincidence that the successful redeveloper of Beale, John Elkington, was an acolyte of Jim Rouse, the developer of such Postmodern marvels as Faneuil Hall in Boston and Harbourplace in Baltimore. It is precisely an imagined "future-past" that Beale Street seeks to capture. As Chapter 4 already discussed, Beale redevelopers had no intention of letting Beale Street return to be "what it was." The product they were selling with Beale was a sanitized, gentrified version of an historic place that was turned into a tourist attraction, mostly by whites, because of its mythical ties to the creation of rock 'n' roll. Avila goes on to conclude that Disney "repositioned the white, middle-class nuclear family at the center of a new public life that took shape in the transition from the industrial, centralized city to the postindustrial urban region."¹⁰ This conclusion brings the argument of the dissertation full-circle, because this is exactly what happened in Memphis. A nostalgic and whitened Beale Street also appeared at the transition from the industrial, centralized city to the city of flexible accumulation.

This chapter completes the story of the transformation of Beale Street and the creation of other tourist attractions around the downtown. The chapter begins first by recapping the political history of the city post-Henry Loeb and then by tracking the evolution of tourism in Memphis, determining what constituted an attraction from the beginning of the twentieth century to the century's end. By considering how tourism changed in the city, it places into perspective the tourist landscape the city began shaping in the 1980s, which was vastly different from landmarks and events the city marketed in

¹⁰ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 140.

its promotional materials. Next, Jim Jarmusch's 1989 film *Mystery Train* depicts cultural tourism in Memphis in the years before the city's efforts to attract more, and different, tourists. Taking a closer look at *Mystery Train* will show not only what a tourist to the city might have experienced in the late 1980s, but also the devastation that urban renewal and the lack of subsequent investment brought to downtown Memphis. After getting a better picture of tourism in Memphis, the chapter turns to conclude the account of the restoration of Beale Street. Finally, it tells the story of the creation of tourist attractions at Mud Island, the Pyramid, and the National Civil Rights Museum. The urban and tourist landscape that began to emerge in the early 1990s was significantly different from the one that existed after the end of the urban renewal program in the mid-1970s. This chapter demonstrates how the changes wrought by urban renewal and suburban sprawl encouraged by planners and policymakers brought downtown Memphis to the point of being able to attempt to create a tourist landscape.

Memphis Politics after Loeb: From another Chandler to the First Black Mayor

In 1971, an unchastened Henry Loeb retired from politics in Memphis. Before leaving, Loeb, a few city council members, and a few business leaders gathered to choose who should succeed Loeb. Their choice was Wyeth Chandler, the adopted son of former mayor Walter Chandler, a Crump machine mayor during the 1940s. Wyeth Chandler was a Southern "good ole boy" and was noted for his lack of a political philosophy: "I don't want to be thought of as some intellectual." Chandler's views on race were similar to Loeb's without "Loeb's level of rigidity." He often referred to whites as "we" or "our people" and blacks as "they" or "your people." The Chandler administration, however, did

not share the extreme fiscal conservatism that characterized Loeb's. Chandler spent city funds on Mud Island, the restoration of Beale Street, and the renovation of the Peabody Hotel, but Chandler proved to be as interested in his social life as in running the city. Marcus Pohlmann and Michael Kirby characterize Chandler as leaving much of the actual governing of Memphis to administrative assistants and department heads. Memphis elected Chandler to three terms in office from 1972 to 1982. He accepted a judicial appointment from Gov. Lamar Alexander in 1982.¹¹

In the 1982 special election to replace Chandler, Richard C. Hackett—a county clerk with a grass roots coalition due to his work for the Mayor's Action Center, which responded to complaints about city services—ran against city councilman and black political leader, J.O. Patterson. Hackett defeated Patterson and white moderate Michael Cody and served as mayor of Memphis during the 1980s.¹² Hackett was drawn into politics through the first Chandler campaign because of his opposition to the annexation of Whitehaven, where he grew up. When he ran for mayor in 1982, he was thirty-three years old. Hackett personally described himself as a “progressive moderate.”¹³ Pohlmann and Kirby, who believe Hackett was a moderate conservative, describe Hackett as a transitional figure in the city's political culture and economy. Hackett's time in office was characterized by large projects, despite his fiscal conservatism, which was especially apparent when it came to taxes. He approved funding for the Pyramid, the downtown trolley project, the National Civil Rights Museum, and continued funding Beale Street. He proved to be much more moderate than Chandler on racial issues. He appointed African

¹¹ Marcus D. Pohlmann and Michael P. Kirby, *Racial Politics at the Crossroads: Memphis Elects Dr. W.W. Herenton*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 20-22.

¹² Ibid. 24-25.

¹³ Ibid., 32-33.

Americans to his administration, including Greg Duckett, the chief administrative officer.¹⁴ He was on significantly better terms with the public employees' unions than his predecessors were. He was actively involved in governing and in meeting local citizens, in sharp contrast to Chandler.¹⁵ Despite his fiscal conservatism, or perhaps because of it, his administration ran a deficit in four of its last five years, depleting the city's cash reserve fund by \$17,000,000.¹⁶

One of the most significant policy changes that affected Memphis politics as well as suburbanization in the city during the 1980s and beyond was a change in state law regarding city annexation. From 1955 to 1974, state law allowed annexation by municipal ordinance without the threat of it being contested before a jury trial. Before 1955, annexation required the approval of the state government, but the Crump machine's hold on state government ensured that Memphis easily annexed large tracts of suburbs during the first part of the century, as outlined in Chapter 2. The new law allowed for contestation of the plan: If an annexation plan was contested, it was sent to a jury trial where the city had the burden of proof to demonstrate that annexation was required for the health and safety of the city and the annexed area. Annexation was a double-edged sword in Memphis. Continued annexation of the suburbs ensured that whites maintained a voting majority in city government, but many whites did not want to be within the city limits because of public education and the busing that continued into the 2000s. The city did not annex territory in order to maintain a white political majority, but, instead, annexed to maintain a wider and richer tax base. During the 1980s, the city attempted to annex two white suburbs, Cordova

¹⁴ Ibid., 24-25, 38-40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 33-36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

and Hickory Hills. The Cordova area is located between Germantown to the south and Interstate 40 to the north. Residents of the area brought a suit to the city's 1984 decision to annex, but lost the trial and the appeal, and the area was annexed in 1990. Cordova subsequently integrated, making it a far cry from its days before annexation when it was ninety-seven percent white. In 1987, the city began the procedure to annex Hickory Hills, at the time, a predominately white area of 37,000 residents southeast of the interstate loop between Lamar Avenue and Tennessee 385. A group called Hickory Area Residents for Tomorrow formed to fight annexation and managed to stall annexation of the area until the mid-1990s. If Hickory Hills had been added to the city before the mayoral election of 1991, it would have added nearly 15,000 more white voters to the rolls. At the time, the area was eighty-five percent white, but, since becoming a part of Memphis, it turned into a predominately African American area.¹⁷

Since A.W. Willis ran for mayor against Henry Loeb in 1967, several black mayoral candidates ran for office with varying levels of success. African Americans, however, had already found political success in congressional politics in 1974 when Democrat, Harold Ford, Sr., defeated the conservative Dan Kuykendall. Ford, whose parents were prominent African American Memphians, was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives in 1970. In 1974, he ran for the Democratic nomination for Tennessee's Eighth Congressional District, which he won handily. Despite the district not having a majority black population, Ford was able to very narrowly defeat Kuykendall by running on economic development and riding the wave of post-Watergate disaffection for Republicans. Ford remained in office until the late 1990s when his son, Harold Ford, Jr. won his father's seat.¹⁸ In 1975,

¹⁷ Ibid., 107-111.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69.

Criminal Court Judge W. Otis Higgs ran against the incumbent Mayor Chandler, and made it to the runoff election. He lost to Chandler, in large part because whites overwhelmingly voted for Chandler and the black vote was only thirty-eight percent of the city. In addition to J.O. Patterson's bid in the 1982 runoff, Hackett ran against two African American candidates in the 1983 election. John Ford, brother of Congressman Ford and concurrently both Memphis City Councilman and Tennessee Senator, ran, competing for black votes against W. Otis Higgs, who ran a second time. Hackett defeated both without needing a runoff.¹⁹

In 1991, at an event in Clayburn Temple to honor Dr. King's birthday, Willie W. Herenton challenged Congressman Ford to help him unite the black community around one mayoral candidate. Soon after, Councilman Shep Wilbun announced a "people's conference" to nominate a mayoral candidate. The African-American People's Convention Organization held their convention in April with around 4,000 attending. W.W. Herenton, who had been formulating the groundwork for a mayoral candidacy flooded the convention with his voters and won on the first ballot.²⁰ Dr. Herenton was raised in poor circumstances in segregated south Memphis. His family shared an outdoor privy with five other families. He attended segregated schools in Memphis including Booker T. Washington High School. He graduated from LeMoyne College, and taught fifth grade for a year. He then went to Memphis State and received a master's degree. He became principal of Bethel Grove Elementary, the first black principal of a predominately-white school in 1968. After two years as principal he received a doctorate from Southern Illinois University, writing a dissertation on the token desegregation of Memphis city schools. He returned to Memphis

¹⁹ Ibid., 22-25.

²⁰ Ibid., 141-145.

after receiving a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship and was appointed deputy superintendent of the Memphis Public School System. In 1978, after whites fleeing busing had turned the city's schools into a predominately African American school system, he was appointed superintendent. He served in this position until his mayoral run in 1991.²¹

Despite the pledge that many candidates signed to abide by the outcome of the "people's convention," Congressman Ford held his own convention for selecting a Memphis mayor. Before Ford announced the date of his convention, Herenton announced that he would run no matter who won the "Unity Summit." At the summit, Herenton's supporters filled the convention just as they had done previously. The outcome was clear, but Ford, whom many had suspected originally wanted to run for mayor himself, took Herenton and the other candidate, two-time mayoral loser Higgs, out of the room and had a major confrontation. Using the threat of a potential congressional recall pushed by Herenton's supporters, Herenton convinced Ford to go back out and announce his support for Herenton for mayor and told Higgs he did not have a chance of being elected mayor. Ford did appear on stage and announced his support for Herenton.²² By 1991, African Americans were a majority of Memphis's population—fifty-four percent, but only fifty percent of registered voters. This was thanks in large part to 75,000 white Memphians fleeing the city limits for the suburbs during the 1980s, a continuation of the white flight that began in the 1970s after court ordered busing.²³ The major issue that Herenton raised in the campaign was the Hackett administration's dismal performance on public housing, but, despite any policy issues and differences, the election was determined by race. Only

²¹ Ibid., 74-78.

²² Ibid., 146-147.

²³ Ibid., 99-100.

one percent of blacks voted for Hackett and only three percent of whites voted for Herenton. Despite record black turnout it did not match white turnout and the election was decided by an extraordinarily narrow 142 votes. Dr. Herenton had ended the reign of white conservatives in Memphis.²⁴

The Evolution of Tourism in Memphis: From Public Libraries to Graceland

Over the course of the twentieth century, the very definition of what constituted a tourist attraction in Memphis changed dramatically. By studying postcards as well as articles on tourism in Memphis in both the city's promotional materials and more unbiased sources, a rough picture of how the tourist landscape changed from the turn of the twentieth century to century's end emerges. Postcards from the early 1900s highlight the types of tourist attractions that were characteristic during the period. The main themes include the Mississippi River and steamboats, cotton fields and processing, the downtown commercial district, hotels, department stores, and public buildings such as the Cossitt Library, the Customs House, and the Shelby County Courthouse, among others. By the end of the century, little of the CBD core appears in the tourist information. The Pyramid Arena, the Peabody Hotel, Mud Island, and Beale Street are the main attractions near downtown. During the 1980s, the most visited tourist site in Memphis was the ubiquitous Graceland mansion. The National Civil Rights Museum, the Pink Palace Museum, Sun Studios, and the Stax Rock 'n' Soul Museum were also tourist draws around the turn of the twenty-first century.

²⁴ Ibid., 167, 175-193.

Just as with change in the types of attractions popular during the twentieth century, the types of events—festivals and fairs—that drew people to Memphis changed over the course of the century. In the early twentieth century, the largest tourism event in Memphis was the Mid South Fair, which began just before the Civil War. During the 1930s, the Cotton Carnival became another major event in Memphis. The Cotton Carnival, which celebrated the Old South with “mythic historical reenactments of plantation life,” began during the Great Depression as a tool to promote the city of Memphis and its central industry, cotton. The event—which was segregated except for the few blacks who played slaves or who pulled the floats in the parade—sparked an alternative event begun by Dr. R. Q. and Ethel Venson called the Cotton Makers’ Jubilee, which began to fade after being a target of black college students and the NAACP in the early 1960s.²⁵ The Cotton Carnival began to diminish after the murder of Dr. King, but the event—in a vastly scaled-back version—continues into the present as Carnival Memphis. In the late 1970s, the Memphis in May International Festival with its Beale Street Musical Festival took over the prominence that the Mid South Fair and the Cotton Carnival once had in the city. In addition to the music festival, Memphis in May also hosted the World Championship Barbeque Cooking Contest, International Week, and the Sunset Symphony. **(Fig. 5)**

Scholarship on tourism is somewhat sparse, but the analysis of two of its main contributors shed light on the change in tourism from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. Though the objective of both Dean MacCannell’s and John Urry’s work on tourism is to understand the phenomenon of tourism—and not to study the historical changes in tourism from the medieval pilgrimage to contemporary Disney World,

²⁵ Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 242.

which unfortunately has not been written—their work can be read, despite their author's intentions, as a description of the difference in the objectives and desires of tourism in the era of Modernity (MacCannell) and Postmodernity (Urry). In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell argues that because modern man has anxiety about the authenticity of personal relationships, when operating as a tourist he seeks authenticity in the sites he visits. He cites late nineteenth-century Parisian travel literature, which shows that upper class tourism information stressed everyday activities, proof of a search for authenticity.²⁶ John Urry argues the exact opposite of MacCannell. He believes that tourism is in opposition to the everyday. Instead, driven by television, film, and other media, anticipation of touristic images, often inauthentic, drive tourism.²⁷ By looking at how tourism changed over the course of the twentieth century in Memphis, it seems, to misuse and simplify their conclusions, that MacCannell's theory applies better to tourism during the first half of the twentieth century and that Urry's theory applies to tourism during the post-Industrial, Postmodern era.

Through the first half of the twentieth century in Memphis, city promoters combined much of the information for tourism with other promotional materials for the city such as business and investment promotion or outreach to attract new citizens to move to Memphis. For example, an article from the late 1910s on Memphis in the Illinois Central Railroad Company's magazine, a publication somewhat akin to the in-flight magazines airlines provide, primarily highlighted the business opportunities available in Memphis from the city's transportation and shipping options to the area's raw materials and

²⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

²⁷ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.

manufacturing base, but the article also focused the reader's attention on the possibilities for those who might move to or visit the city, especially convention goers. The article emphasized the benefits of living in Memphis: parks, highways, education, and hospitals. It also claimed the city was a harmonious place to live: "The foreign element is negligible, a fact which makes for harmony in all relationships of life here." For visitors the article highlights Overton Park, the Zoo, the commercial district, the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, and the Shelby County Courthouse.²⁸ A convention brochure from the 1920s shows the attractions that boosters wanted convention-goers to know. In addition to the Memphis and Shelby County Auditorium, where conventions at the time took place, the guide points to the Shelby County Courthouse, The Tennessee Club, the Cossitt Library, Southwestern University, Overton Park and the Brooks Museum, the city's two railroad stations, local country clubs, options for outdoor activities, and major downtown hotels such as the Peabody, the Chisca, Hotel Gayoso, the Claridge, and the Parkview.²⁹ (**Figs 6 & 7**)

A 1927 article in the *Evening Appeal* advocated that Memphians in lieu of traveling for their vacation should consider staying and enjoying Memphis. The article suggests attractions for locals to enjoy. The author suggests local swimming pools, golf courses, playgrounds and parks, motor boating, fishing, dancing pavilions and roof gardens, and the Fair Grounds.³⁰ A guide sponsored by the New Deal, Federal Writers' Project, written in the 1930s illustrates the full spectrum of what constituted the tourist landscape in Memphis

²⁸ "Memphis, Tennessee," *Illinois Central Magazine*, March 1919, 17-31.

²⁹ "For Conventions: Memphis," no exact date, in possession of author. The booklet clearly dates from the 1920s because photographs of the downtown show the Lincoln America Building while the Sterrick Building, completed in 1929, is not built.

³⁰ Mary York, "How About Memphis for Your Vacation," *Evening Appeal*, May 18, 1927.

and Shelby County in the 1930s. The guide lists parks; important buildings, from the Shelby County Courthouse to the Memphis Hay and Grain Elevator; clubs and social organizations; hospitals; the zoo; and Cotton Row.³¹ Notably Beale Street does not appear in any of the early tourism materials, but it does appear in travel writing from the same period. British river adventurer and travel-writer, Major R. Raven-Hart's *Down the Mississippi*, discusses his visit to Memphis and Beale Street: "It is definitely the sort of place that one must be taken to, and by someone of colour. Later in the year, and all through the winter, white visitors are catered for by the 'Beale Street Ramblers,' whose show admits both races; but at the moment all the drinking-places and cabarets were negro, and (so a large and friendly policeman told us) they do not welcome visitors, especially of the tourist type like ourselves. I don't at all blame them."³² Raven-Hart also explored other colorful and iconic aspects of Memphis that did not appear in the sanctioned tourism materials. While in Memphis, he stayed in a hotel that proved to be a house of prostitution.³³ Prostitution in Memphis had already received publicity when the tenderloin district around Gayoso Street appeared in William Faulkner's first commercial success, *Sanctuary* (1931). Raven-Hart did go to several usual tourist attractions of Memphis during the period: Cotton Row, the riverfront, and the Mid South State Fair.³⁴

In the postwar years, the emphasis in the promotional material began gradually to change. The imposing civic structures downtown mostly disappear from the literature. The Chamber of Commerce's 1949 promotional guide, "Memphis on the Mississippi," provides

³¹ "Points of Interest," Federal Writers' Project for Tennessee State Guide, February 10, 1936, MPL, MSCR, Memphis Information Files, Description and Travel.

³² Major R. Raven-Hart, *Down the Mississippi*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1938), 110.

³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-121.

a good overview the shift in emphasis in both tourism advertisements and the promotional materials for business, investment, and individual relocation. Like earlier promotional materials the guide suggests visitors see the city's parks: "They offer everything from golfing, tennis, boating, picnicing [sic.], art galleries and natural history museums to ancient burial grounds and one of the nation's finest zoos."³⁵ (**Fig. 8**) It also recommends seeing the river, the Cotton Exchange Building, theaters, including the Memphis Open Air Theater, and the city's downtown hotels. Unlike earlier tourism information, this brochure mentions the newly popular Cotton Carnival: "Louisville has its Kentucky Derby, New Orleans its Mardi Gras, St. Louis its Veiled Prophet, Pasadena its Tournament of Roses – and Memphis has its Cotton Carnival! It started as a minor parade sixteen years ago and has developed into one of the Nation's gayest celebrations – a full week of breath-taking pageantry that annually draws hundreds of thousands of visitors from all section of the country."³⁶ (**Fig. 9**) The pamphlet also mentions Beale Street for the first time in the city's promotional materials, just eleven years after Raven-Hart claimed that visitors, especially tourists were not welcome on Beale. The Chamber did add a major, though false, caveat to their reference to Beale Street: "And there is the 'Beale Street' Memphis immortalized in the 'blues' songs of W.C. Handy. However, it is a far cry from the Memphis-of-legend to the Memphis of today where more than 400,000 very modern people live, work, and play in a very modern manner in an area of some 100 square miles. Even Beale Street has changed. It used to be a synonym of Heaven for the South's negroes, but today it is a well-lighted, modern shopping district."³⁷ As with their description of a "modern" Beale Street,

³⁵ "Memphis on the Mississippi," Memphis Chamber of Commerce: 1949, MPL, MSCR, MIF, 10.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

the Chamber's brochure makes pains to stress the progressive nature of Memphis in their appeal to potential business and industrial development including highlighting the "huge slum clearance projects and the accompanying modern housing project, three of which are for Negroes."³⁸

A 1963 promotional guide, "Magic Memphis," again points to a shift in the kinds of attractions the city wanted to market. This guide highlights Memphis's "Southern Charm." It promotes more of a feeling than a list of specific attractions that earlier guides emphasize. Images of azaleas and white columned mansions, refined restaurants and nightspots, and a wealth of cultural refinements compete with images of quintessential Southern leisure activities such as hunting, fishing, waterskiing, golfing, football, and sunbathing. **(Figs. 10, 11 & 12)** One double-page of the guide, however, shows a few attractions including Beale Street and Graceland. While the images fit with the theme of Southern gentility, the subjects are markedly different from earlier guides. The caption on Graceland even tantalizes potential visitors with the possibility of seeing Elvis himself: "Thousands of Elvis Presley fans from all over the globe visit his Memphis mansion, and some of the lucky ones see the singer in person."³⁹ **(Fig. 13)** Despite their appeal to "Southern charm," civic leaders were still unsatisfied with the development of tourism in Memphis. By the late 1960s, the Downtown Association, eager for Memphis to develop a tourism industry that could compete with other Southern and Midwestern cities, sent business and civic leaders to study what other cities had done to redevelop their downtown and encourage tourism. The group toured Atlanta, Dallas, St. Louis, and Minneapolis.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

³⁹ "Magic Memphis," 1963, MPL, MSCR, MIF "Description and Travel."

⁴⁰ Jefferson Riker, "City's Tourist Effort May Be Finding Focus," *Commercial Appeal*, March, 5, 1972.

Even in the early 1980s, the *Commercial Appeal* satirized the city's second-rate status among other large cities in the region and the provincial efforts of local leaders to compete.⁴¹ (**Fig. 14**)

By the late 1970s and 1980s, the sorry state of the tourist landscape and much of the urban landscape in the Memphis had civic leaders frustrated and many Memphians sensitive about their city: "It is a massive inferiority complex which tends to make Memphians feel their city is no good, that it lacks leadership, and that most of the people in this city are motivated by clearly selfish intentions."⁴² In 1976, the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* polled the city asking the question, "What is the big thing to see in Memphis." The top response was the Mississippi River. Other responses included Overton Square, Overton Park, Beale Street, and the airport, but a few respondents were completely negative: "I'd tell him to go down and look at the bridges. Then jump off."⁴³ Despite the negativity of the late 1970s and 1980s, Memphis continued vigorously to promote tourism, especially with the rise of Graceland. By then, however, the advertised tourist landscape had completely changed. The Delta Airlines in-flight magazine from 1983, the year Beale Street re-opened, represents the shift. The Mississippi River continued to headline the material, but it was then coupled with the new park, museum, and river walk at Mud Island. The article stressed that Memphis was turning a corner, thanks in no small part to a newly opened Beale Street:

The past few decades have not been kind to this stately old city. Beset by a variety of ills, ranging from an increasingly suburban population to continued racial tension, Memphis seemed doomed to follow so many other

⁴¹ "How Do We Get 'Em to Sit Back and Stay a Spell," *Commercial Appeal*, May 11, 1980.

⁴² Walter W. Walker, "Memphis Drags Because of Its Inferiority Complex," *Commercial Appeal*, June 10, 1977.

⁴³ Charles Goodman, "'What Is Worth Seeing in City of Memphis?,'" *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 16, 1976.

cities down the path of urban decay. At one point, the city even considered razing several blocks of Beale Street, listed on the National Historic Register, because the buildings there had deteriorated to such a point that pedestrians were endangered by falling bricks. All that is changing now. The signs of rebirth are everywhere from the freshly painted new buildings along Beale Street (the Home of the Blues) to the ducks once again splashing in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel, the centerpiece for the newly reborn downtown.⁴⁴

By 1992, familiar sites continued to make the list such as the zoo, the art museum, and the Pink Palace Museum, but the new attractions at Graceland, Mud Island, W.C. Handy Park and Beale, A. Schwab, Elvis Presley Plaza, and the Lorraine Motel haven taken over as the dominant tourist attractions.⁴⁵ By the late 1990s, tourist sites associated with Memphis's musical heritage, Egyptian connections—from the Pyramid to the University of Memphis's Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology—its Civil War past, and even the city's appearance in recent Hollywood films such as *The Firm* and *The Rainmaker*, were the mainstays of the city's promotional materials.⁴⁶ (**Figs. 15, 16, 17, 18, & 19**)

“Train I Ride,” Jim Jarmusch’s Vision of Memphis

With *Mystery Train* (1989), independent auteur filmmaker, Jim Jarmusch, provided an image of the Memphis tourist landscape directly before the city and private groups began to create Memphis's present-day tourist industry based around the city's musical and Civil Rights heritage. Filmed during the summer of 1988, *Mystery Train* depicts downtown Memphis as a desolate urban wasteland, ravaged by poverty and decay, and emptied by urban renewal. Film critics note the unflattering portrait of Memphis,

⁴⁴ Michael Bane, “New Rhythms on the River,” *Sky* (April 1983), 76-80.

⁴⁵ “Convention and Visitors Guide,” 1992, MPL, MSCR, MIF “Description and Travel.”

⁴⁶ David B. Dawson, *Memphis: New Visions, New Horizons*, Memphis: Towery Publishing, 1997.

Tennessee, with descriptions such as, “this is not a Memphis approved by the chamber of commerce,” or “the Memphis that Mr. Jarmusch elects to show us...is no Memphis that any hometown booster would want to recognize,” which was precisely Jarmusch’s intention.⁴⁷ In the Criterion Collection’s supplemental materials, local record store and recording label owner, Sherman Willmott, claims that the film “captured the time and feel of Memphis in the late eighties.... Quite frankly the ennui of it all... He’d done such an excellent job of capturing...the feel the spirit of Memphis and the language of the city.”⁴⁸ In addition to capturing the spirit of late 1980s Memphis and the sad state of its historic districts and tourist industry around the downtown, *Mystery Train* also exploits many of the myths and stereotypical touchstones of local culture: Elvis, rock ‘n’ roll, R&B, prostitution, gun violence and murder, racial strife, the Civil Rights Movement, Beale Street, and cotton. In doing so, Jarmusch at the same time heightens the sense of place in the film and amplifies the surrealism that he finds in the urban landscape of Memphis. The blues, one of Memphis’s most significant cultural contributions, however, are noticeably missing. By keeping the blues absent from *Mystery Train*, Jarmusch points out the preposterousness of the city’s and the country’s obsession with the white cultural icons of the early rock ‘n’ roll era, particularly Elvis, to the exclusion on the great blues artists who preceded them.

The film involves three distinct segments that all deal with the encounters of foreigners in downtown Memphis on the same night. The segments offer three different perspectives on Memphis in the late 1980s. The first is that of a Japanese tourist couple.

⁴⁷ Roger Ebert, “Mystery Train (1989),” rogerebert.com, July 21, 2010. Vincent Canby, “Film Festival: A Blissful ‘Mystery Train’ from Jim Jarmusch,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1989.

⁴⁸ “Memphis Tour,” in *Mystery Train*. Directed by Jim Jarmusch. (1989; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), Blu-ray.

Second is from the point of view of a stranded Italian traveler. The third shows the perspective of a British immigrant. In showing the viewer the perspective of the tourist visiting Memphis, Jarmusch illustrates the absurdity of tourism in a city waylaid by a devastating mix of poverty, white flight, and failed urban renewal. The couple at the center of the tourism segment relish their time in Memphis because of their romanticization of the rock 'n' roll era of Memphis despite the city's bombed-out appearance. Their interaction with Memphis is superficial and idealized and contrasts both with the images of the city depicted in their segment and interactions of the two other foreigners in the subsequent segments. In the second segment, a worldly European stays the night in Memphis. Despite the fact that she was at the airport when she learned that she was going to be stranded in Memphis for the night, she leaves the airport area and travels downtown. After walking down a nearly empty Beale Street, like the couple of the first segment, she too wanders through the desolation of the South Main area, but where the tourists were blinded by their romanticized vision of rock 'n' roll Memphis, the stranded traveler finds the city utterly baffling. Jarmusch's use of an Italian woman experiencing the ennui of Memphis purposefully juxtaposes Michelangelo Antonioni's great trio of films—*L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), and *L'eclisse* (1962)—in which the characters experience ennui due to the vacuousness of their upper class existences with the character in *Mystery Train* who experiences ennui due to the urban landscape in which she finds herself.⁴⁹ In addition, Jarmusch throws the absurdity of the Memphis urban landscape and culture into relief by showing an urbane European exploring the city. In the final segment, the viewer gets the perspective of a British immigrant. Unlike the characters in the previous two segments, the

⁴⁹ Jarmusch has freely acknowledged the extent of Antonioni's influence on his own work: "Michelangelo Antonioni looms large in my subconscious." See http://www.jim-jarmusch.net/two_weeks_to_go.html

immigrant is familiar with Memphis and, therefore, the viewpoint is more akin to that of a resident than an outsider. Whereas in the first two segments, the characters explore this strange and unfamiliar city, in the immigrant's segment, the viewer is drawn into places the characters from the earlier segments only walked past. The immigrant, however, is still unfamiliar with the culture, both popular and racial. The unfamiliarity of the tourists, the stranded traveler, and the immigrant with the urban landscape and the culture of the city provide the comic raw material for Jarmusch's wry comedy.

In each of the three segments, the characters check into the same rundown—and in real life, long-closed—hotel, the Arcade, which, torn down shortly after filming, was located on G.E. Patterson (formerly Calhoun) Avenue near the corner of Main Street around seven blocks south of Beale. In the film, the Arcade is staffed by an eccentric duo of desk clerk, played by R&B singer Screamin' Jay Hawkins, and bellboy, Cinque Lee, who provide the (deadpan) comedic center of the film. **(Fig. 20)** They ensure that the actions in the three disparate segments are unified both spatially and temporally. The film is bookended by a symmetrical introduction and conclusion—a technique most famously developed by Alfred Hitchcock—that shows the arrival and departure of a Japanese couple, Mitzuko (Youki Kudoh) and Jun (Masatoshi Nagase) via Amtrak through the kudzu-choked delta landscape of the Mid-South. **(Fig. 21)** The first segment, titled “Far from Yokohama,” follows the arrival of Mitzuko and Jun, a teenage couple obsessed with the 1950s rock ‘n’ roll stars who originated in Memphis. Mitzuko is obsessed with Elvis Presley, while her boyfriend prefers Carl Perkins. The film opens with the couple arriving in Memphis on the Amtrak train. When the train arrives at the dirty and empty station in the South Main Street area, the couple begins comparing Memphis to Yokohama,

something the couple does throughout the segment. **(Fig. 22)** As they sit in train station, they discuss where they are going to go. He wants to see Sun Studios where all of the greats, including Perkins, recorded. She wants to go to Graceland. He gives in and says they'll go to Graceland. They leave the station on foot walking through old, poor neighborhoods filled with shotgun houses. **(Fig. 23)** They then stumble upon Sun Studios by accident, a wry sight gag based on Sun Studios' inconspicuousness: "I thought we were going to Graceland." **(Fig. 24)**

The couple goes inside to take the "tour" of Sun Studios, which was a three-room outfit. Mitzuko and Jun with a few other tourists slowly shuffle along one of its four walls as a fast-talking tour guide tells about Elvis Presley's recording of "That's All Right Mama." **(Fig. 25)** After leaving Sun, the couple decides to put off Graceland and walk around Memphis. The wanderings that Jarmusch presents depict a central city that appears completely abandoned. The couple walks past the long-closed silent-film-era Lamar Theater **(Fig. 26)**, a sad little barbershop (outside of which Jarmusch shows a character that appears in the final segment) **(Fig. 27)**, and the "bombed-out" area of Beale Street looking north from Linden Avenue **(Fig. 28)**. The couple stops their walk at the feet of the statue of Elvis in front of the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division Building on Beale. **(Fig. 29)** There the couple argues over whether Elvis or Carl Perkins was better. Then Jun makes another comparison of Memphis to Yokohama, which shows that Jarmusch is once again stressing the emptiness and desolation in post-Urban Renewal Memphis: "You know, Memphis does look like Yokohama. Just more space. If you took away sixty percent of the buildings in Yokohama it would look like this." Soon the couple checks into the Arcade Hotel—shortly after a prostitute's departure—and are taken to their room, which boasts a

large portrait of Elvis. (**Figs. 30 & 31**) Jun and Mitzuko again have a conversation comparing Memphis and Yokohama:

Mitzuko: What are you looking at?

Jun: Memphis.

Mitzuko: Is it like Yokohama with sixty percent of the buildings gone?

Jun: No, nothing like that. This isn't Yokohama. This is America.

Mitzuko: What are you thinking about?

Jun: To be 18 feels cool. And so far from Yokohama. It feels cool to be in Memphis.

In spite of all the devastation and decay that the couple witnessed that day, because of the city's connection to the legendary early rock 'n' roll stars, these pop-culture-saturated teenagers still find Memphis to be "cool." In the morning, the couple hears a gun shot: Mitzuko: "Was that a gun?" Jun: "Probably. This is America." They leave the hotel.

The second segment, "A Ghost," follows Luisa (Nicoletta Braschi), a recently widowed Italian woman who comes to Memphis to retrieve her deceased husband's remains. She is forced to stay overnight in Memphis before her flight to Rome leaves the next day. After leaving the Memphis Airport, Luisa steps out of a cab on Beale Street in front of A. Schwab's. (**Fig. 32**) Luisa also walks through the desolation of the South Main area. (**Fig. 33**) She enters the Arcade Restaurant. As she is sitting alone, a man sits at her table and proceeds to tell her a story. He says that driving back to Memphis one night he kept passing hitchhikers that looked like the same person. He finally stops to pick one up: "And he asked me if I knew where Graceland was. Of course, I knew where Graceland was. Everyone knows where Graceland is." He claims it was Elvis in his car, and tells Luisa the "King" said that when you meet that girl from Rome give something to her. The object he was supposed to deliver was Elvis's comb. Luisa tells him she does not believe him and pays him \$20 to leave. When she finally leaves, the man is outside with another man waiting on her. She changes direction and goes inside the Arcade Hotel. Once inside she

literally runs into a woman named Dee Dee, who was leaving because she could not afford the room. They agree to share a room for the night. Dee Dee tells Luisa about the boyfriend she just left, Johnny, who works at a cotton warehouse and has the nickname of Elvis. Luisa tells Dee Dee about the story the man in the restaurant told her. Dee Dee explains that everyone in Memphis has heard that story. With Dee Dee asleep and “Blue Moon” playing on the radio—another device that Jarmusch uses to unite the three segments—Luisa sees the ghost of Elvis Presley. **(Fig. 34)** He apologizes for apparently getting the wrong address and disappears before Luisa can wake Dee Dee to see him. Memphis proves to be a city so saturated by the memory of Elvis that he literally appears before Luisa’s eyes. They awake in the morning and hear the same gunshot from the first segment.

The final segment, titled “Lost in Space,” deals with Johnny (Joe Strummer), the ex-boyfriend of Dee Dee, his friend Will Robinson (Rick Aviles) and Dee Dee’s brother, Charlie (Steve Buscemi). It begins in a seedy bar. **(Fig. 35)** Johnny plays Rufus Thomas’s “The Memphis Train” on the jukebox. **(Fig. 36)** Johnny and his friend Ed (Vondie Curtis-Hall) talk about needing a job: “It seems like everybody in this town is out of work,” and Johnny’s girlfriend leaving him: “You know if it wasn’t for her I wouldn’t even live in the fucking town.” When a man playing pool (D’Army Bailey) uses Johnny’s nickname, Johnny pulls out a gun.⁵⁰ Ed calls Johnny’s friend Will Robinson and tells him to come with someone to help because Johnny is drunk. Will arrives with his “brother-in-law,” Charlie, who is reluctant to go inside: “They let white people in here.” The two convince Johnny to leave the bar. They pass the abandoned Capitol Theater of Stax Records—torn

⁵⁰ *Mystery Train* depicts a few notable Memphians including the R&B great Rufus Thomas and local judge, civil rights activist, and founder of the National Civil Rights Museum, D’Army Bailey.

down shortly after filming. They go to a run-down liquor store. Inside the clerk makes a racist comment about Will: “Niggers, man you got to watch them every second.” Johnny pulls out his gun and shoots the manager. **(Fig. 37)** They leave with two bottles of cheap whisky, and get drunk riding around town. **(Fig. 38)** They head to the Arcade Hotel where Will’s brother-in-law, who works as the night clerk, gives them the key to the notorious room number twenty-two. Their room, dirtier than the first two, has a bad painting of Elvis, which Johnny has Charlie turn to the wall because it bothers him:

Johnny: Why is he fucking everywhere? It’s a black hotel, black neighborhood, black dudes working at the desk. Why don’t they have a portrait of Otis Redding or Martin Luther King?

Will: That’s cause this a white *owned* hotel. They just got the brothers working here.

Johnny: I see what you mean.

Will: Next time we gonna add Malcolm X. **(Fig. 39)**

In the morning, Johnny admits to Charlie that he and Dee Dee were never married—Charlie had been under the impression that they were brothers-in-law: “You mean after all this shit you ain’t my fucking brother-in-law.” Johnny points his gun at his own head. Charlie dashes to take it away and in the process is shot in the leg: “You’re not even my brother-in-law and now you’ve fucking shot me.” The film ends with Johnny and Will taking Charlie to a doctor Johnny knows in Arkansas as the train bearing the Japanese couple—bound for Fats Domino’s house in New Orleans after their successful trip to Graceland that morning—and Dee Dee—bound for Natchez—leaves Memphis. **(Fig. 40)**

More than any other document from the period, *Mystery Train* manifests—though with humor and some exaggeration—the pitiful state of both the Memphis tourist industry and the downtown area of the city in the late 1980s. The remainder of this chapter follows the creation of a tourism industry in Memphis in the ruins of urban renewal. Despite the

slow push toward a tourism industry in the city based largely on its cultural history in the 1970s and 1980s and the miserable state of the tourist landscape that *Mystery Train* depicts in the late 1980s, the city did manage to create a viable, though only spottily successful, tourism industry in the 1990s and 2000s. *Mystery Train* also highlights the racial tensions inherent in any attempt to market Memphis as a destination for cultural tourism. Jarmusch emphasizes these tensions in his symmetrical beginning and ending. As the Japanese couple enters Memphis on the train, Elvis Presley's "Mystery Train" plays over the opening titles. As they exit the city via train, Junior Parker's "Mystery Train" plays over the closing credits. Both recorded at Sam Phillips's Sun Records, Junior Parker's blues heavy R&B version was recorded two years prior to Presley's more widely known version. Even in the structure of the film, Jarmusch points to the complicated racial waters of Elvis Presley and the origins of rock 'n' roll. This racial tension based on cultural heritage is at the fore of many of the attempts to create a tourism industry in Memphis in the 1980s and 1990s, nowhere more so than Beale Street.

How Beale Street Became What It Is, Part II: "Is This All There Is?"

After the Beale Street National Historic Foundation (BSNHF) took over management of the redevelopment of Beale in late 1974, the BSNHF accomplished very little during the rest of the 1970s. Despite the non-profit's ability to obtain grants from different levels of government, the BSNHF was unable to secure anywhere close to the required capital investments from the private sector. Ron Barassi's Beale Street USA, which had been given—controversially—management rights by BSNHF, was reimbursed for their investments and let go. Barassi, who was twenty-six at the time the MHA awarded

his firm the redevelopment contract claimed all he left the project with was “a PhD in political science in Memphis.” In late 1977, the BSNHF transferred the development rights to the Division of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) of the city government in an attempt to secure funding for building restoration from the US Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA)—created in the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. The deal also transferred ownership of the property from the BSNHF back to the city.⁵¹ The newly created Center City Commission (CCC) then managed the property. With the creation of the CCC, three civic boards which had regulated downtown redevelopment were disbanded: the Downtown Council, the Civic Center Design and Review Committee, and the Business District Advisory Board, which levied special taxes on downtown property in order to build the Mid-America Mall. The CCC, modeled after the Downtown Council, a public-private partnership in Minneapolis, combined board members from the city and county governments and leaders in the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce (MACC). The new, eleven-member board—which still operates in the present—governed the activities of government and businesses within the downtown area and the area within the parkways, including the power of zoning and the issuance of building permits.⁵² Soon after the creation of the CCC, the City Council created the Center City Development Corporation as an instrument of industrial development run by the CCC.⁵³

⁵¹ Terry Keeter, *Commercial Appeal*, November 12, 1977.

⁵² Susan Adler Thorpe, “Panel Formed to Revitalize Downtown,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 27, 1976. “Downtown Unity,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 4, 1976. Thomas Jordan, “Resolution Dissolves Downtown Council,” *Commercial Appeal*, February 23, 1977.

⁵³ “Council Approves Start of City Center Corp.,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 5, 1977.

In 1978, the city of Memphis sought a third redeveloper for Beale. The mayor selected a seven-member group called the Beale Street Steering Committee whose job it was to direct Beale's restoration. The model that local government wanted to set up for the new redeveloper was shopsteading. Like with Memphis's adaptation of the Baltimore Plan in the 1950s, the city modeled shopsteading on a somewhat similar program in Baltimore. Memphis's shopsteading plan involved the city maintaining ownership of the property while the developer collected nominal ground rent and fees for the tenant association, and because of the minimal rents, the tenant made all improvements to the property.⁵⁴ The new developers chosen in 1978, however, blocked the shopsteading move because they did not want to lose control of redevelopment.⁵⁵ In late August of 1978, the committee advised Mayor Chandler to select two new firms—from a list of five, including one from outside Memphis—to redevelop Beale: the Beale Street Development Corporation (BSDC) and Carlisle Properties (CP). The CCC and the DHCD brokered a last-minute joint proposal between the BSDC and CP. The BSDC was started in 1973 by African American businessmen who wanted to see redevelopment on Beale Street. The group's executive director, George B. Miller, owned the Muhammad Ali Town II Cinema at 380 Beale Street, which was the first building constructed on Beale Street since urban renewal. Rev. James Netters was the chair of the eight-member board for the organization that included Paul Savarin, owner of Blues Alley, the R&B singer, Rufus Thomas, and Rev. James Smith, the administrator of Local 1733 of AFSME, the sanitation workers' chapter. Gene Carlisle and two other investors formed CP in 1973 as a real estate investment and management

⁵⁴ "Mayor Picks Beale Overseer," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, April 7, 1978. Thomas Jordan, "\$2 Million Loan Is Available for Beale Street Developer," *Commercial Appeal*, March 23, 1978. Betsy Kelly, "Beale Street Attracts Tenants, Shopsteader," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 28, 1982.

⁵⁵ "Mrs. Aswumb Predicts Beale Deterioration," *Memphis-Press Scimitar*, October 23, 1980.

corporation. (**Fig. 41**) At the time of their selection, CP managed and or developed properties in twelve cities including Memphis. The reasons for the selection of more than one firm are two-fold. First, HUD threatened to block a redevelopment loan to the development company, channeled through DHCD, if the city selected a private firm. The city chose to blend the private firm, CP, with the non-profit, BSDC. Second, the hope of the local government was that the selection of a black firm and a white firm, both with development experience, would calm some of the racial tension that roiled around the MHA's selection of the Barassi firm and would help spur private investment in the project.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, redevelopment on the far west end of the Beale Street project zone, the area known as the Beale Street Landing, got under way in 1976 under the direction of the Memphis Development Foundation (MDF), an organization run by Union Planters National Bank, who hired a contracting firm to develop the first business in the project zone.⁵⁷ The 6.4 acre project, however, was slow to get going. Union Planters National Bank provided financing for the renovation of both the Ellis Warehouse and the Bell Warehouse for loft apartments, located south of Beale on Wagner St.⁵⁸ In March of 1978, CP's Beale Street Landing Ltd. (BSLL), run partly by Gene Carlisle, took over the redevelopment of the Beale Street Landing from the MDF.⁵⁹ The BSLL proposed a fifteen-story apartment building on the north side of Beale between Wagner and Front, but by mid-1981 not even

⁵⁶ "Beale Plans May Hit Snag," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 30, 1978. Thomas Jordan, "Beale Restoration Is Expected to Get Tenants by Next Fall," *Commercial Appeal*, September 1, 1978.

⁵⁷ "Beale Project Launched," *Commercial Appeal*, December 17, 1976.

⁵⁸ Lewis Nolan, "UP Bank, Development Foundation to Take Applications for Beale Units," *Commercial Appeal*, July 3, 1977.

⁵⁹ Thomas Jordan, "Beale Restoration Is Expected to Get Tenants by Next Fall," *Commercial Appeal*, September 1, 1978.

the renovation of the Ellis or Bell Warehouses had begun.⁶⁰ Only at the end of 1982 did Beale Street Landing open, and when it did, it was simply a collection of restaurants and retail shops in three former cotton warehouses.⁶¹ The luxury apartment building Carlisle hoped to build at Beale and Front landed BSLL in court because when the financial requirements for the project exceeded the FHA's lending limit, BSLL had no funds to pay the two engineering firms and the architecture firm hired to oversee the construction of the building.⁶² By the end of the 1984, all of the retail stores in the Beale Street Landing project closed, leaving just three remaining restaurants.⁶³ In 1986, Union Planters National Bank foreclosed on BSLL, which, by this time, Carlisle had mostly divested himself from.⁶⁴ The failed project area saw an opportunity for another chance at redevelopment in 2005. Gene Carlisle, once again, proposed a development at the waterfront on the west end of Beale Street, a 30-story condominium and hotel at One Beale Street. In 2006, he expanded his plans to include an additional tower that would be the tallest building in Memphis. The City Council even approved zoning exceptions for the project despite opposition from residents of Waterford Plaza including John Tigrett's widow (see the account of the Pyramid below), but funding for the project disappeared with the onset of the Great Recession in late 2007. In 2010, Carlisle moved his company's offices out of the Peabody Place Tower and into space occupied by former restaurants in his failed Beale Street Landing Project.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ "Loan Guarantee Approved for Beale Street Landing," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 9, 1981.

⁶¹ Richard Provost, "Beale Shops Could Net Millions," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 12, 1982.

⁶² Ron Taylor, "Court Orders Beale Developers to Pay," *Commercial Appeal*, January 28, 1986.

⁶³ Charles Bernsen, "Beale Landing Shops to Quit Retail Scene," *Commercial Appeal*, November 14, 1984.

⁶⁴ Jerome Obermark, "Bank Begins Downtown Foreclosure," *Commercial Appeal*, August 22, 1986.

⁶⁵ Amos Maki, "One Beale Sings 'Wow,'" *Commercial Appeal*, December 3, 2005. Amos Maki, "Businessman Proposes Towering Beale Project," *Commercial Appeal*, August 10, 2006. "One Beale Project Wins Approval from City Council," *Memphis Business Journal*, October 18, 2006. Wayne Risher, "One Beale Developer Gets Tax Break to Turn Restaurant into Offices," *Commercial Appeal*, April 13, 2010.

Back in the Beale Street Bluelight District, in early 1979, the bodies in charge of the project area chose four architecture firms to draw up plans for redeveloping only the block between Third and Fourth Streets. The local DHCD pledged \$2 million to construction costs, the city and county governments gave \$1.2 million, and the \$2 million dollar grant from the EDA made up the total needed for construction, but after the four firms were finished with the redevelopment plans, eleven different government agencies—both local and federal—had to approve the plan, including the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (NACHP).⁶⁶ In mid-1979, Aubrey Howard, the former executive director of the BSNHF, expressed skepticism over anyone's ability to redevelop Beale Street because of the lack of interest in financing the project, which he claimed was due to race: "People here are not interested in anything that would reflect blackness." The executive director of the CCC, John Dudas, was hopeful that Beale would be redeveloped as a black cultural center: "It will be a major tourist attraction...a cultural center for black history and the arts.... It will not be just a reproduction of Beale Street. It will be a unique Memphis experience.... It should become a place to display new talent and where people will come from around the world to find talent."⁶⁷

In all of the disagreement over the effects of race on the redevelopment of Beale and whether there was the political and financial will to redevelop Beale Street as a center for the celebration of black culture as the BSNHF and the CCC wanted to do, the original intentions of the MHA are important to remember because they were in direct opposition to later aspirations for the area. The deputy executive director of the MHA, Randall

⁶⁶ "Beale Street Renovation Roadblocks Are Falling Despite Lag in Schedule," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 29, 1979.

⁶⁷ Joseph Shapiro, "Beale Street Revival Aspirants Usually End up Singing Blues," *Commercial Appeal*, May 6, 1979.

Johnson, admitted that the MHA hoped to attract mostly white tourists to Beale Street, and, because of that, the MHA had to destroy the neighborhoods around Beale: “It was felt people just wouldn’t come to that type of area, or go through that type of area. For those reasons, the blocks immediately north and south of Beale Street were cleared.”⁶⁸ The Dudas and Johnson quotes reveal all of the contradictions inherent to the redevelopment of Beale Street: how ought they maintain the history of Beale Street while at the same time making it a tourist attraction that would make a financial profit and help a struggling downtown. Carlisle, who worked on developing the Beale area as a tourist attraction from 1978 into the present, believed, after the failure of the retail establishments in the Beale Street Landing project, that the only way to insure the success of retail shops in the Beale area—in the short-term—was to bring in residential development downtown.

When the MHA turned the buildings on Beale over to the DHCD, it put up painted plywood over all openings to the buildings. This created a moisture imbalance in the buildings that accelerated the deterioration of the mortar, caused a significant mold problem, and allowed much of the, in many cases, 100-plus-year-old wood to rot.⁶⁹ Many of the buildings left on Beale that remained nearly ten years after the MHA destroyed the last of the condemned buildings were only a shell. In the case of 203 Beale Street, the façade was held up by steel braces. Club Handy was completely a shell. 152 Beale had collapsed. Restoration work on a row of buildings on the south side of Beale at Third Street left only the façades of three buildings standing while the two flanking it had only the shells survive in 1980.⁷⁰ (**Fig. 42 & 43**)

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁰ Thomas Jordan, “‘Deficiencies’ in Beale Street Grant Bookkeeping Questioned,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 7, 1980.

By late 1979, construction on a small portion of the block between Third and Fourth was announced. The construction that began during late 1979 included reconstruction of the Pantaze Building on the southwest corner of Handy Circle and Beale along with restoration projects for both Daisy Theaters.⁷¹ By early 1980, work had begun on restoring the Pantaze Building, which had housed Club Handy in the 1930s.⁷² Meanwhile, the BSDC came under increasing fire in late 1980 and early 1981, due to evidence of profligate travel expenditures, especially on the part of George Miller, and because of Miller's ownership interest in a for-profit company, Beale Street Properties Ltd. (BSPL), which had a sublease agreement with BSDC. First, Miller took a leave of absence from BSDC and sold his holdings in BSPL, but the Finance Commissioner for the state of Tennessee, Lewis Donelson, said that any continued involvement from Miller would jeopardize state funding for the restoration project.⁷³ Later, Miller was fired from the group and replaced by board member Billy Heard as executive director. Rev. James Smith was the chair of the board. Shortly afterwards, CP withdrew from the project.⁷⁴

After languishing for much of 1981, the project began to move forward in early 1982 after the BSDC and the city agreed to a new contract that gave the group added responsibilities as well as performance requirements.⁷⁵ Just before signing the new contract, city leaders in both the public and private sector attended the Memphis Jobs

⁷¹ Orville Hancock, "Construction to Start on Beale Street This Year," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 22, 1979.

⁷² William Dawson, "Pantaze Work to Signal Beale Street Project Start," *Commercial Appeal*, February 3, 1980.

⁷³ Thomas Jordan, "Beale Staff's Spending Lavish, Records Show," *Commercial Appeal*, September 11, 1980. Brent Manley and David Rapp, "Chandler to Try Bypass of Miller on Beale Project," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 12, 1980. Robert Kellett, "Miller Leave Not Enough Change for Beale Funding, Says Donelson," *Commercial Appeal*, February 8, 1981. "Chandler Will Seek New Beale Partner," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 12, 1981.

⁷⁴ Charles Bernsen, "New Lease Approved by Beale Street Panel," *Commercial Appeal*, January 9, 1982.

⁷⁵ Charles Bernsen, "New Lease Approved by Beale Street Panel," *Commercial Appeal*, January 9, 1982.

Conference (MJC) at the Peabody Hotel. The conference, which was intended to help the city of Memphis determine what its economic future should be, was the idea of newly elected Governor Lamar Alexander. Local developer, John Elkington, who had been on the board of the BSNHF, was a panelist at the conference. There he met the new executive director of BSDC, Rev. James Smith. Elkington, co-owner of the real estate development firm Elkington and Keltner (EK), was a great admirer of Jim Rouse, whose Rouse Company was an early developer of enclosed shopping malls in the late 1950s; planned communities such as Columbia, Maryland, in the 1960s; and festival marketplaces such as Boston's Faneuil Hall, Baltimore's Harborplace, and New Orleans's Riverwalk Marketplace in the 1970s. Elkington and Rouse were both panelists on downtown development at the MJC. At the conference, Smith asked Elkington to consider his firm being the co-developer of the Beale Street project with BSDC. EK, along with two other firms, sent the city and BSDC a proposal for developing Beale. The city selected EK as the third private redeveloper to take the reins of Beale Street.⁷⁶

The new contract with BSDC and the selection of EK as the private developer put things in place for the project to receive the public financing it desperately needed. In early 1982, public financing for the project totaled \$11.6 million, with \$3.87 million from the EDA, \$3.5 million from the state of Tennessee, \$2 million from the HUD financed DHCD, \$1.6 million from the city, and \$600,000 from Shelby County. The plans for the street in 1982 included renovating Handy Park and turning it into a "performance park," joining the former Club Morocco with the New Daisy Theater for use as a restaurant, constructing a replica of the Zorilla building on the north side of Beale at Fourth, renovating the Daisy

⁷⁶ John A. Elkington, *Beale Street: Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008), 31-40.

Theater for use as a public information center and museum, restoring half the buildings between Second and Third, and returning to the shopsteading plan abandoned in 1978.⁷⁷ Over the course of twenty years, shopsteading tenants invested \$4.3 million into Beale Street, bringing the total investment during the 1980s and 1990s to just over \$20 million.⁷⁸

The first and most important move that EK and BSDC made in the early stages of the project was developing a security strategy that would help the tenants and future visitors feel comfortable in coming to Beale. Elkington reported a meeting with mortgage bankers in 1982 where a woman asked, “Aren’t you afraid that women will be raped down there?” and “If you have a daughter, I hope you won’t let her go down there.”⁷⁹ Despite the MHA’s decision to rid the area of the black neighborhood that surrounded it, many whites were still afraid to come near there at all. The second important step that EK took was to meet with as many leaders and potential future leaders in the black community as possible. As Elkington said, “For many, this was the first time they had ever had a serious discussion with a white businessman.”⁸⁰ When Beale opened, forty-percent of the businesses were black-owned, while thirty-percent of the advertising budget for the opening went to specifically African American media. Sixty-five-percent of the employment from all contractors were black, and five of the eight permanent staff members to oversee the project hired by BSDC and EK were black.⁸¹ Several celebrities were considering opening clubs on Beale Street including jazz and R&B singer, Lou Rawls, as well as Memphis great, B.B. King.⁸² There was, however, suspicion of EK and the plans for Beale Street among some

⁷⁷ “\$11.6 Million Put into Beale Project,” *Commercial Appeal*, January 17, 1982.

⁷⁸ Elkington, *Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, 44.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸¹ Anthony Hicks, “Beale Renovation in Full Swing; Minority Role Topic of Concern,” *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, May 7, 1983.

⁸² Charles Bernsen, “Rawls Planning Beale Nightclub,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 28, 1983.

African Americans, especially those with close ties to Beale. Famed Beale photographer, Ernest Withers's assessment of Beale Street was less than sunny:

They don't want anything of the past. The only past they want it W.C. Handy. The type of management required down there and the money charged for the footage doesn't allow for Black management. It's big business. Beale Street of yesterday was a kind of chitlin' type operation. Today it is a computer operation. The kind of attraction they want it to be is not the kind of attraction Black business people are geared to handle. That's why they put Elvis' [sic.] statue at the head and Handy's at the middle. Lou Rawls won't run a business down there. Whites will run a business for Lou Rawls. Lou Rawls will just be a name over the door.⁸³

Withers's comments echo the sentiments of many when the MHA first proposed turning Beale Street into a tourist attraction. His concerns also express the contradictions inherent in turning a center of black cultural heritage into a tourist attraction for the enjoyment of whites in a city that, twenty years earlier, was completely segregated on the basis of race.

Nevertheless, with the good will of some of the black community, a plan in place to ensure the security of both the shop-owners and the patrons, and the required public financing to renovate and reconstruct the buildings between Second and Fourth Streets, the Beale Street Bluelight District was moving forward. Elkington outlined his goals for a new Beale Street in an October 1982 *Commercial Appeal* article: "This is going to be destination shopping, so we will have to have unique merchandise. We are aiming for three basic markets. First, there are the 68,000 people who work downtown and we want to attract some of them during the lunch hours to hear the music, eat, and shop. Then, there are more than 220,000 people who live within 10 minutes of the are who we want to attract after work. And, we expect to attract 600,000 to 1 million tourists in the first full year of

⁸³ Anthony Hicks, "Beale Renovation in Full Swing; Minority Role Topic of Concern," *Memphis Tri-State Defender*, May 7, 1983.

operations.”⁸⁴ Soon the groups announced that Beale Street would open to the public at either the second half of 1983 or the beginning of 1984.⁸⁵ Later in 1983, Labor Day was set as the firm date for the grand opening. BSDC and EK announced that six corporate groups were sponsoring the project, and an ever growing list of tenants made the date of the opening plausible.⁸⁶ One of the key ideas of the groups involved in the decision-making process for Beale was enabling customers to carry alcoholic drinks on the street. That way patrons would be able to walk from one venue to another with a drink. Thanks to old-fashioned Southern political glad-handing, Elkington was able to get the bill through the Tennessee legislature with an additional provision that waved the sixty-forty, food-to-drink sales ratio required by the Tennessee Alcoholic Beverage Control.⁸⁷ The issue, however, was not as easy to gain support for locally because several prominent neighborhood and civic groups opposed it. The local issue was with beer and not cocktails or hard liquor because beer was under the jurisdiction of local government. The Memphis Alcohol Commission voted 3-0 against recommending the change in rules to the City Council.⁸⁸ Eventually local government would cave, a decision that Elkington claims netted the state and local governments over \$40 million in taxes and permits from 1983 to 2007.⁸⁹

After its opening in 1983, redevelopment on Beale Street was slow. One reason for the slowness in development was that EK decided what businesses could and could not be

⁸⁴ Jerome Obermark, “Jazzy Beale Street Is No ‘False Hope,’ Developer Says,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 8, 1982.

⁸⁵ James Chisum, “Renewed Beale Stirs Compliments,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 21, 1982. Charles Bernsen, “New Support, Tenants Cited in Beale Gains,” *Commercial Appeal*, December 28, 1982.

⁸⁶ Nancy De Ruyter Warren, “Memphians Begin to ‘Relive the Legend,’” *Memphis Daily News*, March 23, 1983.

⁸⁷ Elkington, *Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, 61-65. William Bennett, “Beale ‘Drink Walk’ Bill Led to Passage by Ford,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1983.

⁸⁸ Kristi Umbreit, “Bending Beer Rule on Beale Opposed,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 3, 1983. Louis Graham, “Beale Supporters Alter Request on Beer Sales,” *Commercial Appeal*, August 19, 1983.

⁸⁹ Elkington, *Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, 65.

on the street, which they deemed essential to properly developing the street: “It’s very important that we keep physical control of the space down there...It’s a matter of image,” but the tight control and the city’s decision not to spend federal and other public funds on renovations until a tenant had been selected kept the pace slow.⁹⁰ EK had the house of W.C. Handy, which had originally stood at 659 Jennette Place, moved to the corner of Fourth and Beale, a positive development to promote the blues, which EK used to defend against criticisms about the lack of emphasis on the blues. The project hit an obstacle in the mid-1980s when the owner of the bar, Carl Perkins’ Blue Suede Shoes, hung a Confederate battle flag on the wall. When the establishment’s owner refused to take the flag down, many in the black community, already disappointed with the direction that redevelopment was taking, called foul.⁹¹ In the *Tri-State Defender*, Rev. Samuel Kyles accused EK of making the street attractive to “Whites only.”⁹² Once again, turning “Main Street of Negro America” into a tourist attraction proved to be racially divisive.

By 1987, the success of Beale Street as a tourist destination that celebrated its rich musical and African American heritage was in doubt. The National Park Service recommended removing the street’s National Landmark status because “historic characteristics of the district have been altered through construction of new buildings, changes in street patterns, and the demolition of buildings that date from the era of W.C. Handy’s activities on Beale Street.”⁹³ The 1987 plan for downtown Memphis by Venturi,

⁹⁰ Deborah M. Clubb, “‘Czar’ Counts Control as Avenue to Success for New Beale Street,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 10, 1984.

⁹¹ Jimmie Covington, “Wrong Stars and Bars Are on Beale as City Waives Heritage, Critics Say,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 20, 1986. “Flag Owner Plants Foot but Blues Stepping up at Old Stomping Ground,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 21, 1986. Also see Anthony Hicks, “Beale Renovation in Full Swing; Minority Role Topic of Concern,” *Tri-State Defender*, May 7, 1983.

⁹² “Beale Street Turning ‘Country and Western,’” *Tri-State Defender*, June 7, 1986.

⁹³ Rebecca Babineaux, “Preservationists Prepare for Threat to Beale Street’s Landmark Status,” *Daily News*, September 19, 1986.

Rauch, Scott Brown prompted the city and other concerned groups to ensure that Beale Street would “reflect its original mandate and become a historic district capitalizing on its musical and ethnic heritage.” To do this, the plan advocated creating a culture and information center, reestablishing the BSDC, develop a marketing fund and campaign, staging events on the street, screen potential businesses in order “to prevent under-capitalized ventures from opening,” improve Handy Park by adding benches, a fountain, and a play space for children, create a music museum, and build Peabody Place.⁹⁴ In 1988, forty-three businesses operated on Beale Street.⁹⁵ As had happened during the previous five years after the street officially opened in 1983, progress was slow. Small signs of progress, such as in 1988 when the people at Graceland signed a long-term lease to take over managing the Old Daisy Theater, were evident but the project was still slow to progress.⁹⁶ In 1990, the area was still sixty percent completed. HUD recommended the city sell the project because they were not receiving any money from it. Elkington even recommended to the city that if they sold the land and spent the \$1.6 million in federal funds, he would write off \$700,000 of the money he owned on the project, but the city refused and would only spend federal funds on renovations when tenants were found for the buildings.⁹⁷ In 1990, though, Elkington would secure a blues club that would turn Beale Street around.

⁹⁴ Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, *Center City Development Plan, Memphis, Tennessee, Volume 12, Arts and Cultural Resources*, (Memphis: Center City Commission, 1987), 25-26.

⁹⁵ Cornell Christion, “Beale Rebirth Date Celebrated; Street ‘On Its Way,’ Says Mayor,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 19, 1988.

⁹⁶ John A. Elkington, “Beale Street Promises Are Being Fulfilled,” *Commercial Appeal*, February 21, 1988.

⁹⁷ Joe Senat, “HUD to City: Sell Beale or Improve Management,” *Commercial Appeal*, January 17, 1990.

A New Plan for Memphis: The 1987 Plan of Venturi, Rauch, Scott Brown

There was very little in the way of strategic city planning in Memphis between the 1955 Bartholomew plan and the late 1980s. One reason was the fiscally conservative mayors the city had during that time. A former president of the Chamber's Downtown Council spoke about the failures of the 1960s in creating a city unified around its downtown: "In the early 1960s, when Alvan Tate was president of the Downtown Association (DA), we tried very hard to get \$75,000 from the city administration for a comprehensive plan for downtown. But Mayor Henry Loeb said, 'I'll give you anything but money.'"⁹⁸ In the mid-1980s, the downtown area of Memphis was seeing a small renaissance. After a nearly twenty-year building drought, a local development company oversaw the construction of the 3D/Internationally-designed Morgan Keegan Tower in 1984. **(Fig. 44)** When completed in 1985, the building was the second tallest structure in Memphis. In response to what the *Daily News* called the "downtown boom," the CCC asked the city and county governments to fund a new long-range comprehensive plan for the downtown.⁹⁹ In 1984, the CCC hired the architecture and planning firm of Venturi, Rauch, Scott Brown, at the height of their popularity, to execute a comprehensive plan for the downtown area. Denise Scott Brown was the planning principle in the firm and headed the project for downtown Memphis. Scott Brown presented a preliminary report to the CCC in early 1987, and the firm completed the final draft at the end of that year.¹⁰⁰ The plan recognized the need for an altered role for the downtown due to the change in how it

⁹⁸ Joseph Weiler and Jefferson Riker, "'The Downtown Problem': Acceleration in Decline of Memphis Traced to 1968 Events," *Commercial Appeal*, April 28, 1975.

⁹⁹ Martha H. Shephard, "Center City Commission Proposes Long-Range Development Plan," *Memphis Daily News*, June 9, 1983.

¹⁰⁰ John Branston, "Center City Commission Shown Downtown Envisioned for 2012," *Commercial Appeal*, April 23, 1987.

functioned in the regional economy: “An employment center equal in size to downtown has come into existence in the medical complex. Office and retail growth have gravitated to east Memphis, closer to affluent residential areas.”¹⁰¹ Planners said that their plan would “nurture the downtown’s heritage and guide its growth,” but they also struck a pessimistic note: “Our recommendations were to be visionary, but only as that word can apply in urban America today—that is, they were to lie at the optimistic end of the feasibility range.”¹⁰² In this spirit, planners acknowledged that the marginalization of the downtown would persist: “Continued growth for suburban centers is to be expected and encouraged.”¹⁰³

The main recommendations of the twenty-volume proposal included planning for only a modest increase in new office development, encouraging conversion and infill housing in the office and warehouse areas around the downtown, planning for neighborhood development on northern Mud Island and south of Beale Street with an emphasis on “moderate and middle-income units,” and assisting the return of the downtown as a “specialty retail center.”¹⁰⁴ The plan called for any new office expansion to be north and east of the Civic Center Plaza, for the southern end of the CBD to be preponderantly retail oriented, and for residential areas within downtown to be located north of the Peabody Hotel and around Court Square and Cotton Row. The plan proposed three significant projects for the downtown area. First, it called for some type of shuttle system along the Mid-America Mall. Second, planners recommended creating a riverfront promenade that would connect into the existing park system and Mud Island. Finally, the

¹⁰¹ Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, *Center City Development Plan, Memphis, Tennessee, Volume 1, Summary*, (Memphis: Center City Commission, 1987), 1

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

planners advocated a retail center south of the Peabody Hotel called Peabody Place—with the addition of two high-rise office buildings—that would help link Beale Street to the downtown and the Mid-America Mall. (**Fig. 45**)

The plan also stressed promoting tourism to downtown Memphis. Planners believed that a reaffirmation of the “original black musical and cultural theme” of Beale Street and the rehabilitation of the Mid-America Mall, along with the addition of the Peabody Place, would “reinforce [the downtown’s] role as the major cultural, entertainment, and visitor center of the region.”¹⁰⁵ In addition to these improvements designed to encourage tourism, the Scott Brown plan advocates changing the zoning laws to account for tourism because “tourist uses cross the lines between the standard land use categories.”¹⁰⁶ The plan envisioned six different tourism districts within the downtown area. Those areas included the Pinch District north of downtown, the Court Square area, Cotton Row, Beale Street, the riverfront, and the South Main district.¹⁰⁷ The Scott Brown plan found that the main problem with the Memphis tourist landscape and the downtown’s cultural resources was that “there is not yet a feeling of cohesion.”¹⁰⁸ One way the plan hoped to achieve physical cohesion was through the proposed shuttle along the Mid-America Mall, but the plan also called for cultural resources liaisons that would link various entities that deal with these issues and that would serve as “an effective tool to use in marketing Memphis.”¹⁰⁹ The design also recommended satellite branches of various cultural institutions downtown such as the Brooks Museum of Art, the Pink Palace

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 44, 79-81.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 64-65.

¹⁰⁸ Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, *Center City Development Plan, Memphis, Tennessee, Volume 12, Arts and Cultural Resources*, (Memphis: Center City Commission, 1987), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

Museum, and the Memphis Zoo, and planners encouraged the city to promote an IMAX theater on either Mud Island or the proposed Pyramid Arena, an aquarium, a cotton museum, a music museum, and a branch of the Smithsonian.¹¹⁰

In addition to promoting the downtown as a center of tourism and culture, planners hoped to improve the opinions that Memphians had to their own downtown. The downtown “is presently seen [by locals] as inconvenient at best and dangerous at worst.” Their proposals to help this situation included improvements to parking and transportation, a greater security presence, and, apparently unaware of earlier failed attempts, a marketing campaign for the downtown. “People deal in perceptions. Therefore the image of the downtown as a place of unity and vitality offering unique, enriching, and fun experiences must be constantly brought before the public.” Planners advocated encouraging the media to highlight downtown more, “reporting positively whatever possible.” The transportation proposal called for a mass transit system “in order to bring many people who have moved and are moving further to the suburbs back to the center city.”¹¹¹ The plan also called for education centers downtown. Planners advocated a performing arts high school and a joint venture of Memphis universities that would offer courses on tourism, law, arts, government, business, health, hotel management, and architectural preservation.¹¹²

Throughout the plans, the idea of the image of the city or perceptions about the downtown abound. Scott Brown even divided this image into a national and local component:

The image of downtown should be the image of Memphis: Cotton, the Mississippi, steamboats, Memphis on the Nile, Memphis in May, the Blues, W.C. Handy, Martin Luther King, Elvis Presley, -- these are the world

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹¹² Ibid., 10-11.

famous ones. On a more local level there are the bluffs, Court Square, the Hebe Fountain, the Peabody Hotel, the Orpheus, Mud Island, Hernando De Soto Bridge, the Confederacy, Mid-America Mall, the Court House, Cotton Row, South Main, and the Cobblestones. These are more than enough to build an urban identity upon.¹¹³

Imaging and urban identity had long been buzzwords in the era of Postmodern urban planning, due in no small part to Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960). In his landmark work in the field of urban design, Lynch's definition of image deals with the long associations of memory and meaning of places in the city or of the city as a whole. He describes what he calls the environmental image, which he explains is a generalized mental picture of the urban landscape. Lynch argues that a good environmental image provides emotional security to people in the city and helps them to establish an agreeable relationship with the outside world. In addition to the environmental image—more closely associated with Scott Brown's local level—Lynch discusses public images, which are those held by large groups about a city. Through the idea of the public image, Lynch coins the word imageability, which refers to the quality an individual finds in an object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image.¹¹⁴

Mud Island, the "Great American" Pyramid, and the National Civil Rights Museum

Reflecting the long-held desires of many civic leaders for the downtown, the Scott Brown plan placed a large emphasis on increasing the marketability of the downtown area of Memphis specifically for tourism. Because of the dominance of the city's edge over the center, due to the continued growth in the suburbs of Memphis, which was "to be expected

¹¹³ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁴ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960.

and encouraged,” planners saw tourism and the promotion of the arts as the downtown’s only possible salvation, an outcome they perceived to be, at best, at the “optimistic end of the feasibility range.” As the film *Mystery Train* showed, the tourist landscape—beyond Graceland, the pitiful operation at Sun Studios, and a sad Beale Street—was mostly non-existent. The film missed an opportunity to show the attraction on Mud Island, but, other than that, there was no tourist landscape in Memphis. Inspired in part by the Scott Brown plan, civic leaders from different segments of the both the public and private sectors began to construct an expanded tourist landscape. While Graceland, Beale Street, and Mud Island initiated increased tourism to Memphis, the Pyramid, the National Civil Rights Museum, and a rejuvenated Beale Street expanded the tourist landscape in 1991, which has only increased since.

The effort to put some kind of attraction on Mud Island was long in coming. The island itself did not begin to appear off the Memphis bluffs until 1912. As the island began to grow in size during the 1910s and 1920s, it eventually consolidated with land on the north side. Today it is connected to land by a small land bridge between the end of the downtown harbor and the Wolf River. Its ownership became a source of dispute in the late 1960s and early 1970s between the federal and local governments and the descendants of the original proprietors of Memphis.¹¹⁵ The 1924 Bartholomew Plan called for the city to build a park on the newly emerged island: “This is believed to be the most splendid opportunity that has ever been furnished Memphis to acquire a park of large acreage virtually at the city’s front door.... Here is a potential...to create the likes of which other cities are spending several million dollars each.” The plan proposed the construction of a

¹¹⁵ “More Data Dredged Up About Mud Island,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 20, 1970.

bridge from Court Avenue to the island, followed by one from Auction Avenue and one to the north part of the island connected to the “outer Parkway.”¹¹⁶ (**Fig. 46**) Between the 1924 plan and the 1955 plan, nothing happened to Mud Island. In the 1955 Bartholomew Plan, planners proposed connecting the southern tip of Mud Island to the city and turning it into a park, with the proposed riverside interstate highway running between it and Jefferson Davis Park. The plan showed the area of the island north of Poplar Avenue separated from Memphis by a redirected Wolf River to contain an auditorium and sports stadium below the new Interstate 40 bridge. (**Fig. 47**)

In the late 1950s, a small airport was put on the island, which connected air travelers to the downtown by small ferries. (**Fig. 48**) When it became apparent that the interstate highway bridge was going to cut the island in half and displace the airport, numerous proposals were made for what to do with the rest of Mud Island. In 1964, the City Beautiful Commission urged the City Commission to make it a park.¹¹⁷ In 1965, the DA urged the Planning Commission to turn the area south of the new bridge into a “cultural and recreational center.”¹¹⁸ In 1966, the Riverfront Harbor Commission and the Planning Commission urged the City Commission to turn the island over to private development.¹¹⁹ In late 1966, the DA pushed building a park on the southern end featuring a water fountain that would be over 400 feet tall, which would have made it the tallest fountain in the world. DA president, William E. Shelton III, likened the fountain to the new Gateway Arch in St. Louis, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the Eiffel Tower.¹²⁰ In 1967, an architecture and

¹¹⁶ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee: Final Report*, (St. Louis: Bartholomew and Associates, 1924), 105

¹¹⁷ “Island Park Idea Gets New Boost,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 16, 1964.

¹¹⁸ Margaret McKee, “Mud Island Plans Supported by DA,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 2, 1965.

¹¹⁹ “New Proposals on Riverfront,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 15, 1966.

¹²⁰ “Tallest Fountain Urged for Island,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 12, 1966.

development firm proposed a private development on the island featuring two sixty-story towers and “commercial enterprises, residential dwellings, and a plaza ending at a river museum and open-air theater and park at the southern tip of the island.”¹²¹ In 1968, the DA proposed turning the southern end of the island into an amusement park on the scale of Disneyland and Six Flags: “Such an amusement park of high caliber, with no intoxicating liquors allowed and with entertainment aimed at youngsters and adults, would improve the city’s economy by at least \$100 million a year.”¹²² In 1969, the U.S. Department of the Interior pledged federal funding to turning Mud Island into a “greenway.”¹²³ In 1972, a local manufacturing company owner proposed constructing an Armed Services Museum, saying that P-T Boats, Inc. could raise \$1.75 million for the project. Notably, the proposal put forward a twenty-story pyramid as the design for the museum: “The pyramid would be a signature for Memphis as the Statue of Liberty is for New York City.”¹²⁴ In 1974, city council member, Bob James, proposed turning the tip of the island into a zoo where a water moat would keep the animals contained: “Putting a zoo on Mud Island would give the wives of convention visitors something to do.”¹²⁵

In 1973, the Planning Commission heard recommendations from one of its subcommittees that suggested creating a park and river museum to be named Volunteer Park.¹²⁶ Soon after, architect Roy P. Harrover was charged with designing three options for a future Volunteer Park. In mid-1974, Harrover released the three options. The first option

¹²¹ Jack Martin, “Plan Offered to Develop Mud Island,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 23, 1967.

¹²² Philip Kersh, executive director of the DA quoted in “Mud Island Amusement Park Eyed,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 19, 1968.

¹²³ Dorothy Y. Ward, “Mud Island ‘Greenway’ \$\$ Cited,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 29, 1969.

¹²⁴ “County Officials Hear Museum Proposal,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 21, 1972.

¹²⁵ Clark Porteous, “Council Ponders Mud Island as Moat-Encircled Zoo Site,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 12, 1974.

¹²⁶ “Committee Suggests Mud Island Be Developed as River Museum,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, October 26, 1973.

was akin to the 1955 Bartholomew Plan's treatment. It would connect the island to the city from Beale Street to Adams, create a formal garden, an observation tower, a river museum, and a restaurant. The second option was to create a scale model of the Mississippi from Paducah, Kentucky to the Gulf of Mexico with access to the park by an elevated transit. The third possibility was "a typical 19th-century urban park," connected by an elevated bridge with a restaurant, museum, and shops. All plans had an amphitheater.¹²⁷

By mid-1974, the second option was selected as the preferred choice.¹²⁸ It took until mid-1977 for the project to be approved by the City Council and the mayor.¹²⁹ Future Memphis and the Chamber of Commerce pushed hard for moving along on Volunteer Park: "The park was given the No. 1 rating on both the short-term and priorities lists [of Future Memphis] 'because it presents a development which will benefit the entire city, county, and Mid-South region (and) will have a significant impact on tourism and conventionism [sic.] which will generate increased revenues and act as a catalyst to unite the community for progress.'"¹³⁰ The final plans included a walkway with a monorail below that connected the Civic Center Plaza directly to the park's museum.¹³¹ **(Figs. 49 & 50)** The Mud Island Museum featured artifacts and replicas of Memphis's and the Mississippi River's past from an Elvis jumpsuit to a full scale model of the *Memphis Belle*.¹³² **(Fig. 51)** A new seventy-six-slip marina was built on the east side of the island.¹³³ The site included a new 4,300-seat outdoor amphitheater, which began operation with Hal Holbrook's *Mark Twain*

¹²⁷ Jefferson Riker, "Architect Unveils Mud Island Plans," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, May 24, 1974.

¹²⁸ "Island Park Gets Optimistic Report," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 22, 1974.

¹²⁹ Thomas Jordan, "Mayor's Signature Gets Park on Island Started," *Commercial Appeal*, June 2, 1977.

¹³⁰ Richard Provost, "Future Memphis Lists Priorities," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 22, 1977.

¹³¹ Mark Nave, "Monorail Gets Riders in the Mood for Fun," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1982.

¹³² Charles Goodman, "River Sings a Narrative of the Past," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1982.

¹³³ Fred Brown, "Sturdy New Marina Is Ready for Anything," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1982.

Tonight! and the local revue *Whole Lotta Shakin'*.¹³⁴ (Fig. 52) Three full-service restaurants, four “eateries,” and several food kiosks served patrons when the attraction opened.¹³⁵ (Fig. 53) The main attraction to the island, however, was the thirty-inches-to-a-mile scaled model of the Mississippi River from Cairo, Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico. (Fig. 54) The 2,600-feet long model took eight years of design and eighteen-months of construction for its opening in mid-1982.¹³⁶

The \$63 million dollar price tag of the attraction—half of which was publicly funded—had many worried about Mud Island’s financial sustainability. The *Memphis Press-Scimitar* sounded the hopes and anxieties of many for the Mud Island attraction: “Would the park attract enough visitors to take in enough revenue to keep the doomsayers at bay, to add a little luster to the city’s image and to provide momentum for downtown development?” Early numbers suggested the attraction might turn a profit.¹³⁷ At the end of 1982, despite the attraction having been open only half of the year and the negative press it received due to the controversy over the Confederate battle flag’s inclusion in a group of seven flags representing powers that have controlled the territory of Memphis, Mud Island placed twenty-fifth on the list of US tourist attractions by visitors.¹³⁸ In 1983, it still edged out Graceland by 200,000 visitors as Memphis’s most popular tourist attraction, but leaders were already calling the project “troubled” and even a “failure.” The number of visitors was already 450,000 less than its first year, and the city government cut the project’s

¹³⁴ Sheila Peace, “Amphitheater Stage Will See Plenty of Action Over the Years,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1982.

¹³⁵ Georgeann King, “Taste Treats Await Visitors to Island,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*,

¹³⁶ Ron Moody, “Riverwalk Captures Mystique,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1982.

¹³⁷ “Park Off to Good Start,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, August 30, 1982.

¹³⁸ Kay Pittman Black, “Racial Issue Not Saluted on Flagpole,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 21, 1982. “Hooks Seeking to Rid Island of Rebel Flag,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 21, 1982. “Island’s Attendance Ranks 25th in U.S.,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 23, 1983.

budget, including slashing Mud Island's marketing.¹³⁹ The talk even turned to asking the National Park Service to take over the attraction, but many considered Ronald Reagan's contempt for the parks to exclude that option as a possibility.¹⁴⁰

Mud Island was running at a deficit by 1987, so the Scott Brown plan for the downtown listed suggestions to increase the visitors. The plan proposed a free admission day, more shade on the riverwalk, and the construction of a more than thirty million dollar aquarium.¹⁴¹ In 1989, after seven years of the city of Memphis spending an additional \$10 million subsidizing the attraction, it signed the management and all operating costs over to the developer of the Great American Pyramid, Sidney Shlenker (See Below).¹⁴² Soon after, Shlenker unveiled his plans for a re-imagined attraction he tentatively named Rakapolis (to be pronounced "rock-apolis": "Plans call for a reborn and rechristened theme park to be a 'festival city,' crowded with pyramids, mummies, 'time machines,' re-created Egyptian ruins, shopping bazaars, a crystal sphinx, music clubs, and holographic images of blues and rock stars, among other attractions." Shlenker hoped it would be ready to open on Memorial Day 1991 to coincide with the grand opening of the Pyramid.¹⁴³ By mid-1990, Shlenker revealed those plans to the public.¹⁴⁴ (**Fig. 55**) It did not take Shlenker long to abandon his plan for Rakapolis, dropping the focus on Egypt and concentrating on Memphis's musical heritage.¹⁴⁵ Then by early 1991, it became apparent that Shlenker's

¹³⁹ Deborah M. Clubb, "Mud Island: A Troubled Fantasy," *Commercial Appeal*, August 19, 1984.

¹⁴⁰ "Mud Island May Find Reagan an Obstacle," *Commercial Appeal*, August 19, 1984.

¹⁴¹ Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, *Center City Development Plan, Memphis, Tennessee, Volume 12, Arts and Cultural Resources*, (Memphis: Center City Commission, 1987), 26-29.

¹⁴² Thomas Jordan, "Shlenker 'Dives' into Mud Island: He Forecasts a Nice Start," *Commercial Appeal*, July 1, 1989.

¹⁴³ John Beifuss, "Grand Plan for Island Revealed: Shlenker Details 'Festival City,'" *Commercial Appeal*, December 20, 1989.

¹⁴⁴ Susan Adler Thorp, "Mud Island Makeover Highlights the Festive," *Commercial Appeal*, May 13, 1990.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Bernsen, "Shlenker Scrubs Egypt as Theme for Mud Island," *Commercial Appeal*, July 10, 1990.

attempts to redevelop Mud Island in any form had failed. Shlenker's company was unable to find financing for his plans, and infighting among his associates in dealing with the Pyramid doomed a revamped Mud Island.¹⁴⁶ By mid-1992, the city retook the management rights, and the attraction has seen very little change into the present.¹⁴⁷

Mud Island and the Great American Pyramid are linked by more than their common failed developer and manager Sidney Shlenker. Both projects proved far less successful than hoped, yet both stood—and continue to stand—out in the city's tourist landscape. Memphis, though, built its first monumental pyramid nearly 100 years before the Pyramid Arena in the Pinch District, but, instead of on the banks of the Mississippi in Memphis, the city built it in Nashville. In 1897, Nashville held a world's fair, the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition, and offered the other major cities of the state the opportunity to erect pavilions near their planned scale replica of the Parthenon. The county appropriated \$25,000 to for the fair and organized a design committee for the Memphis pavilion. They selected the design of James B. Cook, an English-born architect who stayed in Memphis after coming to oversee the renovation of James Dakin's Gayoso House. His idea was for a 100-foot-tall, wooden pyramid.¹⁴⁸ **(Fig. 56)** Four years later, the City Park Board turned down a request to construct a pyramid to serve as an 15,000-seat auditorium on city-owned land on the riverfront, most likely near the Cossitt Library.¹⁴⁹ As Chapter 3 demonstrated, the city declined again in 1959 to build a large monument on the banks of the Mississippi. As mentioned above, in 1972, a twenty-story pyramid was proposed for a military museum.

¹⁴⁶ Louis Graham, "Mud Island May Open Nearly Intact Due to Woes," *Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1991.

¹⁴⁷ Marc Perrusquia, "Mud Island Visits Dip for Third Year," *Commercial Appeal*, November 3, 1992.

¹⁴⁸ Perre Magness, "Memphis Has Already Built a Pyramid," *Commercial Appeal*, January 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁹ Robert A. Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis*, (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 108.

In 1975, an architect and a local business owner proposed a thirty-story pyramid clad in gold reflective glass to house a history museum, a restaurant, and an observation deck. (Figs. 57 & 58) Promoters hoped to create a “Discovery Museum,” which, because of its location at the Memphis bluff where Hernando de Soto “discovered” the Mississippi River, would highlight the great scientific discoveries through history.¹⁵⁰ Backers advocated building the pyramid on urban renewal land in the western portion of the Beale Street project.¹⁵¹ (Fig. 59) Instead, the city backed the failed Beale Street Landing development, but, in a prescient comment, the *Commercial Appeal* cautioned the city to keep their priorities straight, editorializing that “city and county officials need to keep their attention fixed on the development of the planned Volunteer Park on Mud Island.”¹⁵² The city’s failure to do so in the late 1980s and early 1990s is, in the least, partly to blame for the foundering of both projects.

Ten years later, Dave Bartlett a business student at Memphis State wrote an article on the editorial page of the *Commercial Appeal* in early 1985 advocating a sports arena in the shape of a pyramid. In late 1985, he joined Brent Hertz a young developer whose father was involved with the 1975 pyramid proposal. Bartlett and Hertz said they wanted “to give Memphis a distinctive identifying icon on par with St. Louis’s arch,” an analogy made by many throughout the process of realizing the Pyramid. They joined with the architecture firm, Venables and Associates, in early 1986 to help develop the proposal.¹⁵³ Soon Bartlett and Hertz met with John Tigrett, a local entrepreneur and millionaire who had made his

¹⁵⁰ “The Great Memphis Pyramid,” UMSC, *Press-Scimitar* Morgue File 6576.

¹⁵¹ Clark Porteous, “Plan Detailed for Pyramid of Gold, Glass,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 1, 1975. “Plans Call for Pyramid Near River,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 2, 1975.

¹⁵² “Pyramid Dreams,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 3, 1975.

¹⁵³ Wayne Risher, “Base of Support Is Growing for Pyramid,” *Commercial Appeal*, April 13, 1986. Wayne Risher, “Pyramid Backers Building Momentum,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 1, 1986.

first fortune selling the Glub-Glub drinking duck toy, and convinced him to back the project.¹⁵⁴ Tigrett soon proposed the project to the city and county mayors and to officials at Memphis State University, promising financial support for the project.¹⁵⁵ The City Council and the County Commission established the Public Building Authority (PBA), chaired by Frederick W. Smith, the founder of FedEx, to move forward with building a pyramid arena.¹⁵⁶ Quickly the PBA submitted a proposal to the city and county mayors who moved it on to their respective legislative bodies. The proposal called for the Pyramid to be built north of the Cook Convention Center and for the PBA to negotiate contracts with Hard Rock Café, owned by John Tigrett's son, a music museum run by Elvis Presley Enterprises, and IMAX Theatre.¹⁵⁷ PBA members and city officials selected the site north of Interstate 40 because the size required for the base of the pyramid made five sites around the downtown unfeasible, and they excluded a site on the Mississippi River—below Calhoun in the South Main District—because of the cost of doing infrastructure improvements in the area.¹⁵⁸ The Scott Brown plan suggests a payoff for the area north of downtown—and Interstate 40—if the city goes ahead with the proposed Pyramid Arena: “Pinch should become an area supporting restaurants and recreational retail, which will rejuvenate this once bustling area,” one of the many unrealistic hopes placed on the Pyramid.¹⁵⁹ The move to build the arena was swift. By mid-1988, Mayor Dick Hackett

¹⁵⁴ John Branston, “Aura of Wealth Powers Pyramid,” May 15, 1988.

¹⁵⁵ Jimmie Covington and Thomas Jordan, “Plan Given to Officials for Pyramid,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 10, 1986. John Branston, “Pyramid Backers Present New Plan,” *Commercial Appeal*, February 11, 1987. John Branston, “Tigrett Ups Ante for Pyramid,” *Commercial Appeal*, March 24, 1987.

¹⁵⁶ Jimmie Covington, “Arena Panel Taps Smith, Poses Issues,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 14, 1987.

¹⁵⁷ Jimmie Covington and Thomas Jordan, “Mayors Refine Plan for Pyramid Arena,” February 26, 1988.

¹⁵⁸ John Branston, “Pyramid Proposal Centering on 7 Sites,” *Commercial Appeal*, February 17, 1987. John Branston, “Panel Supports North Site for Pyramid,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 28, 1987.

¹⁵⁹ Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown, *Center City Development Plan, Memphis, Tennessee, Volume 12, Arts and Cultural Resources*, (Memphis: Center City Commission, 1987), 23.

secured an Egyptian exhibit that would coincide with the planned opening of the Pyramid on Memorial Day, 1991.¹⁶⁰ The project secured the backing of the state and use to its right of way north of Interstate 40 and ensured the affiliation with Memphis State University's basketball program and \$8 million in state funds.¹⁶¹ By mid-1989, the planning process was nearing completion.¹⁶²

Behind the scenes, in late 1988, the project hit a snag. In the agreement that the city and county governments reached to move forward with the pyramid project that Tigrett pushed through the typically slow local government, the contract stipulated that a private investor would devote \$10 million to bring in restaurants, two museums, and a ride to an observation deck at the top of the building, but Tigrett's name was not on the contract. The party responsible for securing private investment was Tigrett's son, Isaac. In August of 1988, though, Isaac sold the Hard Rock Café for \$32 million and did not include an agreement with the new owner to agree to the contract Isaac had signed. In desperation, Tigrett turned to his friend, Jerrold Perenchio, co-creator of *All in the Family*, asking him to find "your best Barnum." He recommended Sidney Shlenker, the then-owner of the Denver Nuggets NBA franchise and the president of Houston's Astrodome. Shlenker arrived in Memphis ready to save the Great American Pyramid and attempt to put his grandiose visions into place. Shlenker's ostentatious vision for the Pyramid shot the cost of the necessary private investment up to \$55 million. In addition, he convinced local government to sign over him exclusive control of the project, and he would pay local government's annual debt payments, totalling \$150 million. In the short term, Shlenker

¹⁶⁰ Lawrence Buser, "Mayor Claims Results from His Trip Abroad," *Commercial Appeal*, July 21, 1988.

¹⁶¹ Richard Locker, "Pyramid Proposal Clears Two Hurdles,"

¹⁶² Paula Wade, "Shlenker Wins Arena Contract in Shelby Vote," *Commercial Appeal*, May 23, 1989.

funded the project through advertising and concessions deals for the arena, a business model that, not without irony, more closely resembled a pyramid scheme than sound business practices.

To cap off Shlenker's grandiose plan, his organization consisting of six companies, the Pyramid Companies, spent \$440,000 on a lavish groundbreaking ceremony, dubbed the Big Dig. **(Fig. 60)** The show involved dropping an enormous lighted shovel from a police helicopter, lasers that outlined the future building, fireworks, and live entertainment, including actor Dan Ackroyd who Shlenker paid to fly in on the FedEx private jet. His lavish spending combined with his inability to secure private financing for his vision or even a scaled-back version closer to the original contract ensured his failure. His last two attempts to secure loans involved paying a Florida conman \$200,000 in security for a loan that never came through and promising the city and county mayors that a Las Vegas company, Universal Financial Service, was prepared to make Shlenker an \$80 million loan. What Shlenker did not know was that Nevada authorities had sent the company a cease and desist letter eleven days before they offered the loan to Shlenker, and, to make matters more humiliating, the address the founders of the faux company gave was space 138 in a Las Vegas trailer park, the address of the sham-"president." Also, a war had broken out between Shlenker and Tigrett that began to pit the city and the county mayors against one another. Finally, in June of 1991, with the arena portion of the Pyramid nearing completion, the city and county terminated its contract with Pyramid Companies. The Pyramid opened for business without any of the private investments that Tigrett and Shlenker had promised, on November 9, 1991, when Memphis State played DePaul University on national

television, leaving the city and county holding all financial responsibility, an estimated \$110 million with interest.¹⁶³

The completed Pyramid was 321 feet tall and clad in 8,380 stainless-steel panels totaling 300,000 square feet.¹⁶⁴ (**Figs. 61 & 62**) Despite the failure to find any private investment to create the planned restaurants, museum, and “unique ride” to an observation deck, the Pyramid functioned as the home basketball arena for the Memphis State—and after 1994—the University of Memphis Tigers. It hosted concerts and prizefights among other events. Over ten years after Shlenker’s promise to the city to bring in an NBA franchise, the Memphis Grizzlies began playing professional basketball in the Pyramid in 2001, after owner Michael Heisley moved the team from Vancouver, but the Pyramid, with its lack of amenities, cramped seating, and distance from the entertainment and shopping areas on the south side of downtown, was not well-suited as an NBA arena. The city constructed a new basketball arena on vacant land cleared by urban renewal directly south of Beale Street for \$250 million.¹⁶⁵ When completed in 2004, both the Memphis Grizzlies and the University of Memphis basketball program moved into the FedEx Forum, named—for \$92 million—after the famed Memphis company. Since 2004, city officials sought solutions for what to do with the Pyramid. After selecting from an array of options, the mayor and City Council agreed in 2005 to lease the Pyramid, for a term of fifty-five years, to Bass Pro Shops. Plans include a 220,000 square foot retail space, a 200-room hotel, a bowling alley, a restaurant, an arena for demonstrations and workshops, and an indoor

¹⁶³ Louis Graham, “Pyramid Dreams, Pyramid Schemes: How Did Shlenker’s Promise Die,” *Commercial Appeal*, October 18, 1992.

¹⁶⁴ “Metal Panel Design Requires Custom Attention,” *Building Design & Construction*. 1992. HighBeam Research. (February 4, 2013). <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-12422147.html>

¹⁶⁵ Marlon W. Morgan, “Pyramid More Infamous Than Famous,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 2, 2002.

shooting range. (Figs. 63 & 64) The project was funded, in part, by federal bonds because of the new facility's expected positive economic impact on the surrounding Pinch District.¹⁶⁶

Like many of the tourist attractions in Memphis, the National Civil Rights Museum was many years in the making. In the late 1970s, Walter Bailey, the owner of the Lorraine Motel, worked with local leaders who wanted eventually to turn the motel into a memorial or museum: "This place ought to have gold steps, instead it's just a lot of work for an old man with no help."¹⁶⁷ Circuit Court Judge, D'Army Bailey—no relation to the motel's owner—spoke about Walter Bailey's desires for his motel: "He knew that the site had a destiny, and he in his own simple, limited way was trying to meet that by trying to find somebody to come in there with some money, some leadership, to turn that decaying old site into what it needed to be."¹⁶⁸ In the early 1980s, many prominent black Memphians formed the Martin Luther King Memphis Memorial Foundation (MLKMMF) in an attempt to save the Lorraine Motel from foreclosure.¹⁶⁹ Despite raising \$10,000 to secure a short option to buy, the MLKMMF could not raise the necessary funds to buy the building outright, but, when it came to auction at foreclosure, the MLKMMF won the bid at \$144,000 due in part to large, last-minute contributions from Rev. James Smith at AFSCME and Paul Shapiro of Lucky Heart Cosmetics.¹⁷⁰ In turn, the MLKMMF leased the building back to Walter Bailey for a small fee. The room where Dr. King stayed when he was murdered was turned into a shrine by the MLKMMF. The foundation changed the

¹⁶⁶ Michael Sheffield, "A Look Inside Bass Pro's Pyramid Plans," *Memphis Business Journal*, June 21, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ William Thomas, "Tragic Past Predestines Dim Future," *Commercial Appeal*, April 3, 1979.

¹⁶⁸ Wayne Risher, "Museum is Fruition of Dreams of Motel Owner, Many Others," *Commercial Appeal*, June 30, 1991.

¹⁶⁹ UMSC, MS 345, Box 8, Folder 311, Item 1.

¹⁷⁰ "Miracle on Mulberry Street," December 17, 1982. UMSC, MS 345, Box 8, Folder 312.

name of their organization to the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation, Inc. (LCRMF), largely because Coretta Scott King wanted Dr. King's name left out of the project. In 1984, LCRMF worked with several partners to produce different design options for a museum centered around the site of King's murder. The Memphis Design Center, a non-profit architectural outfit that teamed architects with students from Christian Brothers College submitted a design that called for constructing a museum adjacent to the Lorraine Motel. The McKissack-O'Brien-Smith plan from a local team of architects and landscape architects called for using the shell of the Lorraine as the museum with the option to expand and add other structures as necessary. Finally, a local advertising agency made a film about both concepts for the museum, which the LCRMF used to obtain funding from the city and county for an economic feasibility study. Memphis Mayor Hackett and Shelby County Mayor Morris instructed the CCC and the Memphis Arts Council (MAC) to help the LCRMF, with the CCC supporting development and implementation and the MAC buttressing the organizations fundraising efforts. From the beginning of the LCRMF, the desire was for a larger museum devoted to the entire Civil Rights Movement. Their definition was expansive: "The movement began with the first fatality of the Revolutionary War, a black man, Crispus Attucks."¹⁷¹

In mid-1985, the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCVB) threw their support behind the museum project.¹⁷² A year later the Chamber of Commerce added its support to the project.¹⁷³ Beale Developer, John Elkington, claimed that A.W. Willis—a local real estate developer and strong supporter and founding member of the LCRMF—

¹⁷¹ UMSC, MS 345, Box 8, Folder 311, Item 1.

¹⁷² Letter from Jeff Sanford to D'Army Bailey, UMSC, MS 345, Box 8, Folder 312.

¹⁷³ Letter from David W. Cooley to Councilman Jack R. Owens, UMSC, MS 345, Box 8, Folder 312.

knew that nothing could move forward on turning the motel into a museum until the end of Lamar Alexander's term in office as governor. His successor, Democrat Ned McWherter, who was Speaker of the House of Tennessee, pushed legislation that funded creating what would become the National Civil Rights Museum.¹⁷⁴ Maryland-based museum consultant and former Smithsonian official, Benjamin Lawless, submitted a proposal for the project in 1986. Soon after, Willis and D'Army Bailey guided the project through the State Assembly, the County Commission, and the City Council. The State of Tennessee allocated \$4.4 million to the project while the city and county each allocated \$2.2 million.¹⁷⁵ The City Council vote was close. Councilman Bob James, who voted against said he did not believe that "bringing up the past in a museum setting would be conducive to healing the wounds left from the civil rights struggle."¹⁷⁶

The idea of turning the Lorraine Motel in the seedy South Main area into a memorial and museum that would honor Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement did not sit well with many Memphis residents: "The problem was the location, and that many people felt the Lorraine was better forgotten and better left alone. It was very politically charged. It had been a black eye for Memphis for years."¹⁷⁷ D'Army Bailey summed up his view of the majority of the opposition to the museum: "Most of the opposition that we have encountered with the project has come from racists who have been hostile to the struggle for civil rights and to Dr. King."¹⁷⁸ Early in the planning stages, however, it was

¹⁷⁴ Elkington, *Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, 53.

¹⁷⁵ Wayne Risher, "Museum is Fruition of Dreams of Motel Owner, Many Others," *Commercial Appeal*, June 30, 1991.

¹⁷⁶ "Council OK's \$2.2 Million for Lorraine," *Commercial Appeal*, June 10, 1967.

¹⁷⁷ Ann Abernathy, lawyer and CCC special projects coordinator for the National Civil Rights Museum project, quoted in Wayne Risher, "Museum is Fruition of Dreams of Motel Owner, Many Others," *Commercial Appeal*, June 30, 1991.

¹⁷⁸ Anita Houk, "A Monument to Civil Rights," *Commercial Appeal*, January 15, 1989.

apparent that white political leaders in the city were afraid of a backlash from a segment of their white constituents. For example, County Mayor Morris suggested “the center focus on a variety of American groups rather than a single person or cause.” The stated conditions for support by county officials said, “It will be a celebration of our rights as Americans tracing back to the signing of the Constitution and up to the present time, focusing on a variety of groups, including blacks, women, immigrants, Indians (and) ethnic groups such as Italians and Irish.”¹⁷⁹ A local talk show host at the time said, “In this case, nearly all the blacks were for the project and most of the whites were against it, although some whites did support the project as well.” The chair of the MCVB worried about the negative impact that conflict over the project could have on that nation’s image of Memphis: “It’s a fact that tourists do seek out the Lorraine Motel. As a Southern city people come here with all sorts of preconceived notions anyway, and I cringe at the negative image we give to these tourists.... We can control the image we now give to outsiders.”¹⁸⁰

Despite statements to the contrary, the museum was not universally supported by African Americans in Memphis. Shelby County Criminal Court Clerk and former County Commissioner, Minerva Johnican explained the hesitancy about the project among part of the black community: “There’s a feeling that blacks aren’t getting excited about the museum because D’Army and a group of whites out of Nashville put it together. Maybe excitement will grow once we see it. The excitement for me comes when I remember the civil rights movement.... I think once people see the museum they will reflect on that period of history and feel more a part of it.”¹⁸¹ D’Army Bailey assured the largely African

¹⁷⁹ Jimmie Covington, “County Offers Ideas for Lorraine Project,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 10, 1986.

¹⁸⁰ Gregg Gordon, “Lorraine Museum Proposal Stirs Rumbblings of Emotion: Race Seen as Theme of Public Reactions,” *Commercial Appeal*, May 2, 1986.

¹⁸¹ “Witness: Minerva Johnican,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 30, 1991.

American audience of the *Tri-State Defender* that the project would “include a very significant amount of input from local black leaders.” The article assuaged the fears of many in the black community: “Black citizens concerned over whether development and renovation of the Lorraine Motel will become a commercial venture for White developers need not worry according to the head of the Lorraine Foundation.”¹⁸² The “sick” letters to the editor printed in the *Commercial Appeal* arguing against the National Civil Rights Museum ensured wider support for the project among the black community.¹⁸³ The most famous example of dissent among African Americans, however, came from a former resident of the Lorraine Motel, Jacqueline Smith, who worked at the Lorraine and gave tours of the small shrine to Dr. King on the second floor balcony. The long-term occupants of the Lorraine left in early 1988, but Smith immediately set up a vigil outside the motel to protest plans to turn it into a museum. After spending nearly three years in a tent directly outside the motel, Smith was removed from her spot in mid-1990 so that the construction could begin, but she just moved down the street and has been a fixture outside the National Civil Rights Museum ever since. **(Fig. 65)** Her main objections relate to feeling that the museum is an exploitation of Dr. King: “The Lorraine should not be just another tourist trap. It should be developed to reflect Dr. King’s legacy and life and carry on the dream.” She preferred turning the Lorraine into a center for housing, job training, and medical and educational opportunities for the poor.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² “Blacks to Control Lorraine,” *Tri-State Defender*

¹⁸³ Thomas DeBerry, “‘Racism’ Delays Lorraine Project,” *Tri-State Defender*, May 17, 1986.

¹⁸⁴ John Branston, “Keeping Watch at the Lorraine,” *Commercial Appeal*, November 30, 1986. Lawrence Buser, “Emotions Flow as Motel Empties,” *Commercial Appeal*, January 11, 1988. Anita Houk, “A Monument to Civil Rights,” *Commercial Appeal*, January 15, 1989. Dave Hirschman, “Protestor at Lorraine in the Way, Unmoved,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 3, 1990. Dave Hirschman, “Deputies Haul Ms. Smith from Lorraine,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 17, 1990.

The final plans, which followed the McKissack-O'Brien-Smith proposal, called for demolishing the majority of the Lorraine for the construction of the museum but leaving the west façade and the famed balcony intact. McKissack and McKissack Architects and Engineers, Inc., out of Nashville executed the finalized design for the museum. The unobtrusive design features a lobby and an off-center fanned entrance, capped by an angled skylight element, but the entrance is still subservient to the historic façade of the original motel: "We wanted to make sure that a passerby who did not want to tour the museum would still have the opportunity to see the balcony."¹⁸⁵ (**Fig. 66**) The museum opened for tours in September 1991, but its grand opening was held in July. The festivities were attended by Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and Jesse Jackson among others.¹⁸⁶ When the museum opened, the text-heavy exhibitions guided visitors through the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Major highlights included a city bus from Montgomery, Alabama, that visitors could enter, which had recordings of things a bus driver might have said to an African American in 1955; a lunch counter; a burned period Greyhound bus representing the Freedom Riders' bus attacked in Alabama; a barrel-shaped Memphis garbage truck; and the preserved, though staged, rooms 306 and 307 of the Lorraine Motel where the museum tour concludes.¹⁸⁷ (**Figs. 67 & 68**) Walter Shapiro of *Time* panned the museum as having a "taste problem": "This state- and locally funded [sic.] museum will push the barriers of good taste in its quest to create a sense of historical immediacy and emotional context for a jaded theme-park generation." Shapiro's take is understandable for the period,

¹⁸⁵ Project manager, Fred Royals, quoted in Cindy Wolff, "Civil Rights Museum Decorators Are Happy to Play Second Fiddle," *Commercial Appeal*, July 21, 1991.

¹⁸⁶ Lisa Jennings, "Heat, Crowds Evoke Memories of '68," *Commercial Appeal*, July 5, 1991. Wayne Risher, "Thousands Share Pride in Shrine to Civil Rights," *Commercial Appeal*, July 5, 1991.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Loller, "The National Civil Rights Museum," *Commercial Appeal*, June 30, 1991.

but, for the most part, the National Civil Rights Museum's exhibits are tasteful and a far cry from "the parody of the Disney style" of more contemporary museums such as the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.¹⁸⁸

In 1991, both the National Civil Rights Museum and the Pyramid opened on the edge of the downtown. Also during that year, the Beale Street project received a long-awaited boost. Since the early 1980s, Beale Developers tried to get a famous Memphis musician to open a club in the bluelight district, including B.B. King, Jerry Lee Lewis, Isaac Hayes, and Memphis Slim.¹⁸⁹ A nightclub owned by Lou Rawls was a part of the original businesses during the street's "rebirth" in 1983, but Beale Street was slow to start to improve. In 1991, however, B.B. King agreed to throw his name behind a nightclub project at the corner of Second Street. George Eldridge, the owner of Little Rock's Doe's Eat Place and friend of Governor Bill Clinton, agreed not only to open a franchise of Doe's on Beale Street but to also manage the new B.B. King nightclub. B.B. King's Blues Club opened in a completely refurbished 143 Beale Street in time for the Memphis in May festival in 1991.¹⁹⁰ **(Fig. 69)** The opening of this blues club ensured that the Beale Street redevelopment project would survive. By 1995, sales in the bluelight district totaled \$16.4 million¹⁹¹ Between King's blues club and the renovated New Daisy Theater that saw performances by Bob Dylan, Prince, Elvis Costello, and Wynton Marsalis among many others, Beale Street, despite several bumps along the way, would remain a Memphis tourist attraction into the present.

¹⁸⁸ Walter Shapiro, "The Glory and the Glitz," *Time* (August 5, 1991), 56.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Bernsen, "New Support, Tenants Cited in Beale Gains," *Commercial Appeal*, December 28, 1982.

¹⁹⁰ Elkington, *Resurrecting the Home of the Blues*, 80-87.

¹⁹¹ Cindy Wolff, "Elkington Ready to Wrap Beale, Move On," *Commercial Appeal*, September 18, 1996.

From Jim Crow to Gentrification: The Transformation of a City

Conclusion

From 1954 to 1991, the city of Memphis was transformed by the dual forces of urban renewal and accelerated suburbanization. Nurtured by the 1955 Bartholomew comprehensive city plan, suburbanization occurred in two waves of white flight. The first took place in the 1950s and 1960s. Blacks encroached on neighborhoods around the downtown because of the lack of available housing and whites retreated to new suburban enclaves in Frayser, Whitehaven, and east Memphis. By the 1960s, the vast majority of whites lived in Memphis's sprawling suburban landscape miles from the downtown. The second wave occurred after court ordered busing led to a mass exodus of whites from Memphis Public Schools. Many put their children in private schools, but others fled the city limits for areas in the Shelby County School System in suburbs such as Bartlett, Cordova, Hickory Hills, Germantown, Collierville, and Olive Branch, Mississippi. At the same time as the first wave, Memphis embarked on an ambitious program of urban renewal in many of the poor black neighborhoods surrounding downtown. The first project at Railroad Avenue cleared a dense black neighborhood with no goal or benefit other than removing the people and buildings. African Americans—in response to the creation of white civic clubs, the violence and threats of violence that rocked transitional neighborhoods, and the urban renewal plans—formed their own civic clubs, which organized blacks politically in post-poll tax Memphis and foreshadowed the coming civil rights push during the 1960s. Through constant and underpublicized pressure from African American activists involved in sit-ins and marches, public spaces of white Memphis slowly

desegregated with the guidance of the biracial MCCR, and Memphis avoided the highly publicized racial strife that characterized many other cities in the region.

Meanwhile, urban renewal continued unabated around the downtown. Many of the post-Railroad Avenue projects, with the exception of Riverview, brought large-scale public works during the 1960s. The Jackson Avenue zone, in a predominately black neighborhood, yielded St. Jude's Children Hospital. The three Medical Center zones due east of downtown, also in an African American area, brought the beginnings of the large medical complex between downtown and midtown including the University of Tennessee Medical Center. The Court Avenue project zones, the only urban renewal directly downtown, resulted in the Civic Center Plaza, a complex on the north end of downtown that brought all branches of government into one square. The design was influenced largely by the utopic urban planning ideals of Le Corbusier. Local planners believed the plaza would be "a center from which the City might dispense its good will and record of good works to visitor and resident alike," but the plaza proved to be an ideal place for public protest.¹ After a recalcitrant and racist mayor refused to give into the demands of the Memphis Sanitation Workers, the Civic Center Plaza became the center of a two-month struggle for unionization and fair pay and treatment, and it came to symbolize larger inequality in Memphis's African American community. The strike brought Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Memphis three times. The final time in early April 1968 resulted in the murder of the Civil Rights icon, an event that would scar the city for years to come.

As the second wave of white flight got under way in the early 1970s, the Memphis Housing Authority embarked on what would be one of their last urban renewal projects,

¹ UMSC, *Memphis Press-Scimitar* morgue file 3720, "Program and Schematics, Memphis City Hall," 1961, 2.

Beale Street. Plans called for removing the surrounding black neighborhood because, as the MHA later admitted, they believed white tourists would not come to an area downtown surrounded by a black neighborhood. The MHA hoped to redevelop Beale Street as a shopping center and tourist attraction based on its historic association with the blues and its mythic role in the birth of rock 'n' roll. In the late 1970s, when the project languished without a viable redeveloper, an MHA official admitted that the purpose of removing the black neighborhood around Beale Street was to make it more likely for white tourists to want to come there. This admission, while made about Beale, applies to much of the urban renewal program. Planning officials carved a circle of cleared black neighborhoods around the downtown. The Medical Center on the east, Beale Street on the south, and the new Interstate Highway on the north isolated the downtown from the once dense African American neighborhoods that had surrounded it. The plan was to make the downtown—abandoned by whites as the main shopping center of Memphis in the 1950s and 1960s and increasingly surrounded by black neighborhoods—a place that white Memphians and tourists with money to spend might actually want to visit.

In this spirit, civic leaders during the 1970s and 1980s funded large projects that they hoped would rehabilitate the recently isolated downtown. Many of these new projects were located on land cleared by urban renewal. In the mid-1970s, the city built the Mid-America Mall to connect the Civic Center Plaza to the Beale redevelopment on the south. The Beale Street “bluelight district” finally got a competent redeveloper in the early 1980s and began to restore and rebuild the short historic district between Second and Fourth. Land cleared on the far west part of the Beale Street area was the site of a failed shopping and restaurant center called the Beale Street Landing. In the early 1980s, the city built an

attraction on the small island that began to appear off Memphis's bluff in the early twentieth century. The attraction housed a museum, restaurants, and a large, scale model of the Mississippi River from Cairo, Illinois, to the Gulf of Mexico. In the late 1980s, the city funded a boondoggle of a project to build a thirty-two story pyramid arena on land cleared by the Interstate Highway that ran due north of the Court Avenue urban renewal project zone. Also in the late 1980s, the city, county, and state funded the construction of a museum dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement in the shell of the Lorraine Motel, the site of Dr. King's murder. The city eventually constructed a trolley that ran through downtown Memphis along the Mid-America Mall and connected the Pyramid to the north and the National Civil Rights Museum to the south, but as the *Memphis Flyer* editorialized, the trolley only provided a "\$32 million ride through a landscape of orange sawhorse hazard barricades and boarded up ruins."² Despite the ruinous state of parts of the downtown, especially the Mid-America Mall, the city of Memphis did \$1.5 billion in tourism business in 1993. The tourist landscape in Memphis continued to grow during the 1990s and 2000s. In 2003, the Stax Museum of American Soul Music opened in a reconstruction of the original Stax building, which was torn down in 1989, thirteen years after the recording studio that brought the world Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Wilson Pickett, The Mar-Keys, Sam & Dave, William Bell, Eddie Floyd, the Bar-Kays, Albert King, and Booker T. & the MGs, closed its doors. **(Fig. 1)** As Beverly Robertson aptly said, "It had to be destroyed to be respected. That's what makes Memphis,

² Gary Moore, "...and the Mall Came Tumbling Down," *Memphis Flyer*, June 24, 1992, quoted in Marcus D. Pohlmann and Michael P. Kirby, *Racial Politics at the Crossroads: Memphis Elects Dr. W.W. Herenton*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 46,

Memphis.”³ Three years earlier another music museum came to Memphis, first in the form of an exhibit from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History in the Gibson Building off Beale. The Memphis Rock ‘n’ Soul Museum moved in 2004 into museum space connected to the FedEx Forum basketball arena built on land cleared in urban renewal thirty years earlier. These music museums combined with a completely new Beale Street Landing and the Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid round out the Memphis tourist landscape in the present. The gambit cooked up the 1950s to wipe out the black neighborhoods around downtown in order to revamp the downtown for conventioners, businessmen, and tourists paid off financially.

Nevertheless, Memphis remains deeply segregated. The racial geography of the city has changed little from the 1950s. The “white wedge” running from midtown out to the east remains with only a few minor changes around the edges. In the 2010 U.S. Census, Memphis was the most impoverished large metropolitan area in the country: 19.1 percent of the metropolitan population of 1.3 million lived below the poverty line.⁴ Thanks in large part to its poverty level and its high rates of violent crime, Memphis appeared third on *Forbes* “Most Miserable Cities” list behind Cleveland, OH and Stockton, CA in 2010.⁵ In 2011, the average income inside the Memphis city limits was \$32,000, while the average income in the largely white suburbs outside the city limits was \$92,000.⁶ Within the city limits, areas around the downtown continued to gentrify beyond the tourist attractions. In the 1990s, Developer Henry Turley constructed two New Urbanist neighborhoods around

³ Christopher Blank, “Reprising Role as Racial Respite: Stax Resurrects Soul of City’s Music, Lives on as ‘Memphis Sound,’” *Commercial Appeal*, April 30, 2003.

⁴ Tom Charlier, “Census Calls Memphis Poorest in Nation,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 2011.

⁵ Jody Callahan, “Memphis Ranks Third on Forbes List of ‘Most Miserable Cities,’” *Commercial Appeal*, February 18, 2010.

⁶ Sam Dillon, “Merger of Memphis and County School Districts Revives Race and Class Challenges,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2011.

the downtown, South Bluffs in the South Main area and Harbor Town on Mud Island across from the Pinch district.⁷ In 2010, the Memphis City Schools were nearly ninety-percent minority, eighty-five-percent black. Approximately half of the Memphis schools are at least ninety-nine-percent black.⁸ These statistics raise the question as to what has really changed in Memphis since the mid-1950s. This dissertation finds that while dynamic forces including urban renewal, white flight, and a changed economy altered much in Memphis both spatially and socially between 1954 and 1991, these forces generally reinforced existing spatial patterns. This study concludes that it is, therefore, not without irony that a tourism industry that, in part, romanticized the musical contributions of African Americans along with the city's Civil Rights era history developed in Memphis while segregation in the city's school system, its residential patterns, and its politics remained in several significant ways basically unchanged.

⁷ See Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 75-99.

⁸ Marcus D. Pohlmann, *Opportunity Lost: Race and Poverty in Memphis City Schools*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 82.

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Chapter 1 Images

Figure 1: Part of the twenty-year construction zone. Beale Street in ruins on December 22, 1970. Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Special Collections.



Figure 2: A portion of the Beale Street urban renewal area from the top of the Peabody Hotel, August 16, 1974. Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Special Collections, photograph by John George.



Figure 3: Edward Hull “Boss” Crump, photograph from www.historic-memphis.com



Figure 4: Edmund Orgill, October 1957, UMSC, MVC.



Figures 5 and 6: Jean-Louis Ernest Messonier, *Barricade on the Rue de la Mortellerie*, June 1848, 1849; Daguerrotype taken on June 25, 1848 of the barricades in the Faubourg du Temple



Figure 7: Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, 1877 (Art Institute of Chicago)



Figure 8: Ebenezer Howard, a model Garden City from *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 1902

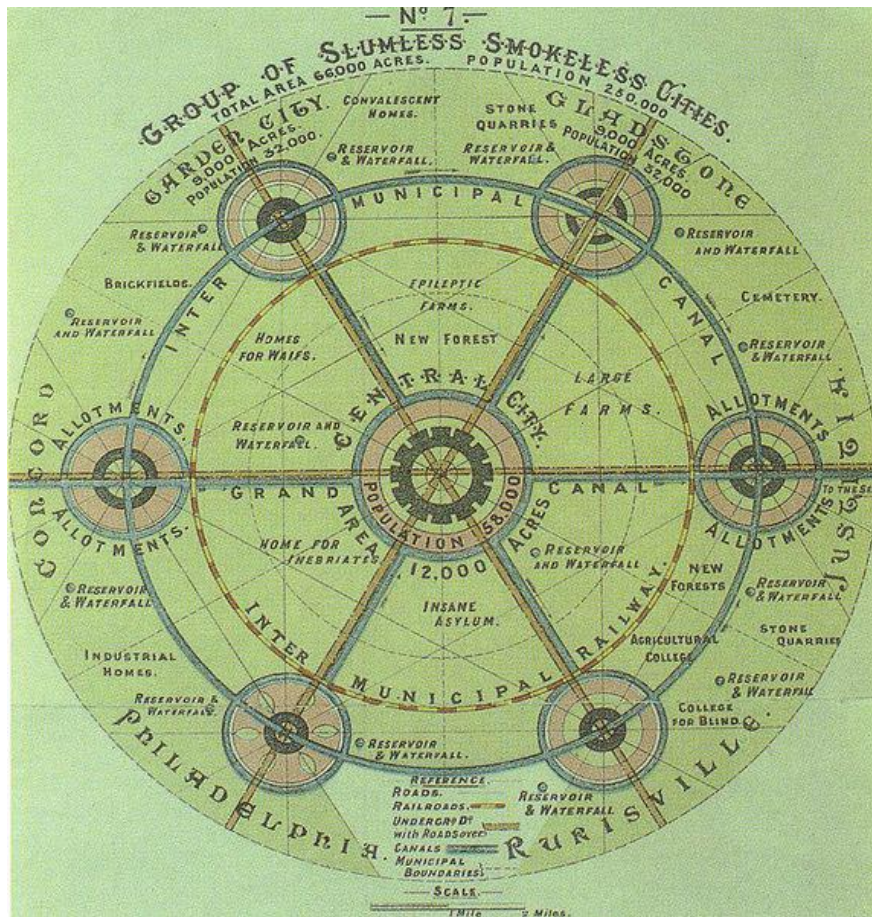


Figure 9: Jules Guerin, *Chicago Civic Center*, from Burnham's 1909 plan

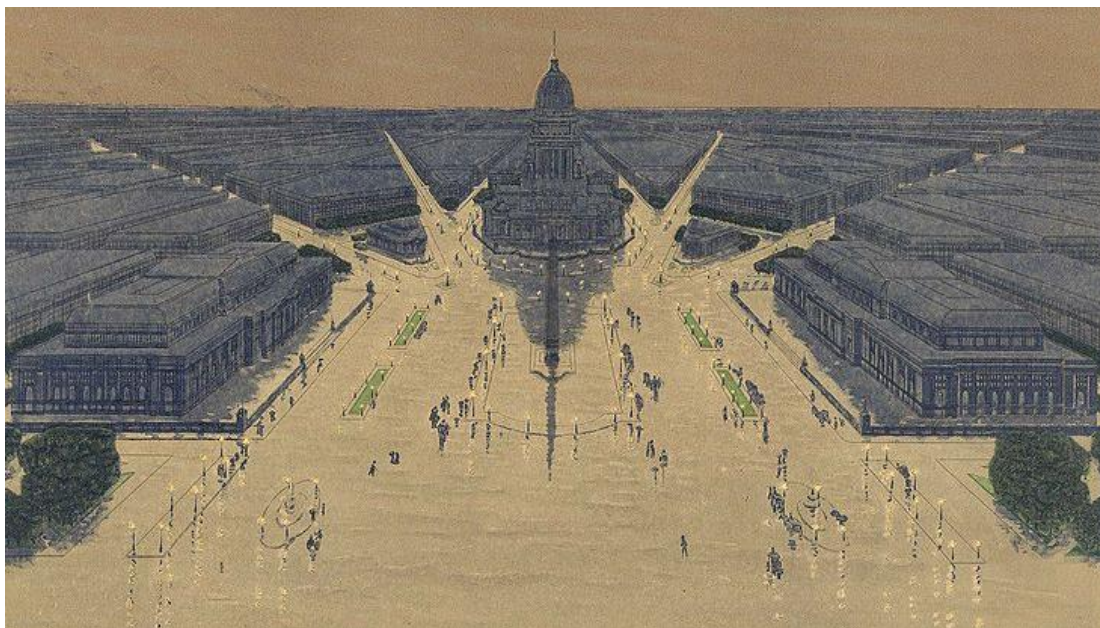


Figure 10: Le Corbusier's 1925 Plan Voisin in Paris. He elaborated his planning vision in the book *La Ville radieuse* in 1933.

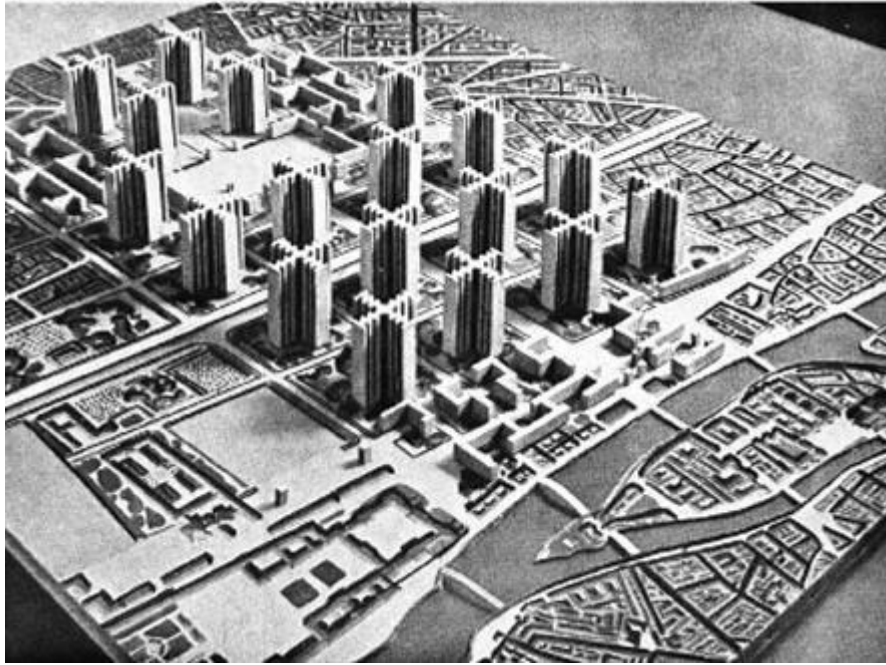


Figure 11: Downtown civil rights demonstration, June 17, 1961 from “Negro Marchers Are Led by Boy,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, June 17, 1964.

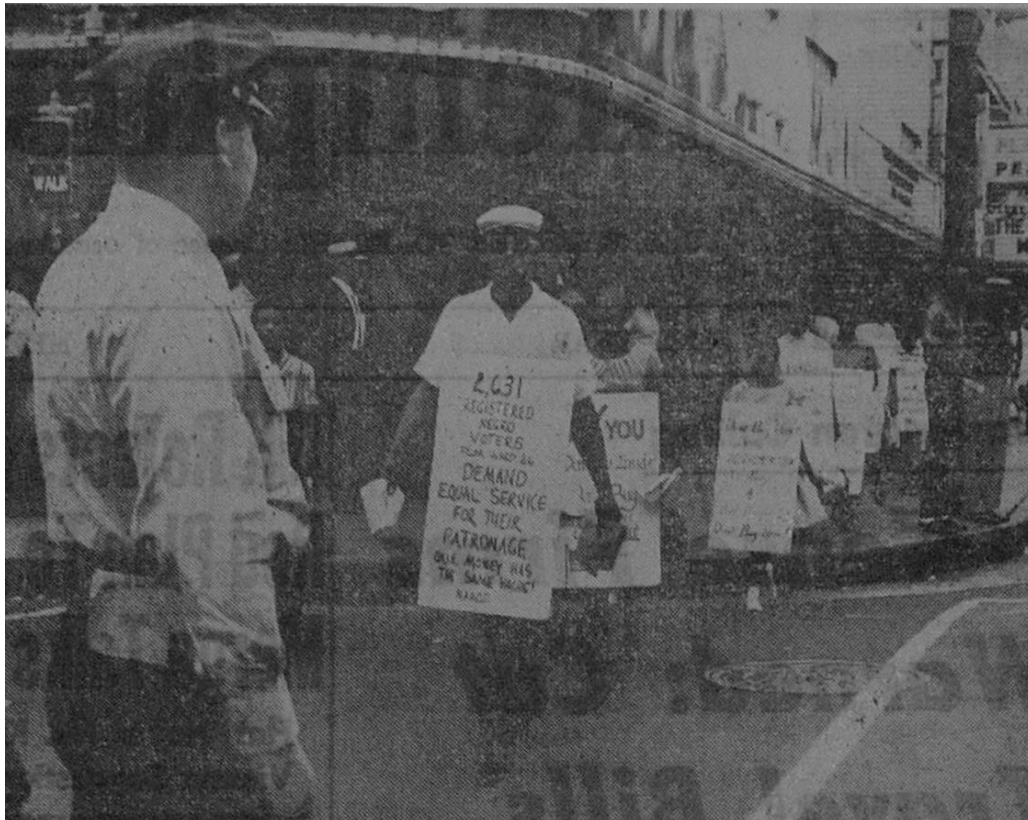


Figure 12: The only photograph of sit-ins in Memphis at UMSC, MVC, sit-in at the Normal Tea Room, May 1964, photograph by James R. Reid.



Figure 13: School segregation protests, September 1963, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figures 14 and 15: "Race Mixing Is Communism" from UMSC; MS 93, Box 1, Folder 8

RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM

"ARE YOU A HYPOCRITE"

Do you send your children to a negro school?

Do your children have negros for playmates?

Do your children associate socially with negros?

Have you intergrated your family with negros?

Do you have negros in for meals and bridge?

Would you like to have negro grandchildren?

Would you object to your children marrying negros?

If you teach, preach or advocate race mixing and you answer NO to

Any of the above questions you brand yourself "A HYPOCRITE."

Figure 16: Railroad Avenue Project Zone, From the Temporary Loan Application, 1952. (SCA, UR Files, Box 279)



Figure 17: Land Disposition Plan for Jackson Avenue Project. (R-3) (SCA)

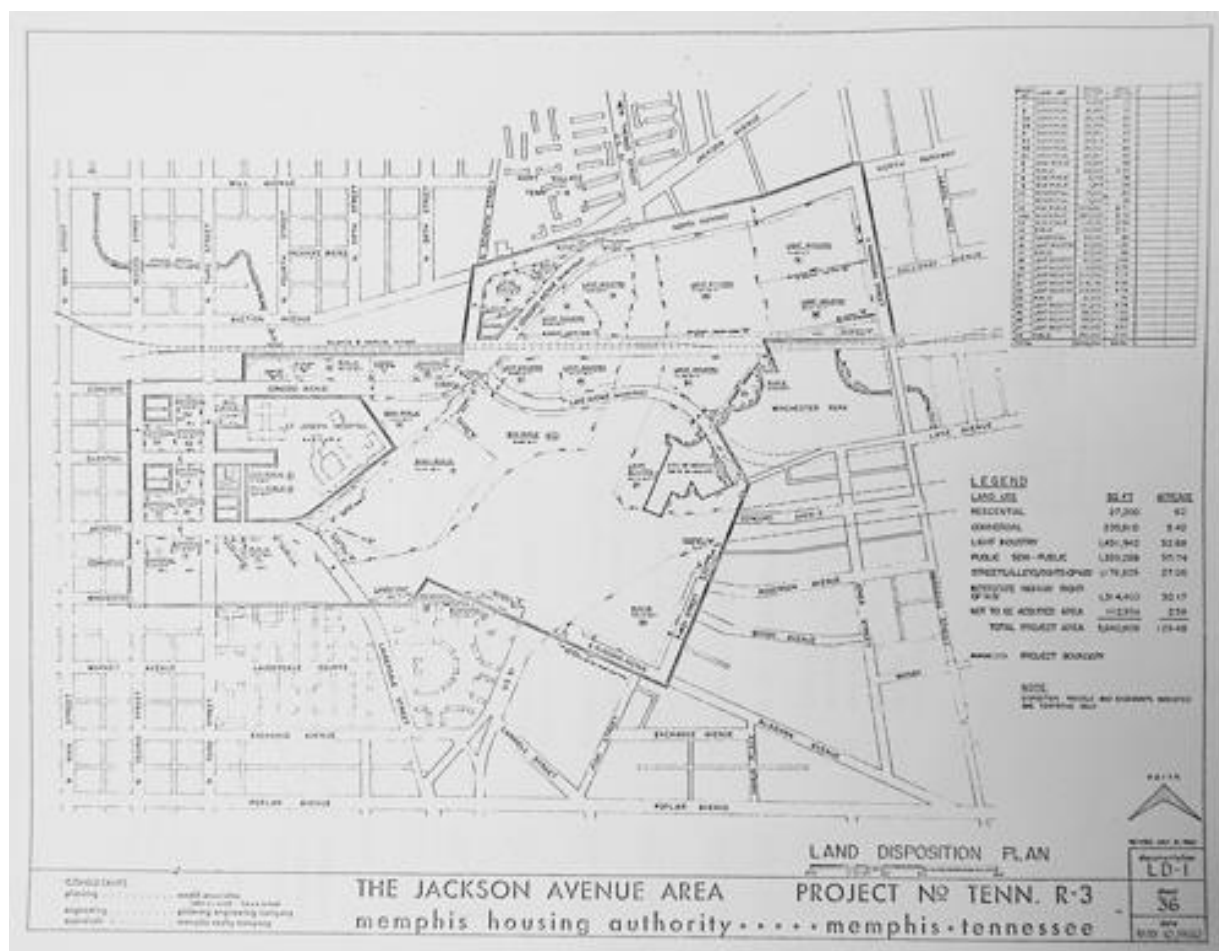


Figure 18: Intersection of Polk and Orleans St. in the center of the Railroad Avenue Project, May 1951. (SCA, UR Files, Box 312)



Figure 19: 510 Mosby Ave. (rear) in the Jackson Avenue Renewal Area, early 1950s. (SCA)



Figure 20: Urban Renewal Public Hearing, date and project unknown. (SCA)



Chapter 2 Images

Figure 1: Present and Proposed Track Arrangement of the Memphis Streetcar System, Plate 25 of the 1924 Bartholomew Plan

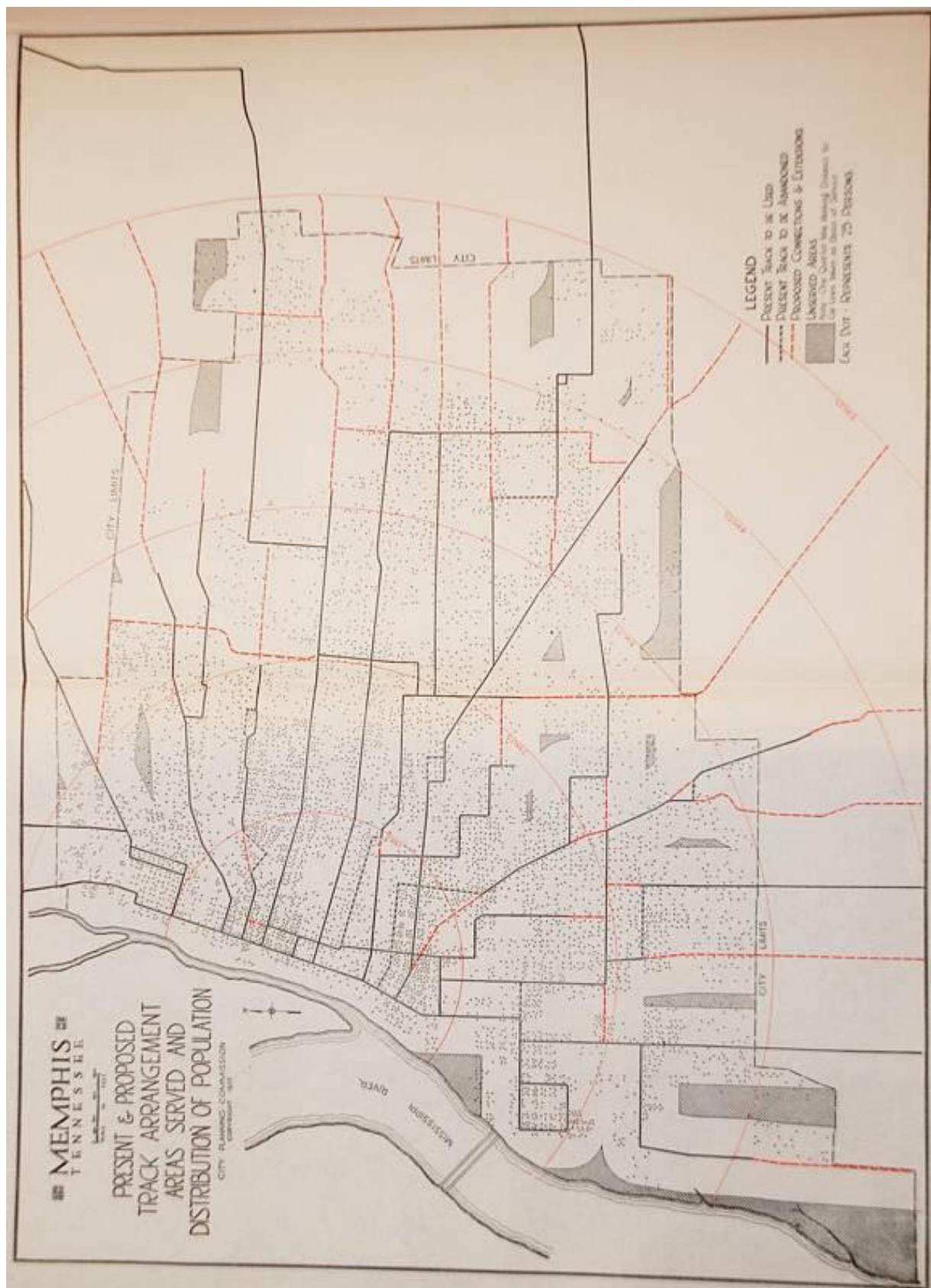


Figure 2: Map based on the 1941 joint survey of the MHA and the WPA. Gray areas show areas with a majority of dwellings considered substandard and the black areas show the location of the five prewar housing projects. Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, Figure 27

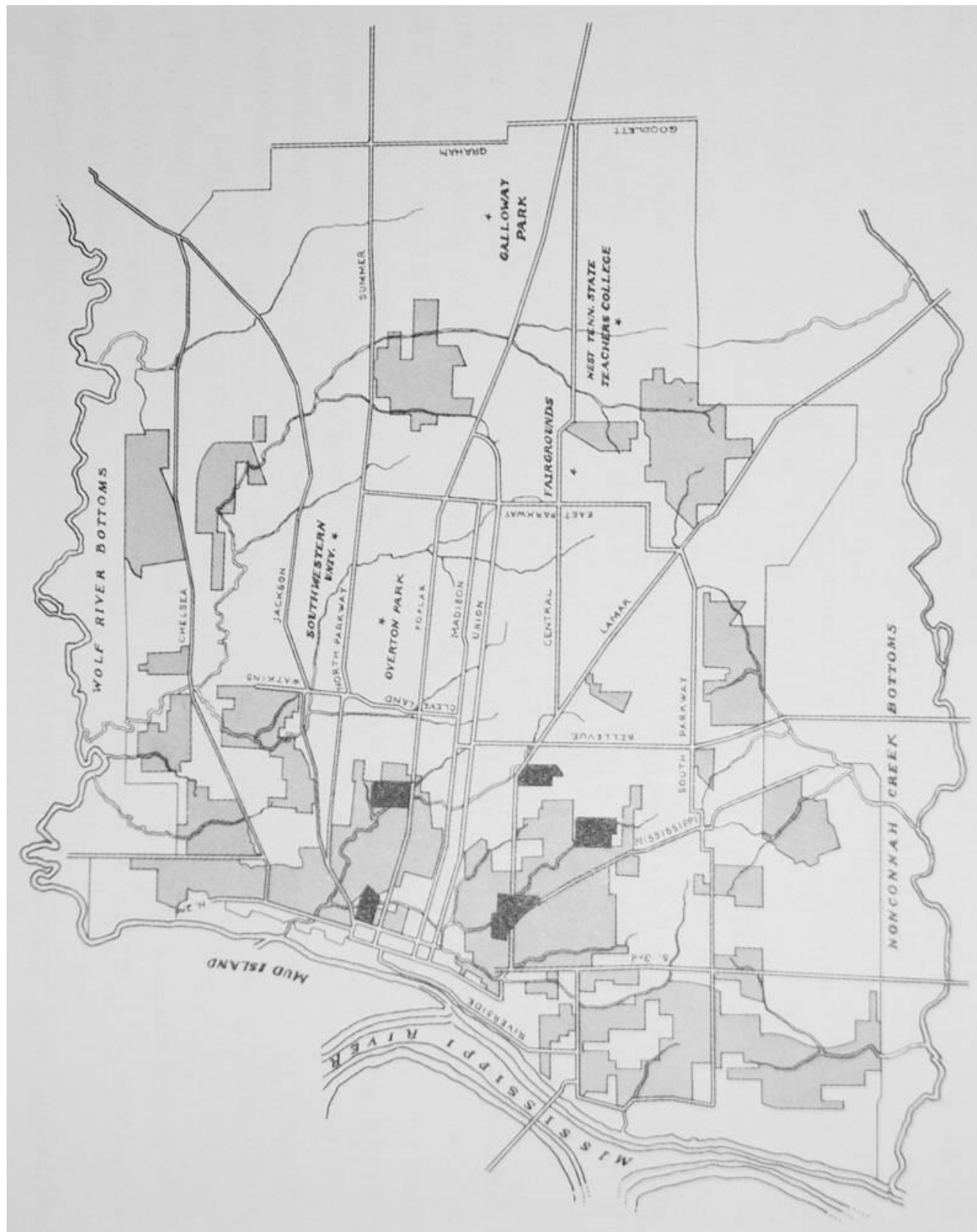


Figure 3: Census Tracts with 70 Percent or Greater Black Population from 1940 to 1980, Map from Silver and Moeser, *The Separate City*.

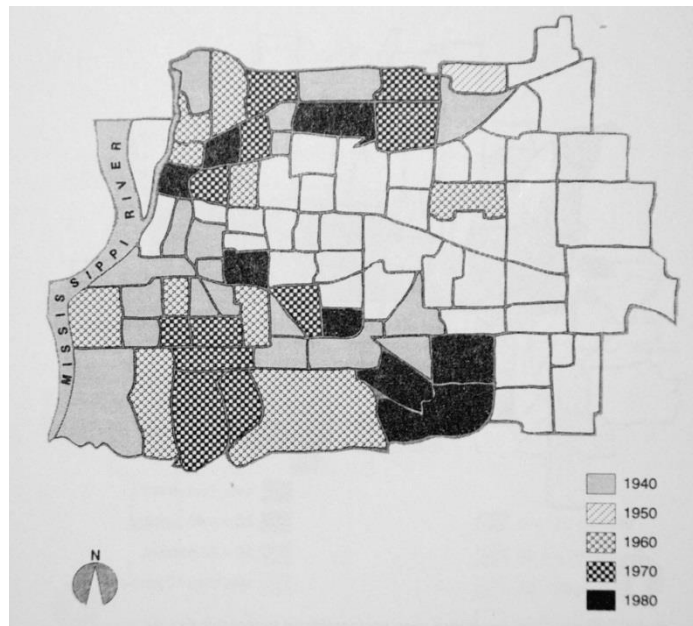


Figure 4: 2005-2009 map of Memphis by race, *New York Times* (<http://projects.nytimes.com/census/2010/>), blue dots represent 100 African Americans, green dots whites, yellow dots Hispanics, and red dots Asians.

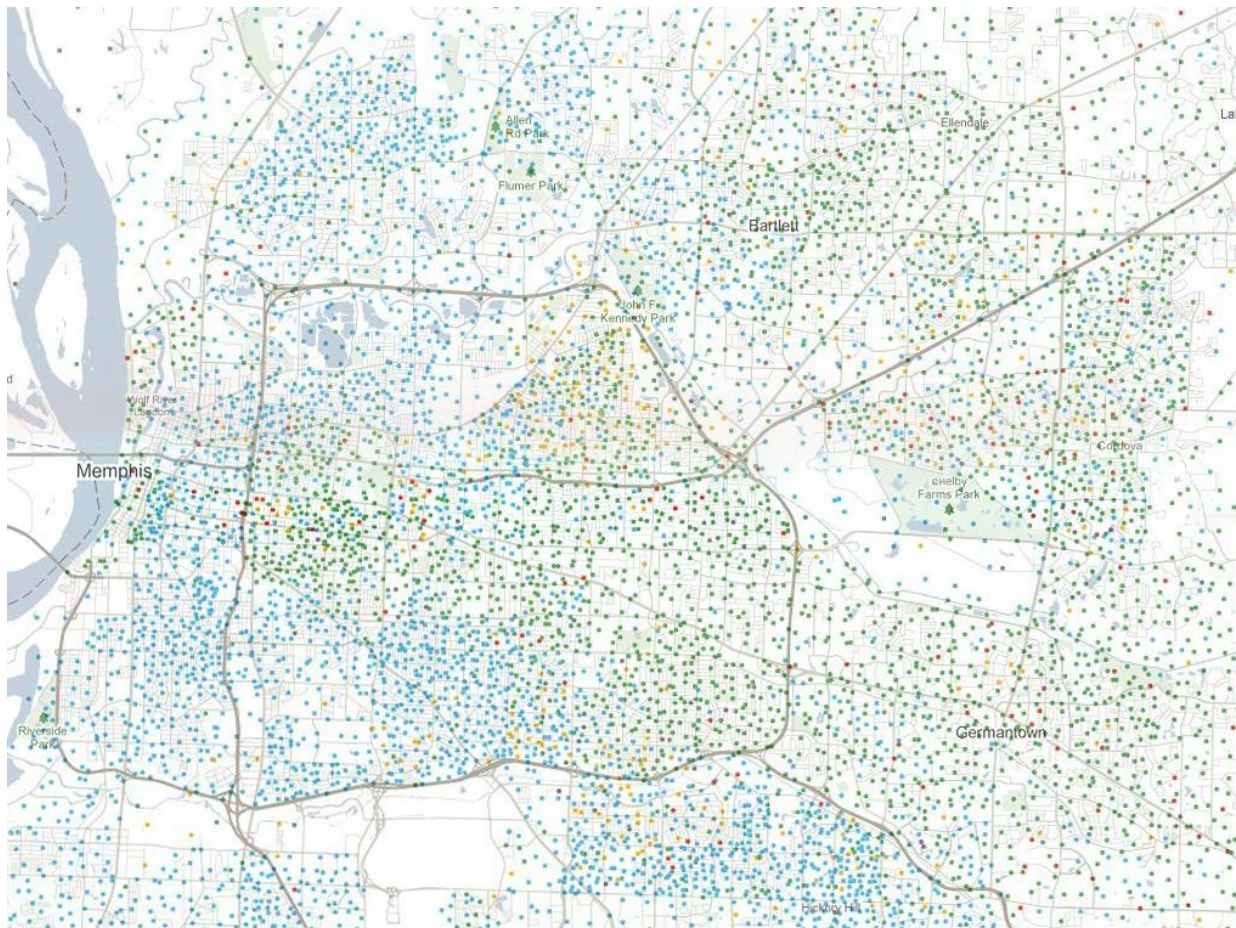


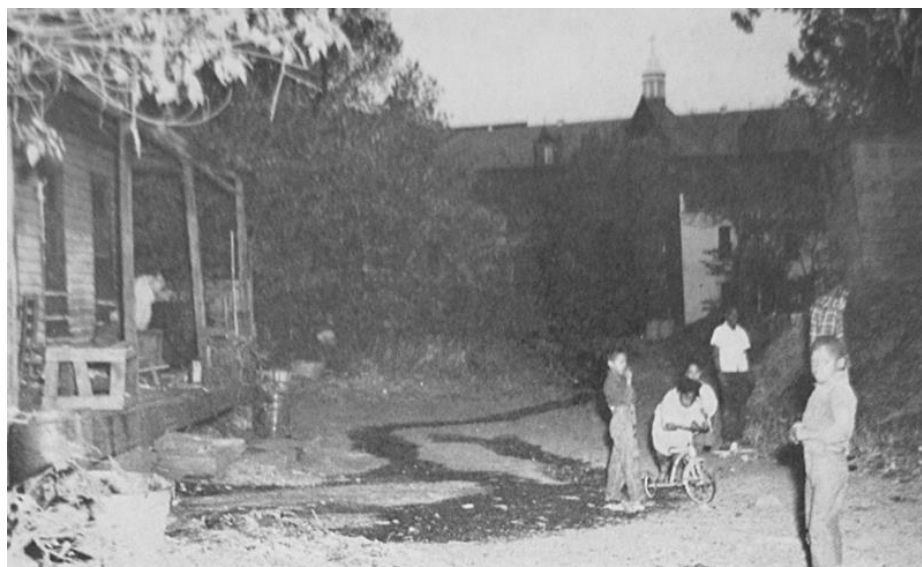
Figure 5: Central building of Lauderdale Courts shortly after completion in 1938, *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, UM Mississippi Valley Collection



Figure 6: 462 Alabama Street, Home of the Presley family (on the lower level) from April 1953 to 1955, Photograph from the Urban Renewal Files of the SCA



Figure 7: The Miller Family, pictured in the 1958 Annual Report, UMSC, MS 87 Box 28, Folder IA



Old Jackson Avenue area offered little for these children.



This is where they lived with other members of the family.



Figure 8: Miller Family



Figure 9: 405 Alabama Avenue, Home of the Miller Family, SCA, Urban Renewal Files, Box 292



Figure 10: Still showing Sun Studios in 1988 from *Mystery Train* (1989).



Figure 11: (Left to Right): Sam Phillips, Elvis Presley, and Marion Keisker (the secretary of Sun Studios) outside Sun Studios



Figures 12 - 14: Three aerial photographs from 1940 to 1959 that show the Getwell Avenue area below Audubon Park. The red dot marks 1414 Getwell, the location of the Presleys rental house

Figure 12: Aerial photograph of Getwell Avenue below Audubon Park, June 25, 1940, SCA



Figure 13: Aerial photograph of Getwell Avenue below Audubon Park, June 15, 1949, SCA



Figure 14: Aerial photograph of Getwell Avenue below Audubon Park, January 22, 1959, SCA



Figure 15: 1960 Roadmap of Memphis with detail of the Getwell Avenue area.

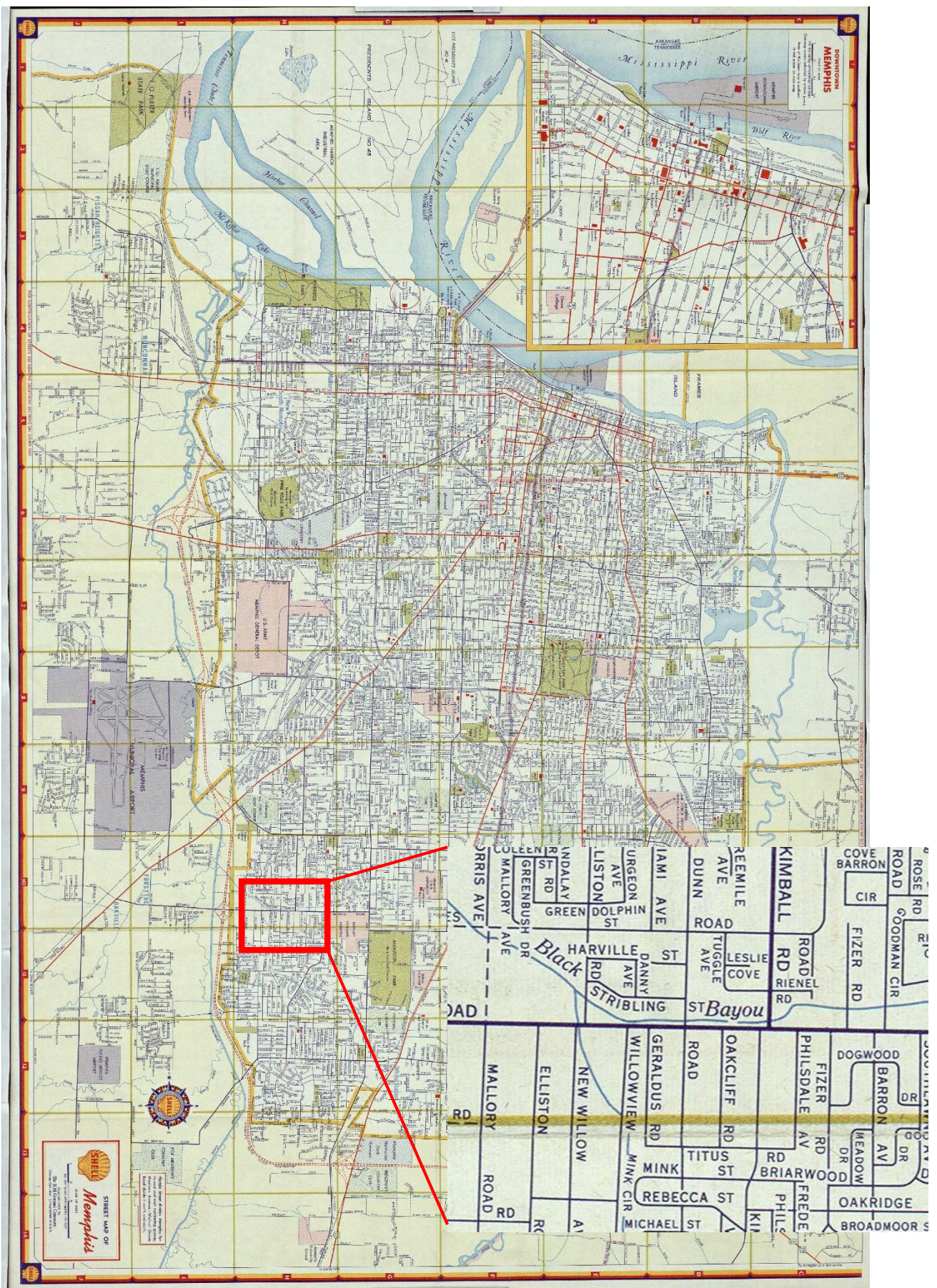


Figure 16: Elvis Presley on the lawn of 1034 Audubon Drive, May 1956

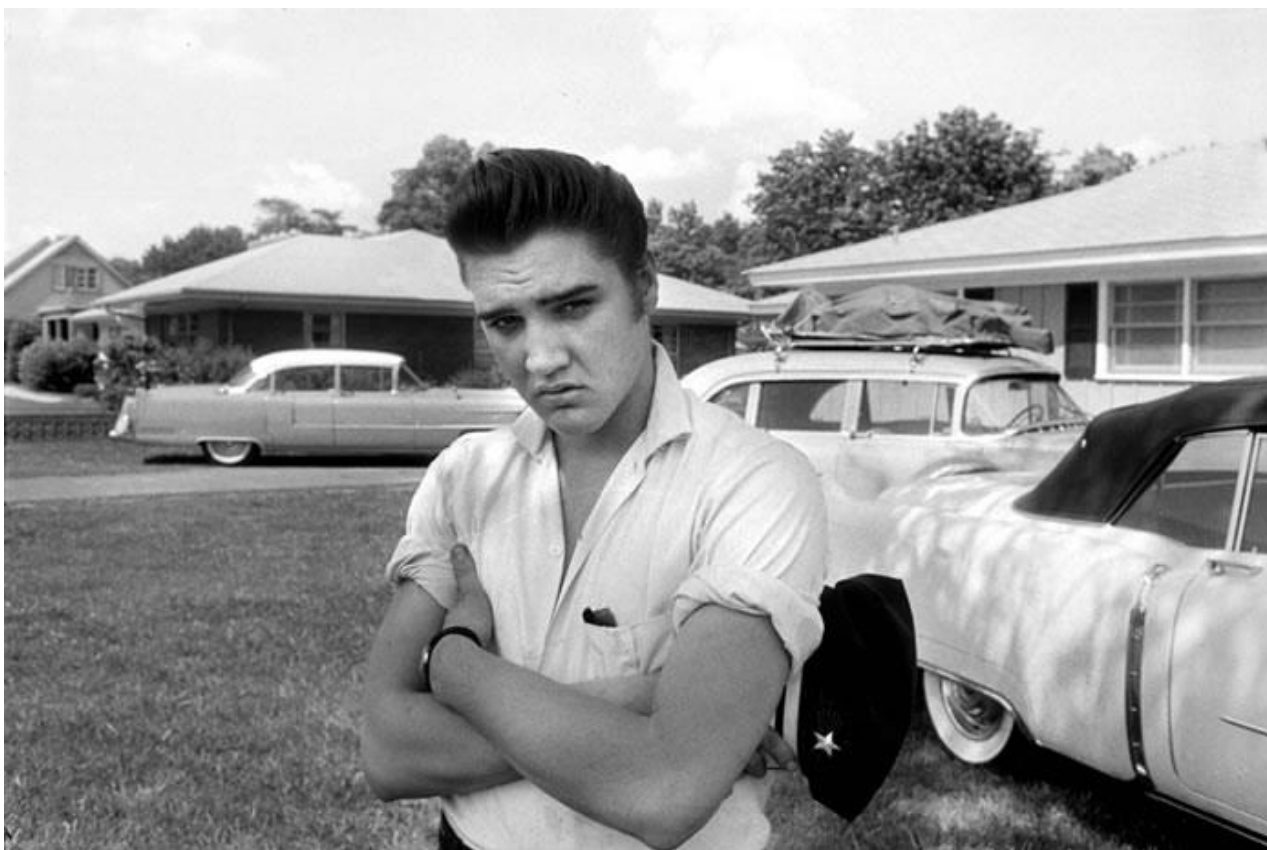


Figure 17: Elvis Presley and Family, back porch of 1034 Audubon Drive, July 4, 1956



Figure 18: Elvis Fans Picking the Grass at 1034 Audubon Drive



Figure 19: Lowenstein's South, August 1, 1956, Commercial Appeal



Figure 20: Lowenstein Building, 62 North Main Street, 2009, Commercial Appeal, Jeffrey Jacobs



Figure 21: Elvis with the newly installed gates at Graceland, April 22, 1957



Figure 22: Elvis at Graceland, c. 1957, Michael Ochs Archives



Figure 23: The four individuals arrested in the garden hose incident. As the existing accounts from the neighborhood indicate that Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Banks (pictured on the right) were the leaders of the mob threatening residents, real estate agents, and African Americans moving into the neighborhood, there is a high likelihood that they should have been the primary suspects for the never prosecuted bombing. The other individuals are Mrs. M.C. Burton the owner of the house being shown (far left) and Mrs. J.M. Beard who wielded the garden hose (center left).



Figure 24: Houses off Manassas Street within the Jackson Avenue Urban Renewal Project, MHA (SCA, Box 191)



Figure 25: Image from the June 1906 edition of *Ladies Home Journal* article by J. Horace McFarland, the President of the American Civic Association titled, “Eyesores that Spoil Memphis.” This open drainage ditch, like DeSoto Bayou, had been a problem in Memphis for quite some time. (page 29).

**BAYOU GAYOSA FROM THE
REAR OF DE SOTO STREET**

This stream passes through the best section of the city, and is as bad as this for a considerable distance. These banks ought to be made beautiful.



Figure 26: Tenement Building at 683 Galloway Avenue on December 22, 1957. Note the open drainage ditch on the right. Bill Day photographer. (SCA, Box 191)



Figure 27: Proposed Major Street System, Plate 2 of *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee*, 1924.



Figure 28: Proposed Treatment: Memphis River Front and the Island, Harland Bartholomew, 1923, Frontispiece of *The City Plan of Memphis, Tennessee: Final Report*, 1924

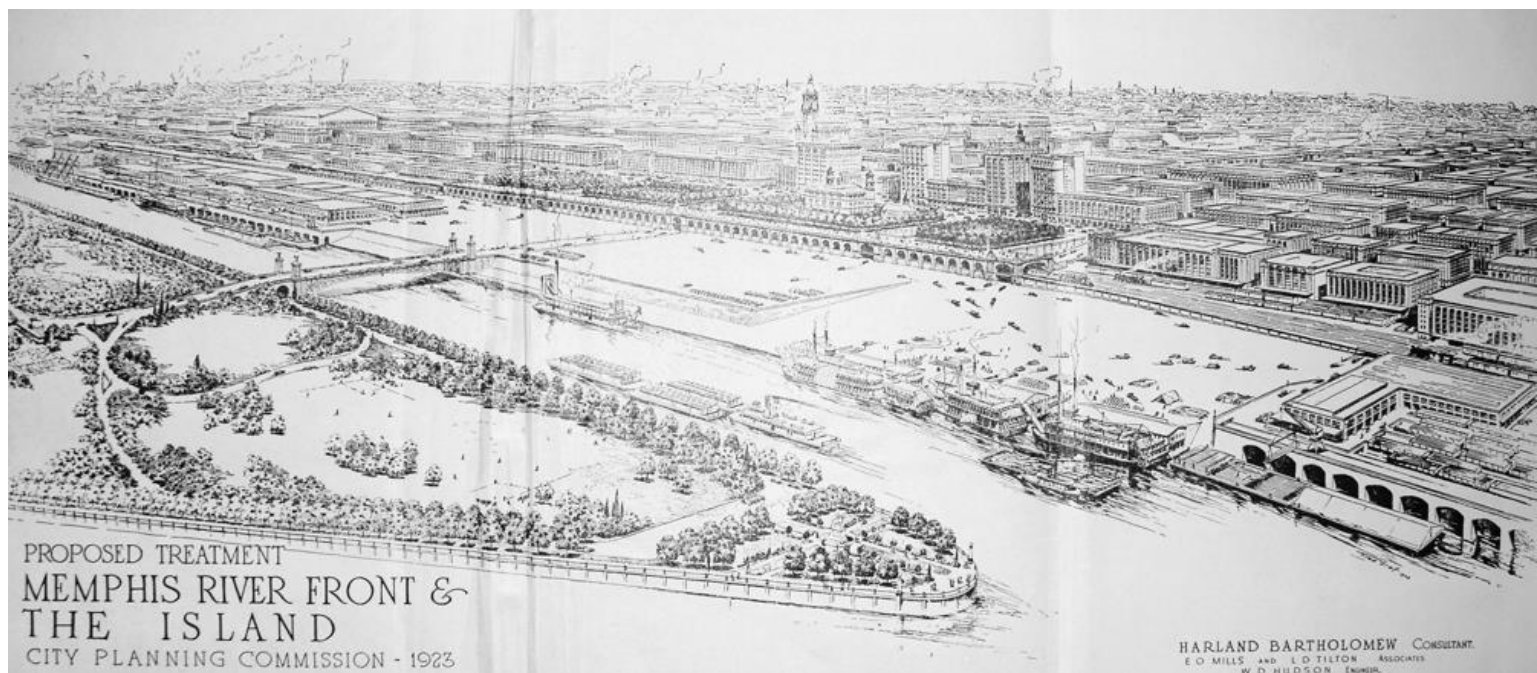


Figure 29: Holiday Heights, June 1962, Mississippi Valley Collection (UMSC)



Figure 30: Frayser Park Site, Ken Ross, photographer, June 7, 1959, Mississippi Valley Collection (UMSC)



Figure 31: Towers at Poplar and White Station, Jack E. Cantrell, September 19, 1978, Mississippi Valley Collection (UMSC), towers from left to right: Clark Tower (1971), White Station Tower (1965), and Memphis Hilton (1975)

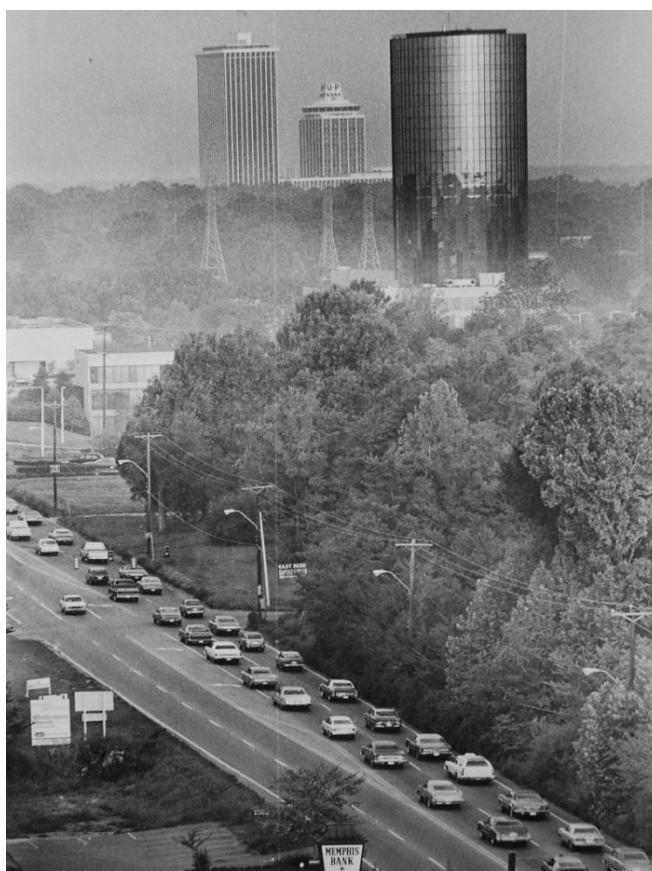


Figure 34: Protest in front of the Board of Education on October 11, 1969, one of the earliest demonstrations in the school desegregation and school board representation protests of 1969. Photograph by Tom Barber, *Press-Scimitar*, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 35: Protesters in downtown Memphis on October 22, 1969. Photograph by James R. Reid, *Press-Scimitar*, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 36: November 1, 1969 AFSCME and AFLCIO protest as part of the school desegregation and school board representation protests of 1969. Photograph by Tom Barber, *Press-Scimitar*, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 37: Black Monday protest demonstrations in downtown Memphis, November 3, 1969, Photograph by James R. Reid, *Press-Scimitar*, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 38: Black Monday protest demonstrations at Civic Center Plaza, November 3, 1969, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 39: Protesters outside Booker T. Washington High School on Black Monday, November 3, 1969, Photograph by James R. Reid, *Press-Scimitar*, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 40: Protesters gathering outside Clayborn Temple AME Church on November 3, 1969, also the gathering place for the Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 41: Child at Black Monday demonstration. As a continuation of the Black Monday protests, many participated in boycotting white retailers during the Christmas shopping season, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 42: Family of Willie James Summerall, March 9, 1972, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 43: The family of Robert E. of Frazier, March 9, 1972, photograph by Ken Ross, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 44: CAB School in Frayser held in the pews of a local church, February 2, 1973, photograph by James R. Reid, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 45: Demonstrators and counter-protesters, August 31, 1963, photograph by James R. Reid, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 46: Counter-protesters on August 31, 1963, photograph by James R. Reid, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 47: Child hurling rock at CAB bus burial protest, March 22, 1972, photograph by Barney Sellers, UMSC, MVC. The sign in the photograph reads, "Here lies a school bus. No mourning from us. No more fuming, No more fussing, May this be the end of busing."



Figure 48: Classroom during a CAB-organized school boycott, April 28, 1972, photograph by Fred Payne, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figure 49: Protesters outside a local school, April 29, 1972, photograph by William Leaptrott, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 50: Protests outside school, August 22, 1973, photograph by Fred Payne, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.

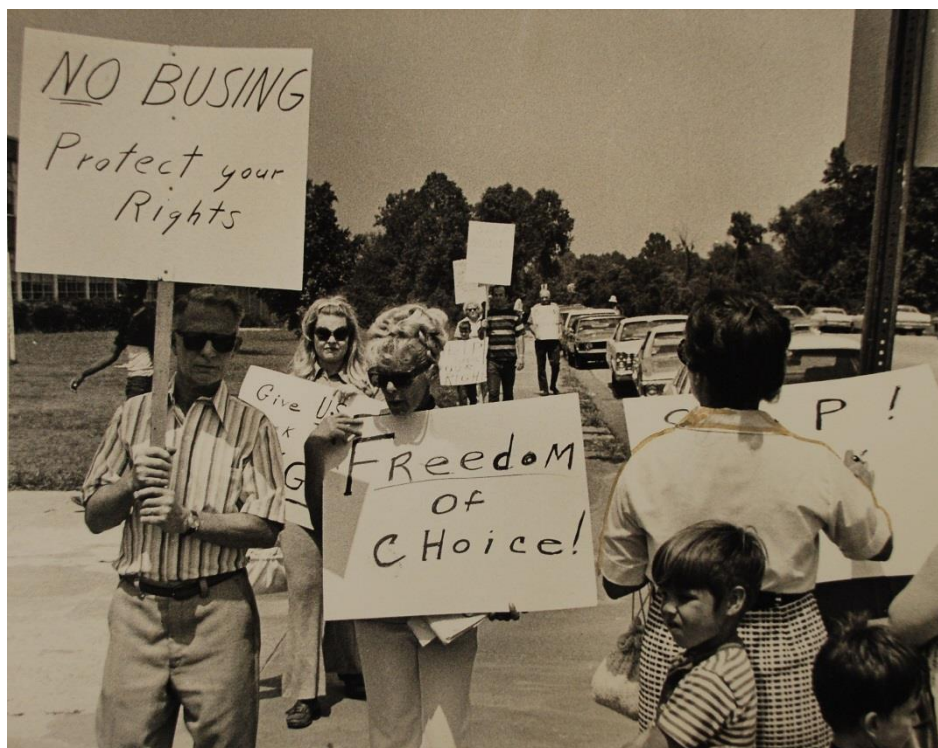


Figure 51: CAB busing assignment burning protest, May 17, 1972, photograph by Fred Payne, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC.



Figure 52: Faux funeral protest, February 19, 1972, Mississippi Valley Collection, UMSC



Figures 53 - 57: Series of aerial photographs from 1940 to 1971 of the Whitehaven area around Graceland, which is marked by the red dot

Figure 53: Aerial photograph of Whitehaven, June 25, 1940, SCA



Figure 54: Aerial photograph of Whitehaven as far south as the photos went, June 15, 1949, SCA



This is a black and white aerial photograph of a suburban or rural landscape. A prominent vertical road, labeled 'U.S. HWY. NO. 51', bisects the image. To the left of this highway, there are several residential streets including 'Winchester Rd.', 'Singing Trees Rd.', and 'Hickory Rd.'. To the right, a more densely developed residential area is visible, with streets such as 'Timothy Rd.', 'Paines Rd.', and 'CRAFT RD.'. A red dot is marked on a small, cleared area near the intersection of U.S. HWY. NO. 51 and CRAFT RD. The terrain shows a mix of developed land with houses and roads, and undeveloped, wooded areas.

Figure 56: Aerial Photograph of Whitehaven, January 21, 1964, SCA



Figure 57: Aerial photograph of Whitehaven, November 7, 1971, SCA



Figure 58: Far southern portion of Barlett, Tennessee, 1971, SCA. Bottom right corner shows the intersection of Summer and Stage, and the upper left corner shows the southeast corner of present-day Nesbit Park.



Figure 59: The same area shown in Figure 58 in 1990, SCA.



Chapter 3 Images

Figure 1: Marchers, including Rev. James Lawson holding “King Henry” sign during the Sanitation Workers’ Strike (not dated), photograph by William Leaptrott, MVC, UMSC.

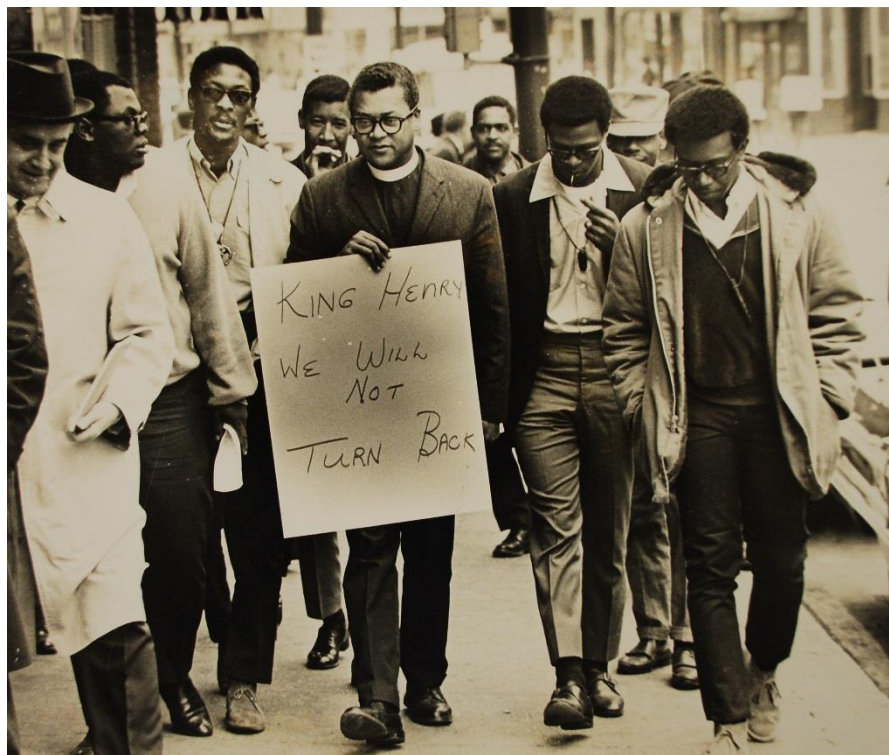


Figure 2: the Urban Renewal Mourners Bench in the Riverview project area, photograph from SCA, UR Files, Box 182.

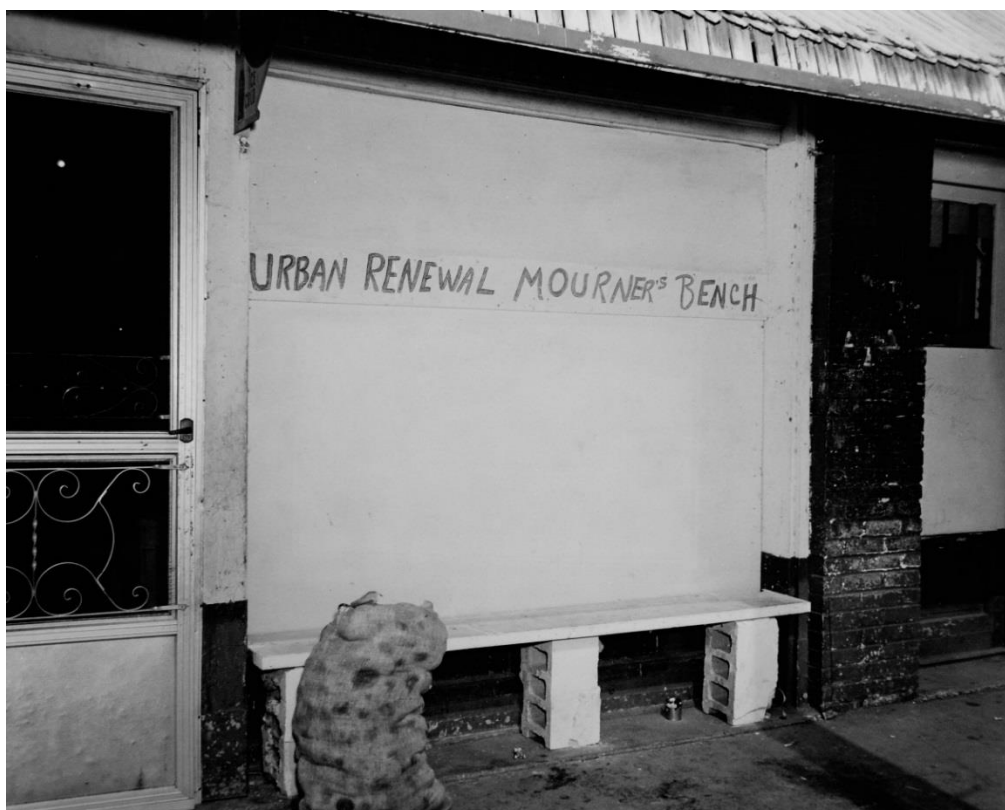


Figure 3: Plan for the Riverview Project, UMSC, MS 332, Box 14, Folder 404.

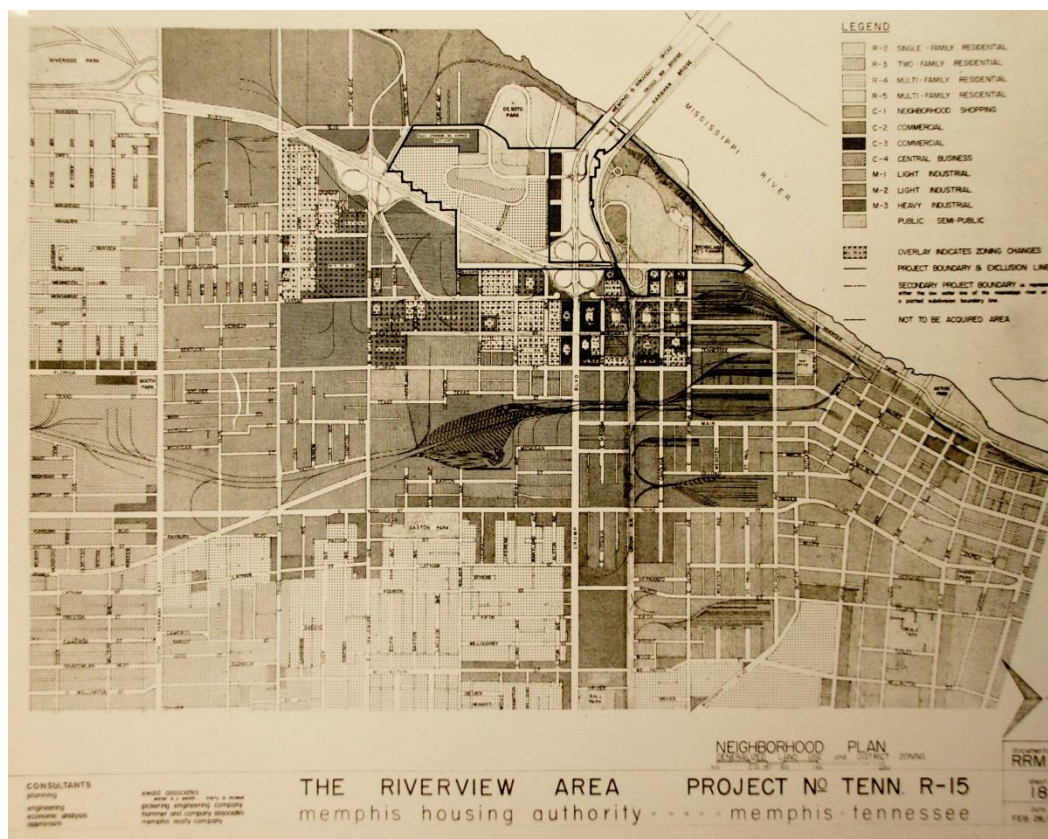


Figure 4: Rendering of the high-rise apartments built in the Riverview Project Zone, UMSC, MS 332, Box 14, Folder 404.

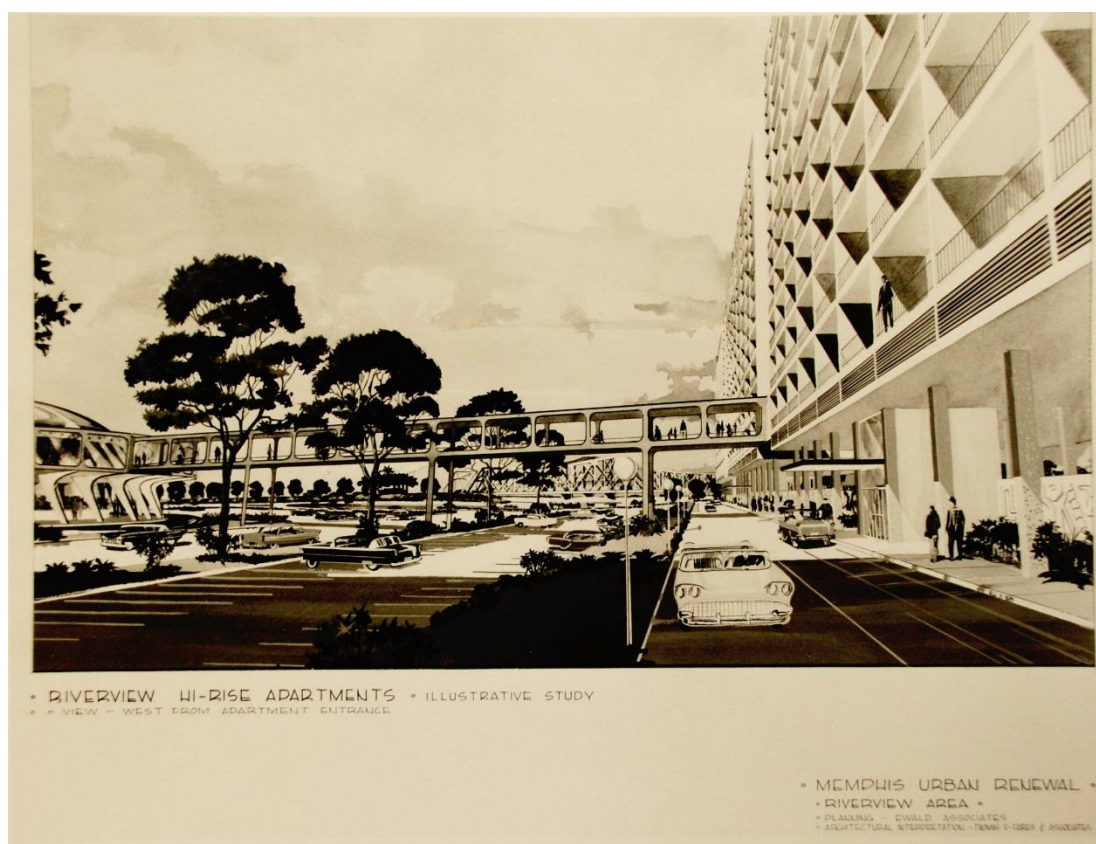


Figure 5: The funerary monument of Nathan Bedford Forrest in Memphis's Forrest Park, photograph 2010, by author.



Figure 6: Portion of a February 14, 1971 advertisement in the *Commercial Appeal* paid for by the Lakeland Jockey Club



Figure 7: The Memphis Steam Laundry shortly after completion, photograph from www.historic-memphis.com

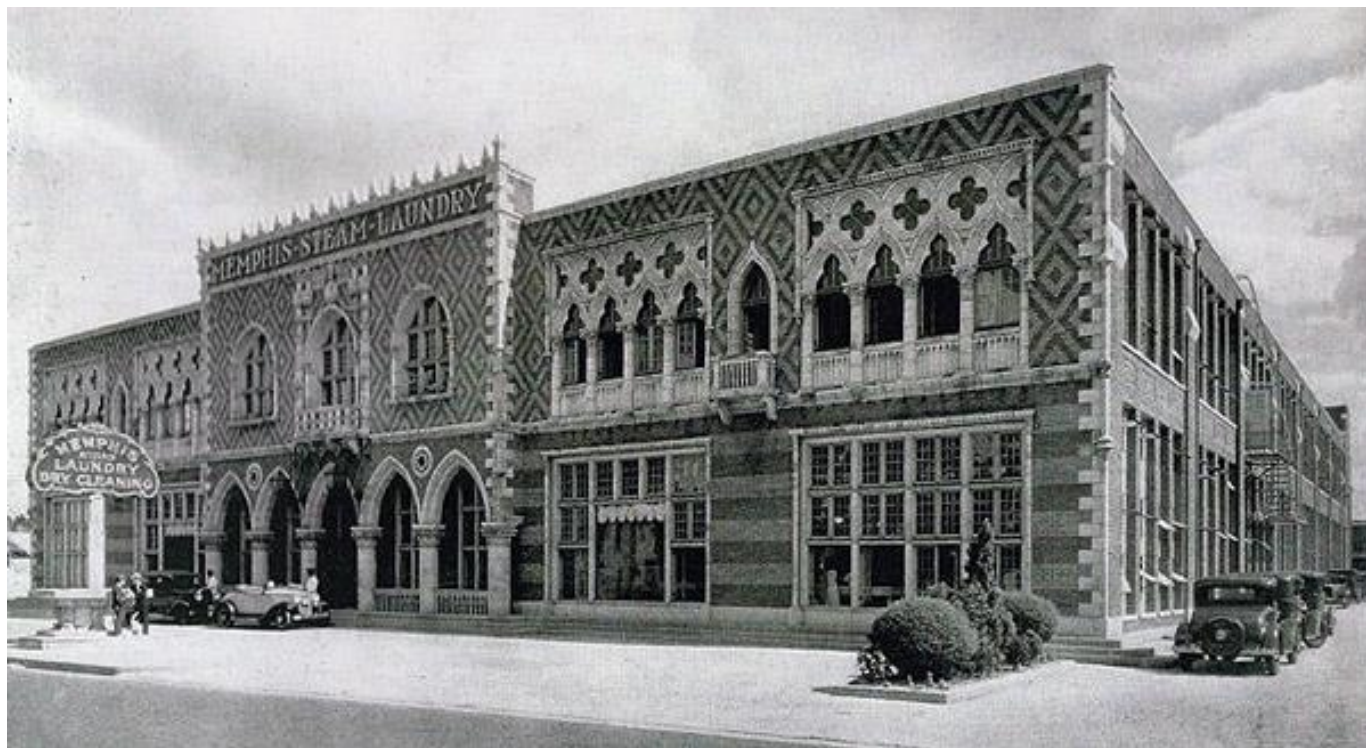


Figure 8: Site Plan of the Court Avenue Urban Renewal Area I (R-19), from the “Survey and Planning Application,” May 1960, SCA, UR Box 24.

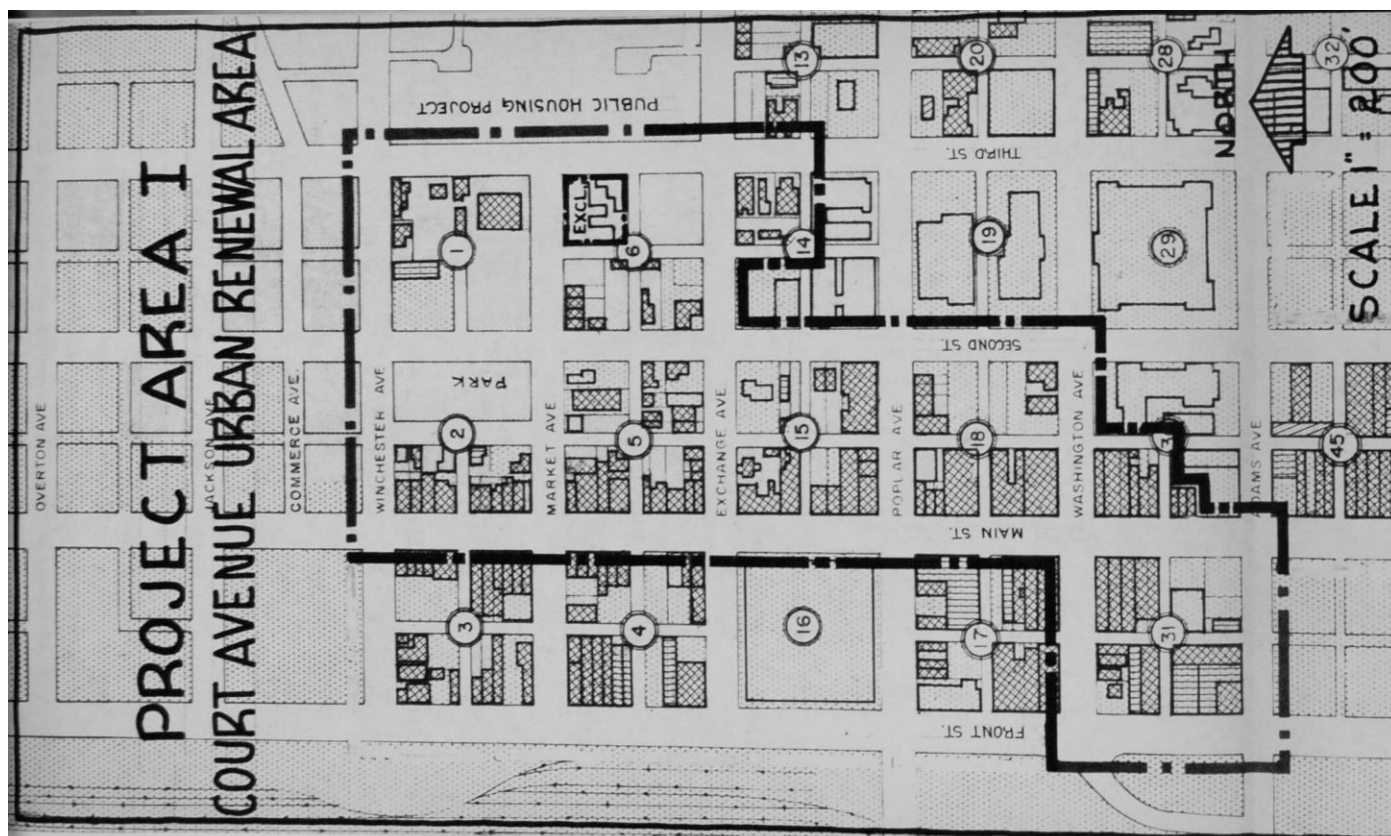


Figure 9: Shelby County Courthouse, 1940s, photograph courtesy of Blake Billings, image from *Memphis Magazine*, August 2011: <http://www.memphismagazine.com/Blogs/Ask-Vance/August-2011/Never-Before-Seen-Old-Photos-of-Memphis-Found-at-Local-Estate-Sale/>



Figure 10: The old Federal Building and Post Office, 1929, postcard from the Bluff City Photograph Collection, MSCR, MPL



Figure 11: Site Plan of the Civic Center, Plate 37 of *A Report upon the Comprehensive Plan: Memphis, Tennessee*

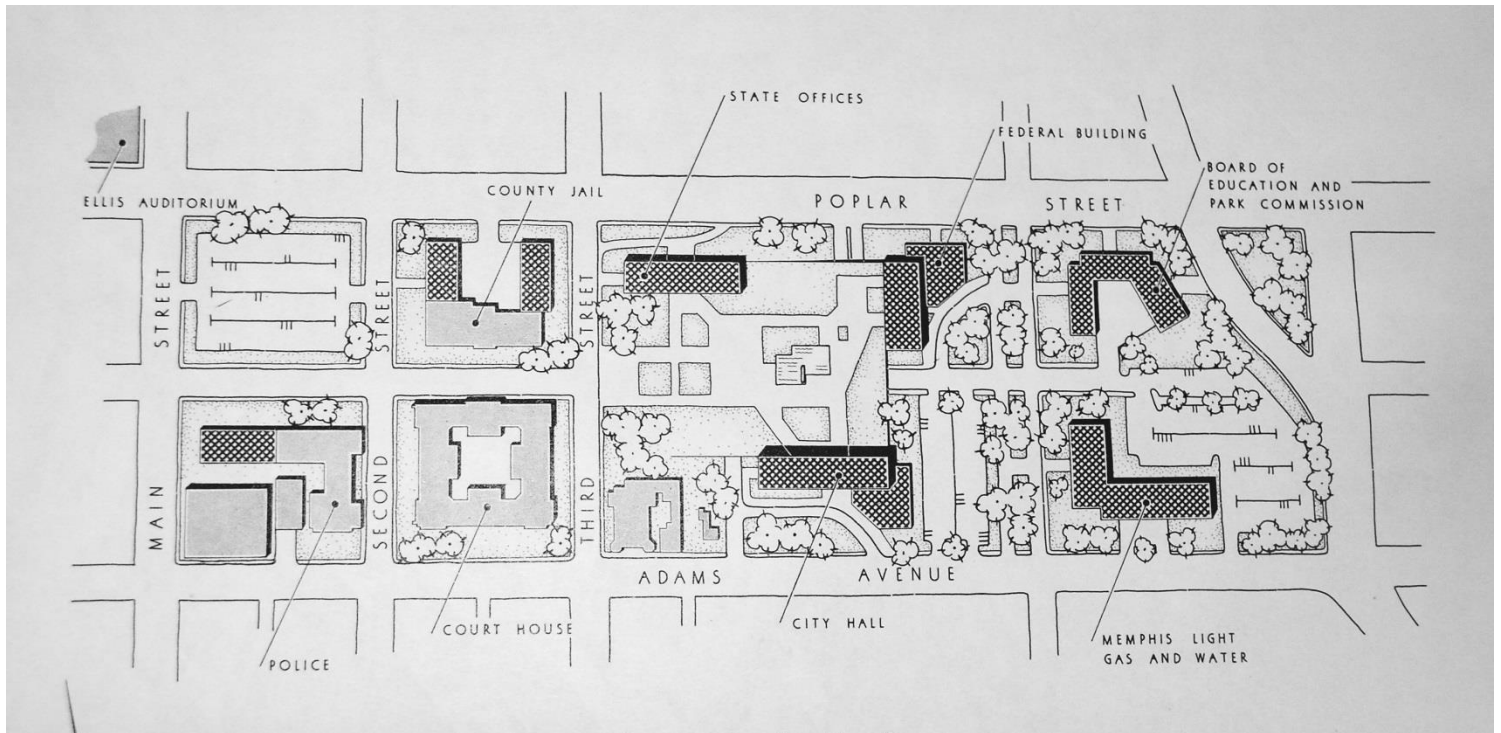


Figure 12: The Bartholomew Plan's proposed civic center, perspective, Plate 38 of *A Report upon the Comprehensive Plan: Memphis, Tennessee*



Figure 13: Bird's Eye Perspective of the Civic Center Plaza Design, from "Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3" of the League of Memphis Architects, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA, MVC, UMSC.

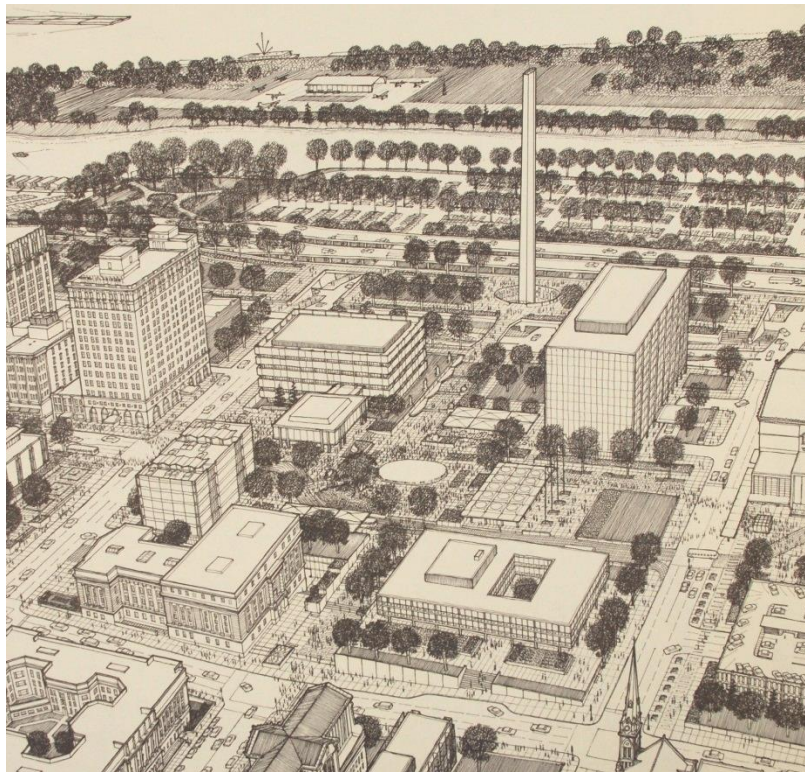


Figure 14: Proposed New Buildings Plan, from the "Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3" of the League of Memphis Architects, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

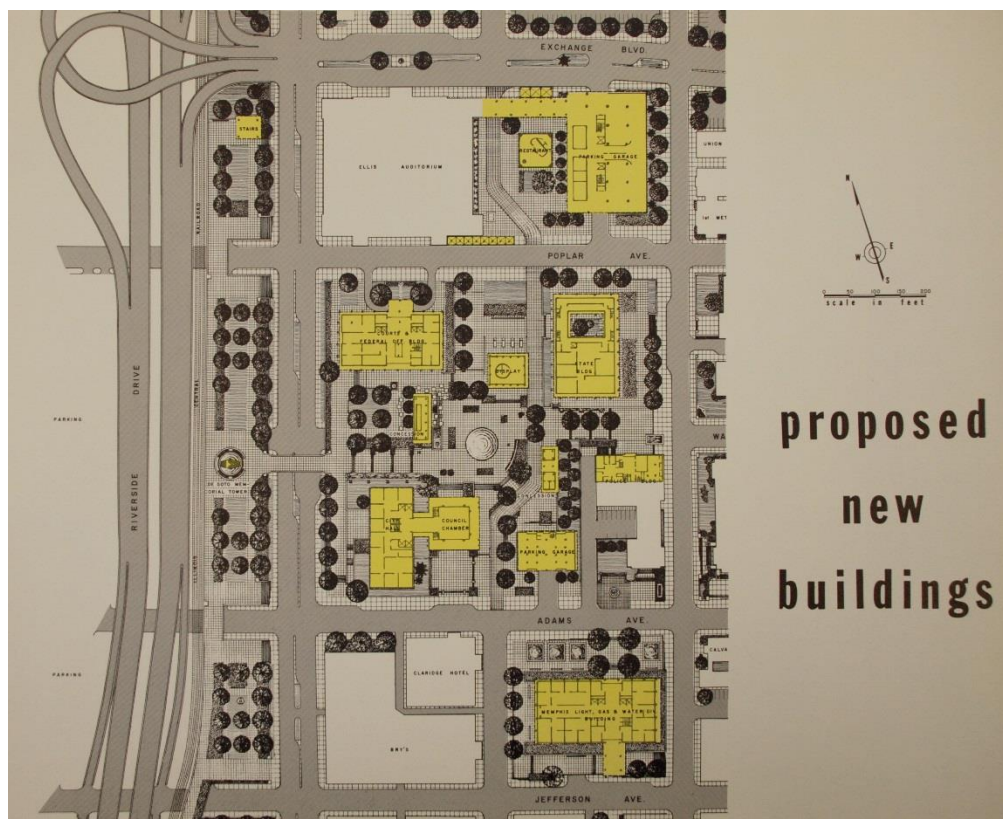


Figure 15: Federal Building, Memphis, 1960-1963, A.L. Aydelott. The building is still under construction when this photograph was taken. Notice the vertical steel I-beam elements have yet to be clad in marble. Photograph from SCA, UR Box 291.



Figure 16: Lafayette Park Pavilion Apartments, Detroit, 1961-1965, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, photograph from the University of Michigan



Figure 17: Photograph of the LMA's model for the proposed Civic Center Plaza showing the view from Arkansas across the Mississippi River. From the "Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3" of the League of Memphis Architects, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

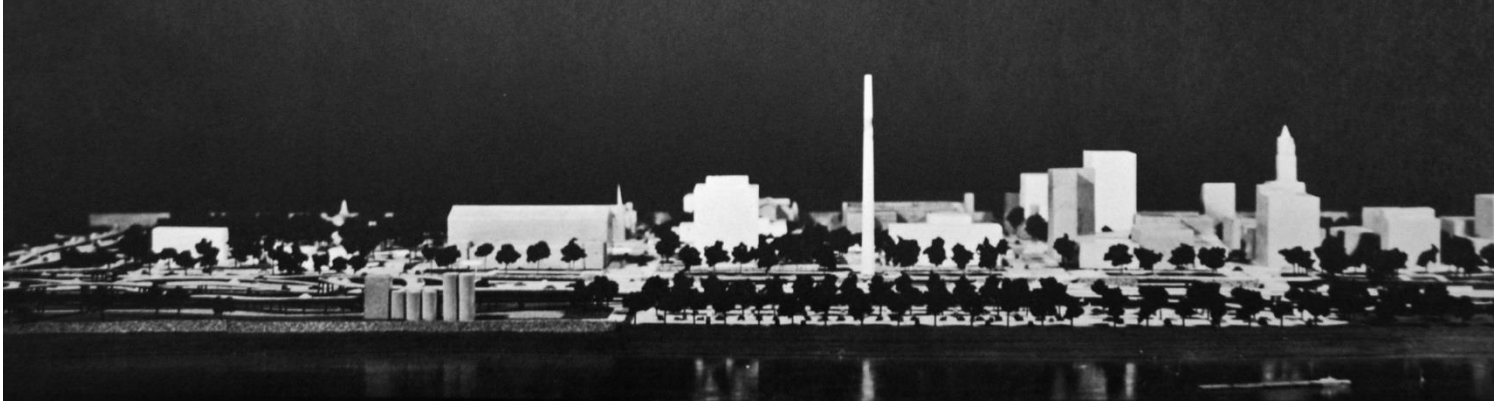


Figure 18: Perspective of the Civic Center Plaza from the northeast corner. The proposed City Hall (left) and the Federal Building (right) bookending the tower. The low building on the far right is the proposed Information and Display Pavilion. From the "Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3" of the League of Memphis Architects, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.

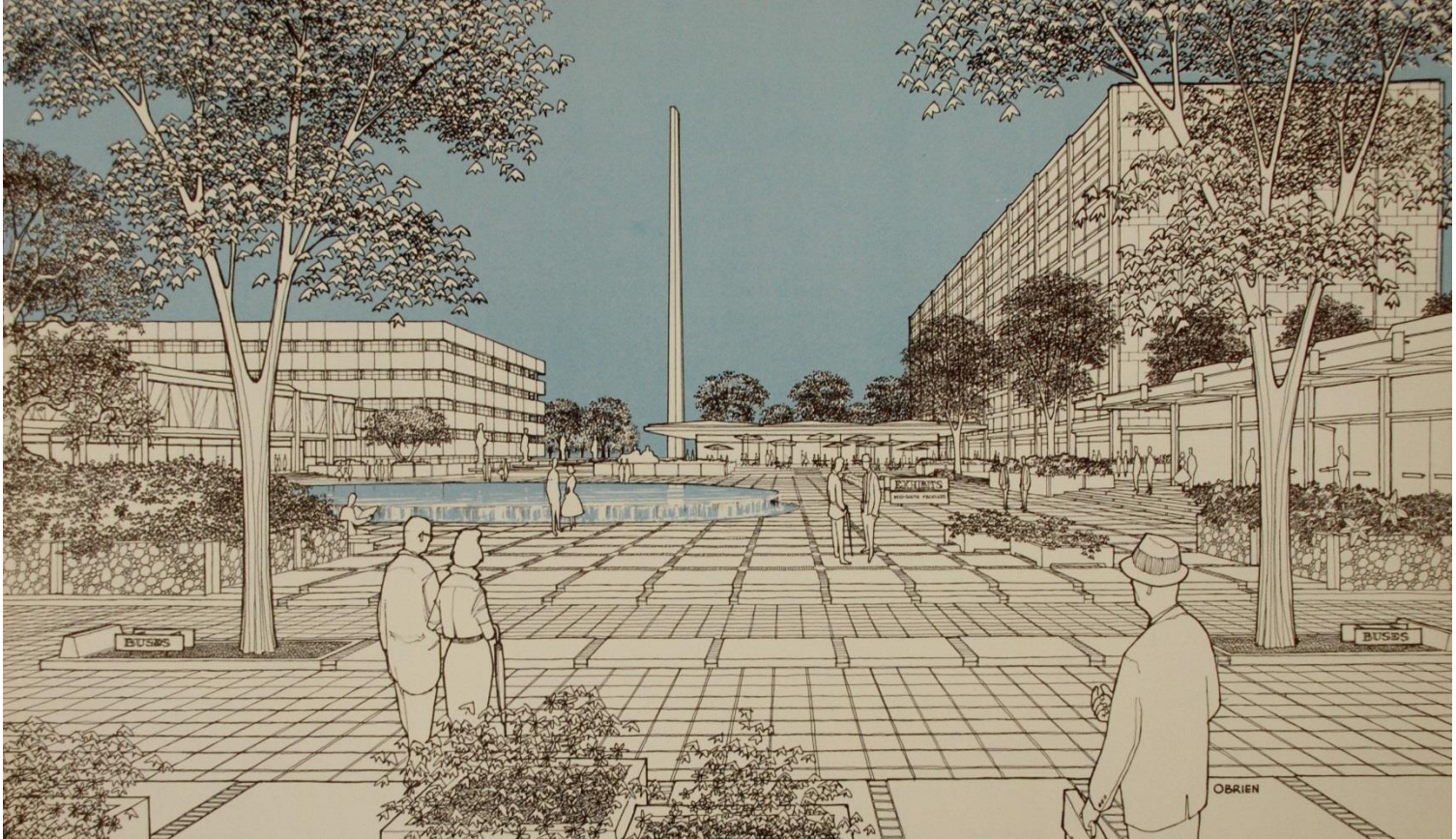


Figure 19: The platform and light well of the DeSoto Memorial Tower with an imagined design of what would become the Hernando de Soto Bridge to carry Interstate 40. From the “Civic Center Plan, Report No. 3” of the League of Memphis Architects, UMSC, MS 87, Box 25, Folder VIIIA.



Figure 20: Shelby County Office Building, 1959, Photograph from Johnson and Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*, 57.



Figure 21: Propaganda from a Pro-Southerners pamphlet showing Martin Luther King, Jr. at a supposed meeting of the Communist Party. UMSC, MS 87, Edmund Orgill Papers, Box 16, Folder IX. C.

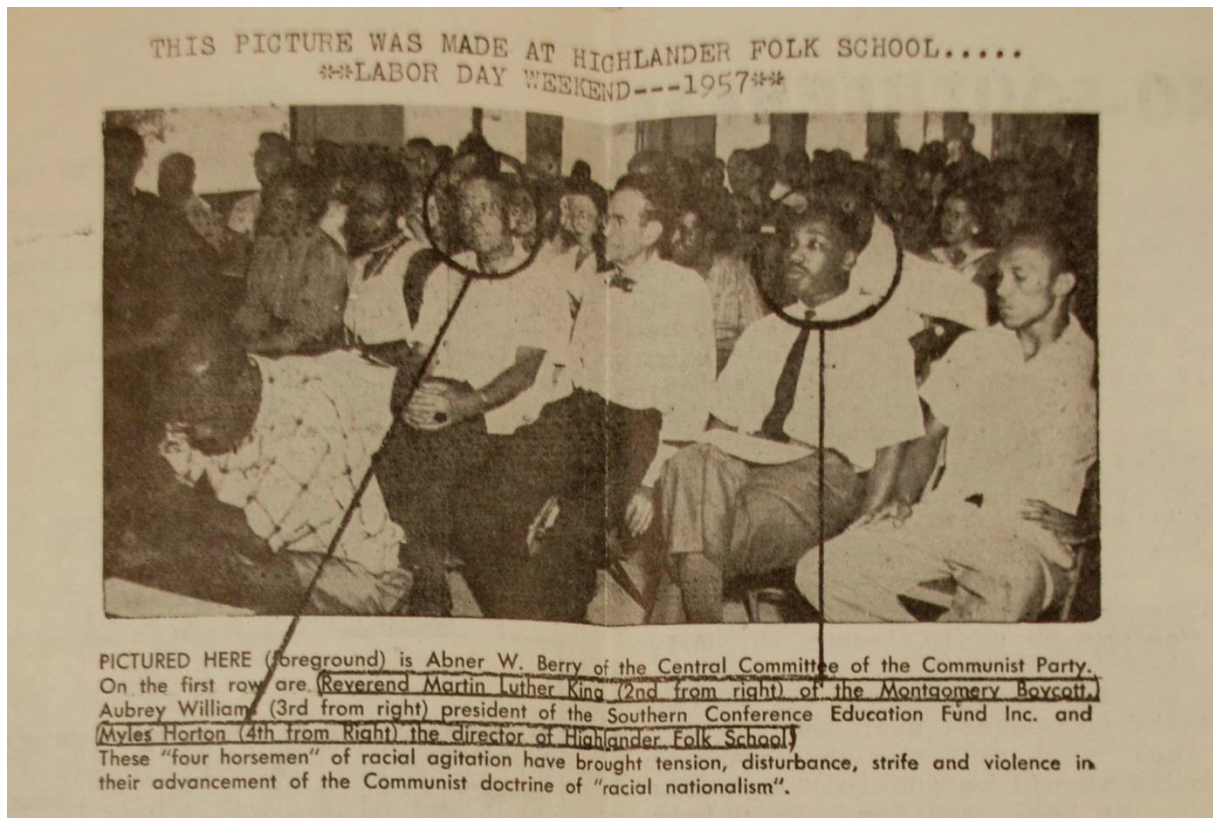


Figure 22: Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights marchers during the March Against Fear being confronted by two Mississippi State Troopers in northern Mississippi, photograph by Tom Barber, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 23 The garbage trucks in the lot at the “barn.” Note one of the old “wiener barrel” trucks at the far end of the lot in the upper portion of the picture. Photograph by Barney Sellers, the *Commercial Appeal* files



Figure 24: February 13 meeting (left to right): Mayor Henry Loeb, Joe Paisley, P.J. Ciampa, William Lucy, and T.O. Jones. Photograph by Barney Sellers, the *Commercial Appeal* Files.



Figure 25: Mayor Loeb amongst a sea of striking workers, photograph by James R. Reid, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 26: Mason Temple, from *A Pictorial History of the National Headquarters of the Church of God in Christ* (1955)



Figure 27 AME church, Clayborn Temple, previously Second Presbyterian Church, constructed in 1891, photograph by HABS.

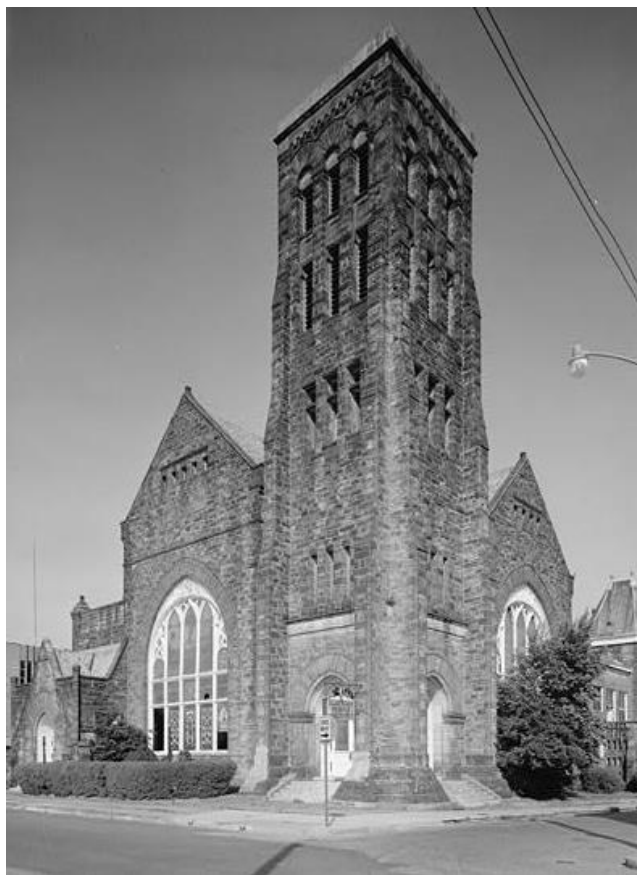


Figure 28: The march down Main Street between Madison and Monroe Street on February 23 before the police intervened. Photograph by Jack E. Cantrell, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 29: Police spraying mace directly into a marcher's face, February 23, 1968. Photograph by Jack E. Cantrell, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 30: Large group of police spraying mace, February 23, 1968. Photograph by Tom Barber, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 31: Police charging marchers in front of Goldsmith's Department Store, February 23, 1968. Photograph by Tom Barber, MCV, UMSC.



Figure 32: P.J. Ciampa after being maced by the police, February 23, 1968. Photograph from the Reuther Library, Wayne State University.



Figure 33: Demonstrators crossing Main Street in front of City Hall, February 26, 1968. Photograph by James R. Reid, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 34: March along Main Street, February 26, 1968. Photograph by James R. Reid, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 35: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Mason Temple holding a trashcan used as a money collection basket with a sign that read, "King Henry, This is OUR town not your DUMP!," March 18, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 36: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressing the crowd at Mason Temple, March 18, 1968. Photograph by Ernest Withers, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 37: Thomas Moore, a UAW member from Detroit protesting in the snow on March 22, 1968. Photograph by Fred Payne, MVC, UMSC.

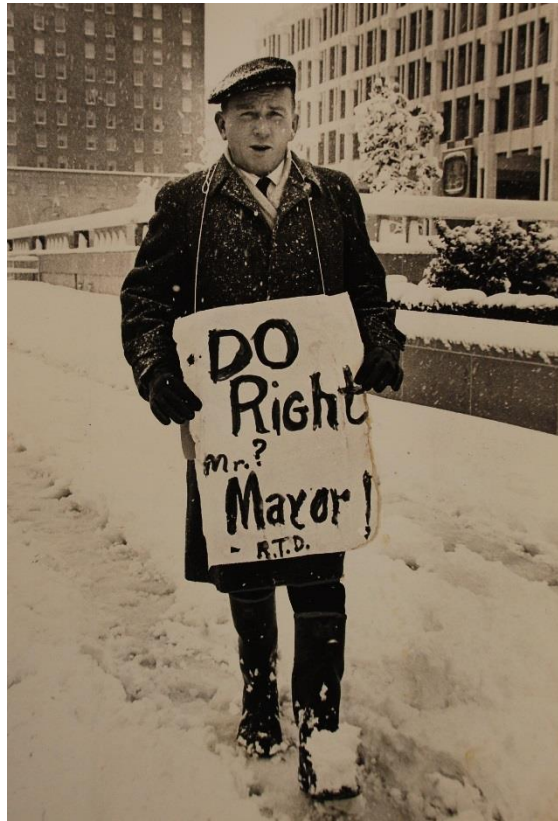


Figure 38: Assembled marchers waiting on the arrival of Dr. King, with sanitation workers in the background. March 28, 1968. Photograph by UPI, MCV, UMSC.



Figure 39: Ernest Withers's iconic photograph of the Sanitation Workers before the demonstration, March 28, 1968.



Figure 40: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after being rushed by students, March 28, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 41: Police running to break up an assembly at a black school. Events similar to this occurred as several black schools across the city. March 28, 1968. Photograph by James R. Reid, MCV, UMSC.



Figure 42: MPD officers with gas masks at Hernando and Beale Street, MVC, UMSC



Figure 43: Police with a beaten and bloodied man in custody, March 28, 1968. Photograph by Bill Evans, MCV, UMSC.



Figure 44: Beaten man in police custody, March 28, 1968. Photograph by William Leaptrott, MCV, UMSC.

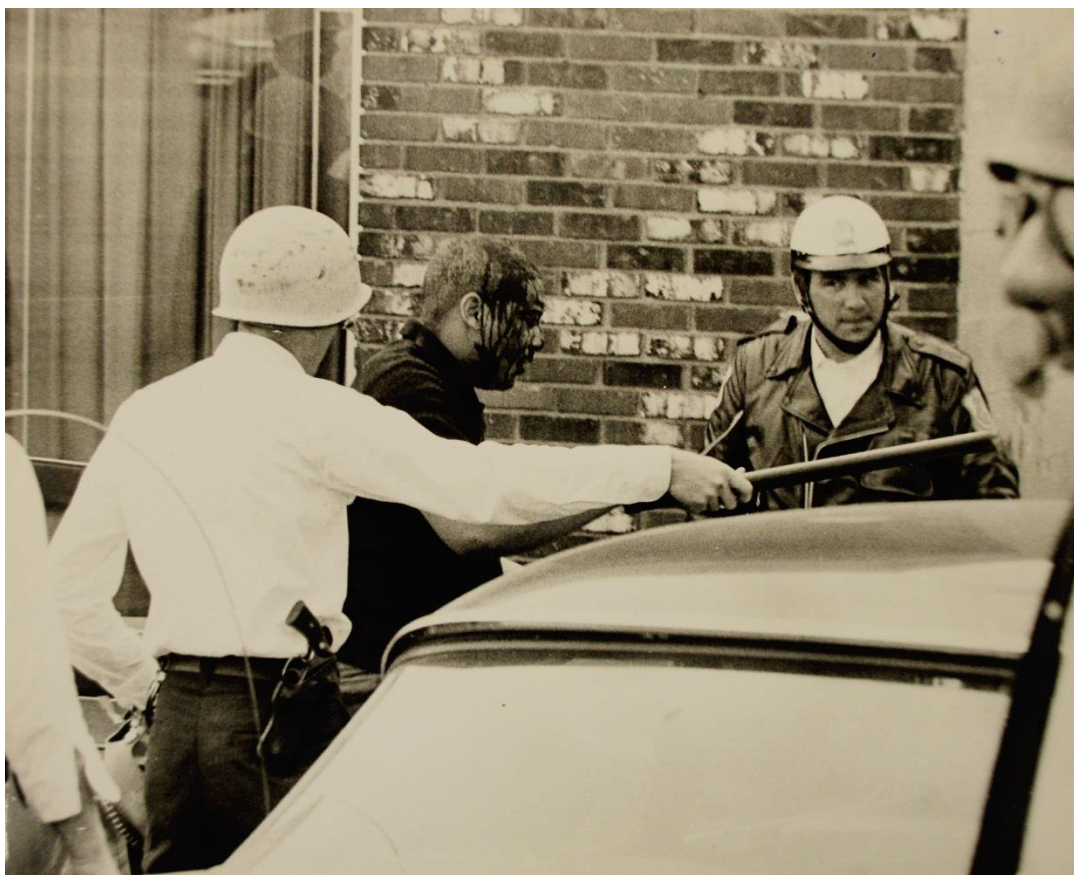


Figure 45: Police officer beating an African American youth. The boy standing on the right side of the photograph is Larry Payne who would be killed by MPD officer Leslie Jones later in the day, March 28, 1968. Photograph by Jack Thornell, Associated Press.

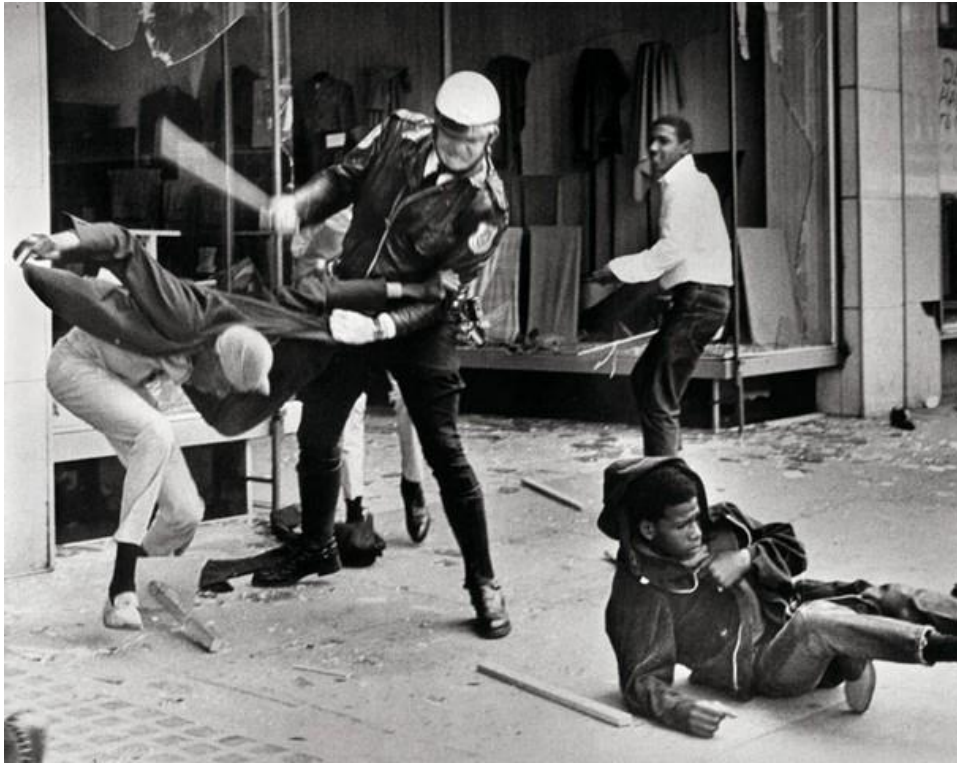


Figure 46: Man being beaten to the ground by MPD officer, March 28, 1968. Photograph by UPI, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 47: A looted Beale Street in front of A. Schwab dry good store, March 28, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 48: Police in front of Clayborn Temple, March 28, 1968. Photograph by Ron McCool, Black Star. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 49: National Guard troops newly arrived in downtown Memphis in front of the Orpheum Theater at Main and Beale. March 28, 1968. Photograph by Tom Barber, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 50: National Guard troops downtown near Main and Beale, either March 28 or 29, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 51: Sanitation workers marching on Main Street at Beale Street, March 29, 1968. Photograph by UPI, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 52: National Guard troops blocking Beale Street and tanks lining Main Street, March 29, 1968. Photograph by UPI, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 53: Ralph Abernathy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rev. James Lawson entering room 306 of the Lorraine Motel on April 3, 1968. Barney Sellers, *Commercial Appeal* Files



Figure 54: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and SCLC aide, Jesse Jackson, April 3, 1968 at Mason Temple. Photograph by Ken Ross, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 55: Still from the television recording of the end of Dr. King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, April 3, 1968.



Figure 56: SCLC aides at the Lorraine Motel pointing in the direction of the shot as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dies on the balcony. Photograph by Joseph Louw, Getty Images.



Figure 57: Mayor Loeb after meeting with the ministers who marched to city hall. Note the shotgun under his desk. Photograph by Robert Williams, *Commercial Appeal* Files.



Figure 58: Marchers on Main Street at Beale Street before the arrival of the King family, April 8, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 59: The April 8 demonstration after the King family joined. 1. Rev. James Lawson, 2. James Bevel, 3. Harry Belafonte, 4. Yolande King, 5. Martin Luther King, III, 6. Dexter King, 7. Coretta Scott King, 8. Ralph Abernathy, 9. Andrew Young, 10. Hosea Williams, 11. Jesse Epps. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 60: The Civic Center Plaza as the demonstrators arrive. April 8, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Figure 61: The crowd during the rally in the Civic Center Plaza. April 8, 1968. MVC, UMSC.



Chapter 4 Images

Figure 1: Lieutenant George Washington Lee, MPL, MSCR



Figure 2: The original St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital shortly after completion, SCA, UR Files, Boxes 291-292.



Figure 3: A copy of William Lawrence's 1819 original plan for the city of Memphis, from Eugene Johnson and Robert Russell, Jr. *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990. For orientation note Court Square in the lower left corner.



Figure 4: Driver-Hunt-Phelan House, photograph by Richard Bolton, from HABS, 1934.



Figure 5: Robertson Topp House, c. 1842, photograph by Richard Bolton, from HABS, 1934.



Figure 6: The Auditorium at Church Park built in 1899. Photograph from www.historic-memphis.com



Figure 7: The Palace Theater, built c. 1919, before the new marquee and 1949 renovation, photograph from historic-memphis.com



Figure 8: The Palace Theater after the new marquee was installed but before the 1949 renovation, photograph from *Life*, 1944.



Figure 9: Palace Theater after the 1949 renovation, photograph from MPL, MSCR



Figure 10: Daisy Theater, built in 1917, photograph from the urban renewal appraisal files, UR Box 1, SCA



Figure 11: Georgia Theater, 663 Mississippi Boulevard, contemporary photograph from www.historic-memphis.com



Figure 12: 1899 Photograph of the Beale Street Market and Cold Storage, MPL, MSCR



Figure 13: Statue of W.C. Handy in Handy Park, photograph by Newman – Fury Commercial Photographers, SCA, UR Files, Boxes 191-192.



Figure 14: P. Wee's Saloon, built c. 1890, photograph from MPL, MSCR



Figure 15: Lipmann's Loan Office Building, built c. 1890, photograph by Jack E. Boucher from HABS, 1974.



Figure 16: View of Beale Street, c. 1920 with Commercial Loan Office Building on the left. Photograph MVC, UMSC.



Figure 17: Gallina Building, built, 1891, photograph, 1970s, from MPL, MSCR,



Figure 18: Central Baptist Church on Second Street between Gayoso and Beale, built 1868-1885, demolished 1937, Edward Culliar Jones, architect. Photograph from historic-memphis.com



Figure 19: Drawing of the original Beale Street Baptist Church with its ornate towers, drawing from Raichelson. *Beale Street Talks*, 76.

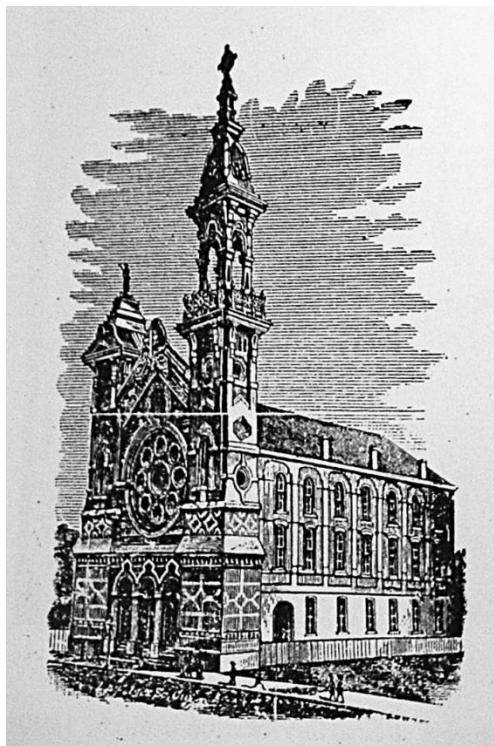


Figure 20: Beale Street Baptist Church, built 1866-1885, Edward Culliart Jones, architect, photograph by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, 1974.



Figure 21: Beale Street Baptist Church, interior, looking north above the pulpit, photograph by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, 1974.



Figure 22: Lansky Brothers, opened in 1946 and closed at 126 Beale in 1981, photograph from Lansky Brothers.



Figure 23: A. Schwab at 163-165 Beale Street, opened at 163 in 1912, photograph, 1930s, from MPL, MSCR



Figure 24: Small houses at 598 Beale Street, photograph from the SCA, UR Box 299-300



Figure 25: Tenement building at 477 Beale Street, photograph from the SCA, UR Box 299-300



Figure 26: 100 North Main Street, completed in 1965, the tallest building in Memphis. Notice the new City Hall Building on the right. Photograph from a postcard, MPL, MSCR.

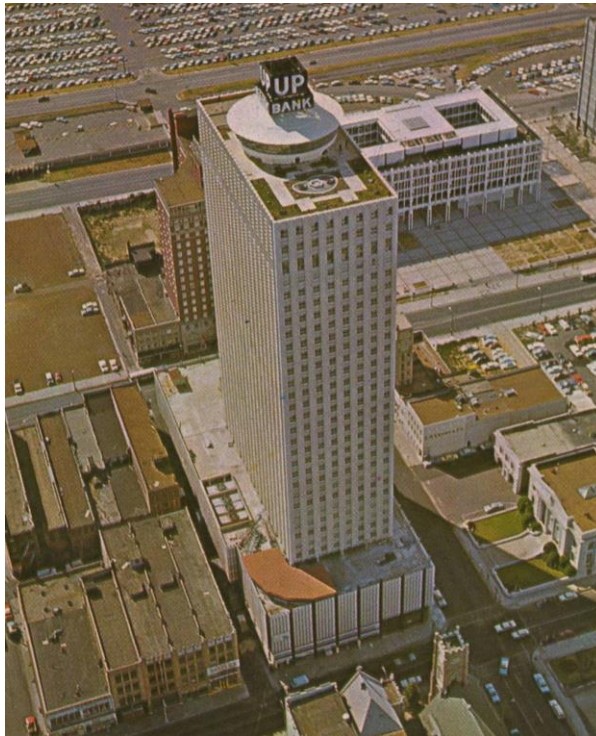


Figure 27: Beale Street Area Project, Segment A (west), SCA, UR Box 24, Blocks 19 and 20 are outlined in a bold dotted line in the bottom center portion of the map



Figure 28: The south portion of the Beale Street block between Main and Second, date not specified, photograph from SCA, UR Files, Boxes 191-192.



Figure 29: The Randolph Building, c. 1912, which occupied the site of the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division Building, photograph from www.historic-memphis.com

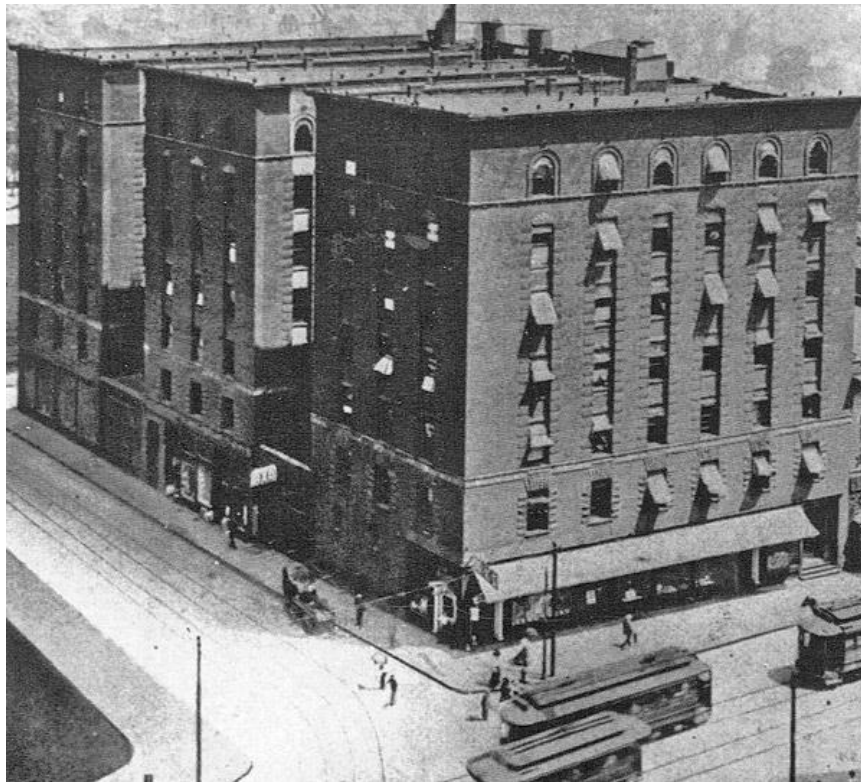


Figure 30: Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division Building with the Elvis Presley statue on Beale Street, photograph 2005, by author.



Figure 31: Map showing the planned Handy Circle. From “The Blue Light District of Beale Street, Memphis, Tennessee: An Architectural and Historical Survey for Memphis Housing Authority,” SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

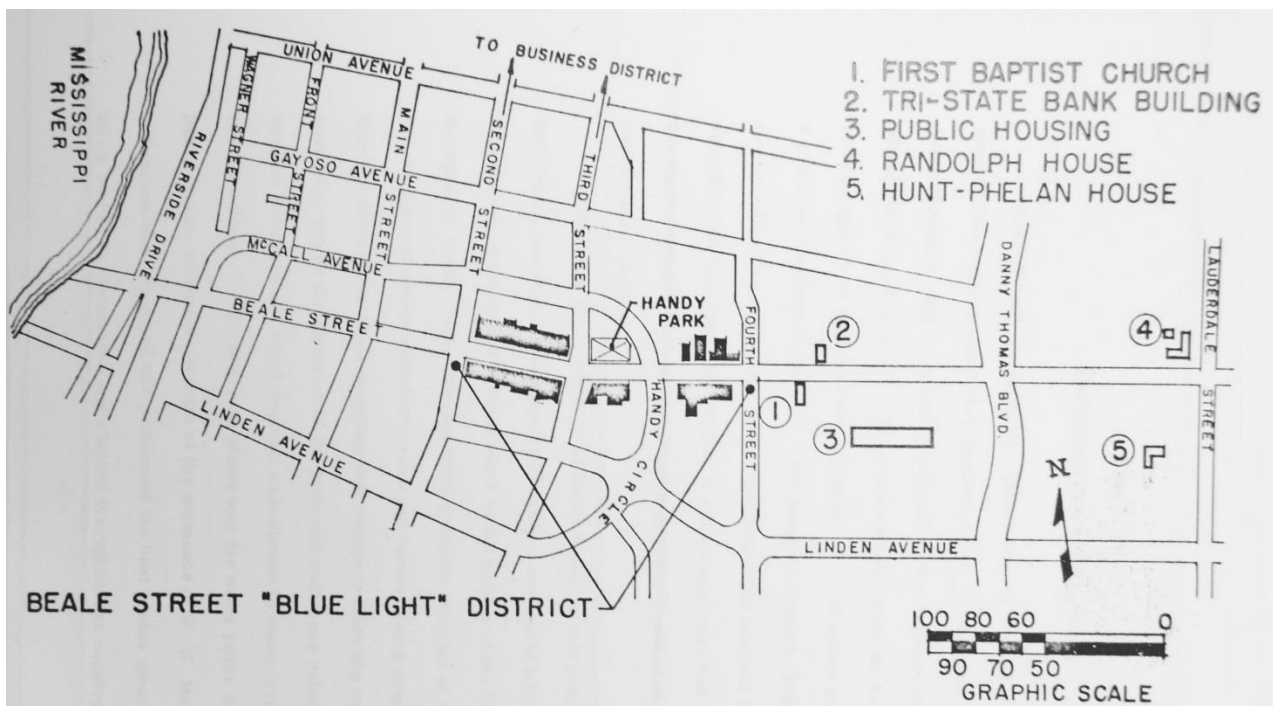


Figure 32: An example of the “slums” around Beale Street. Allen Alley, March 14, 1967, photograph by William Leaptrott, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 33: Cartoon from the July 2, 1973 *Commercial Appeal*, reflecting the increasingly negative press coverage the MHA and the Beale Street project received starting in 1973.

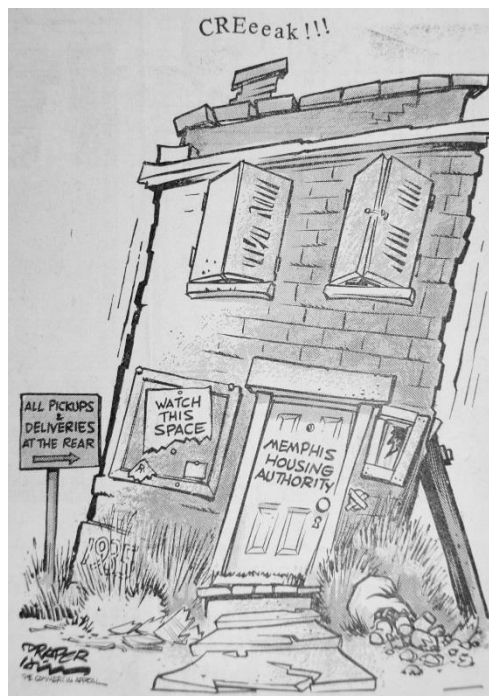


Figure 34: Tearing down the housing in the Beale Street project, photograph by James R. Reid, April 11, 1973, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 35: Leveling the cleared land in the Beale Street project zone, photograph by Ken Ross, January 18, 1973, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 36: Beale Street Baptist Church and the commercial buildings between Fourth and Hernando, March 30, 1972, photograph from MVC, UMSC



Figure 37: View from atop the new turnkey housing project, Edward M. Barry Homes looking across Church Park to St. Patrick's at the corner of Linden and Fourth. Large mound of dirt is on the southeast corner of the present-day site of the FedEx Forum, photograph from MVC, UMSC.



Figure 38: The completed Handy Circle amidst the empty fields of Beale Street, photograph by John George, August 16, 1974, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 39: Tractors mowing the fields of Beale Street in preparation for the first Beale Street Music Festival, photograph by Jack Gurner, May 10, 1979, MVC, UMSC.



Figure 40: Aerial photographs from 1962 showing Beale Street before urban renewal, SCA.

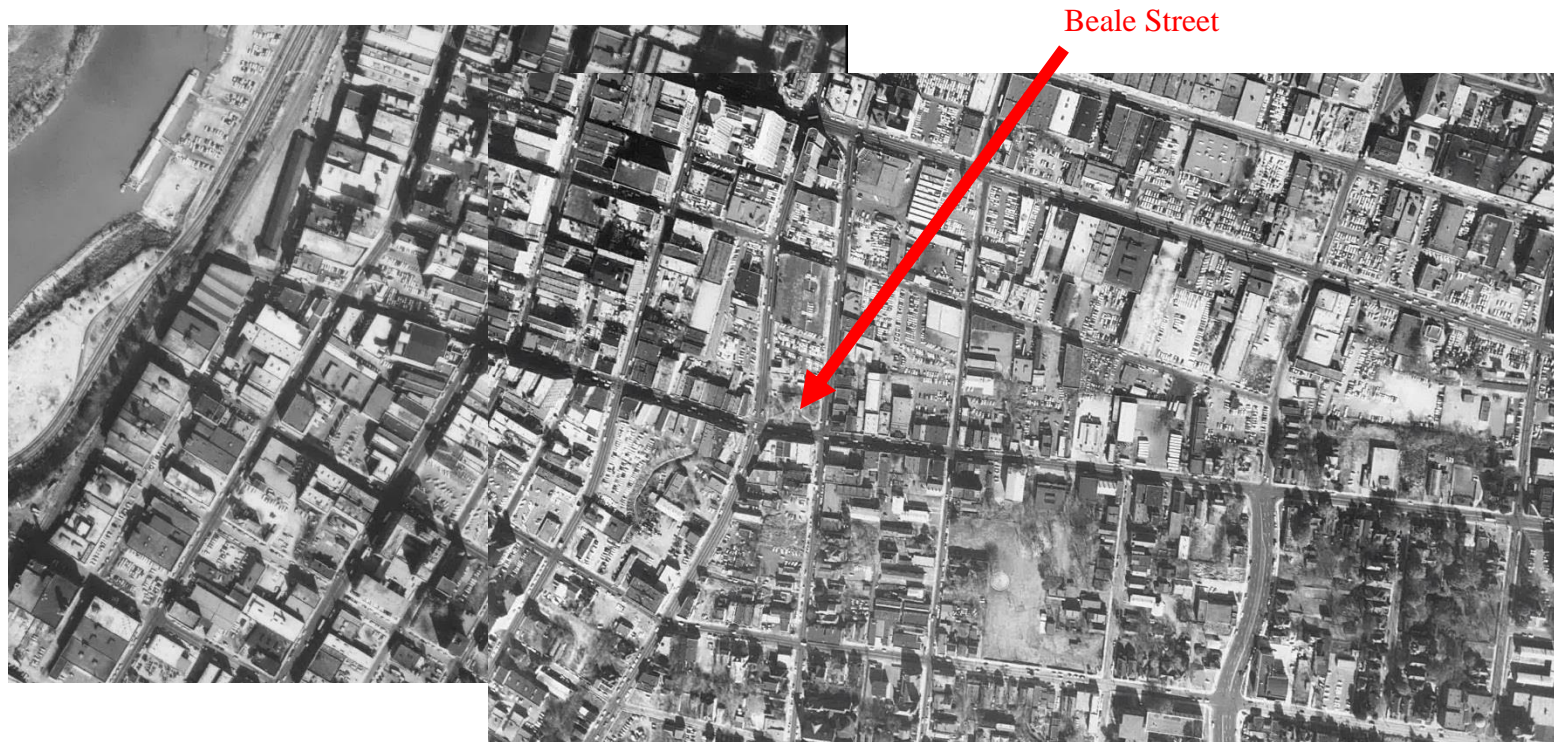


Figure 41: Aerial photograph of the Beale Street area in 1977, SCA.

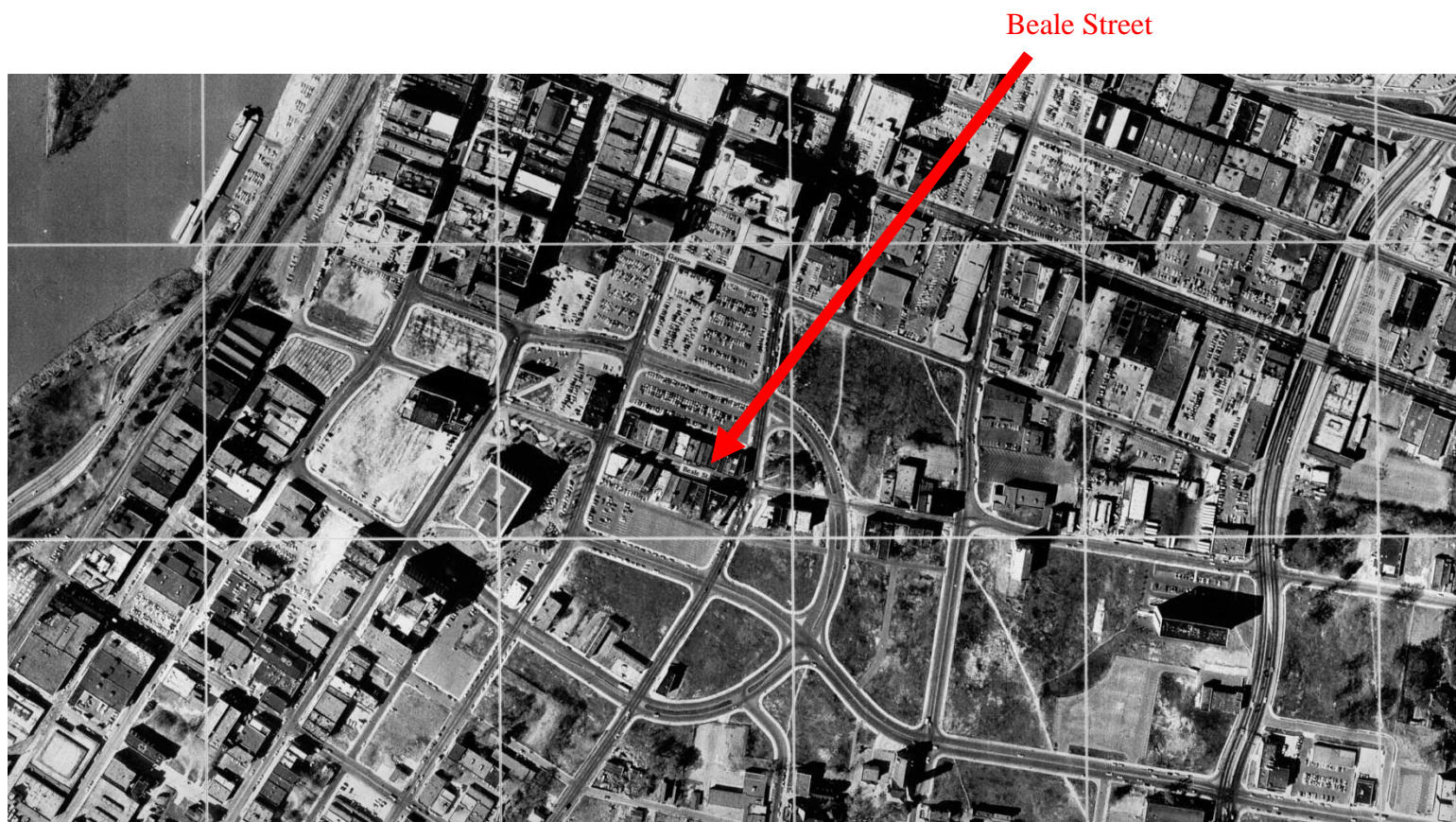


Figure 42: The MHA demolished some of the commercial buildings that were deemed as too damaged and not “architecturally important,” such as the building in this image, which is most likely the Palace Theater, photograph from HABS.



Figure 43: Ewald and Associates Plan for Beale’s redevelopment, “Aerial Looking West,” SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

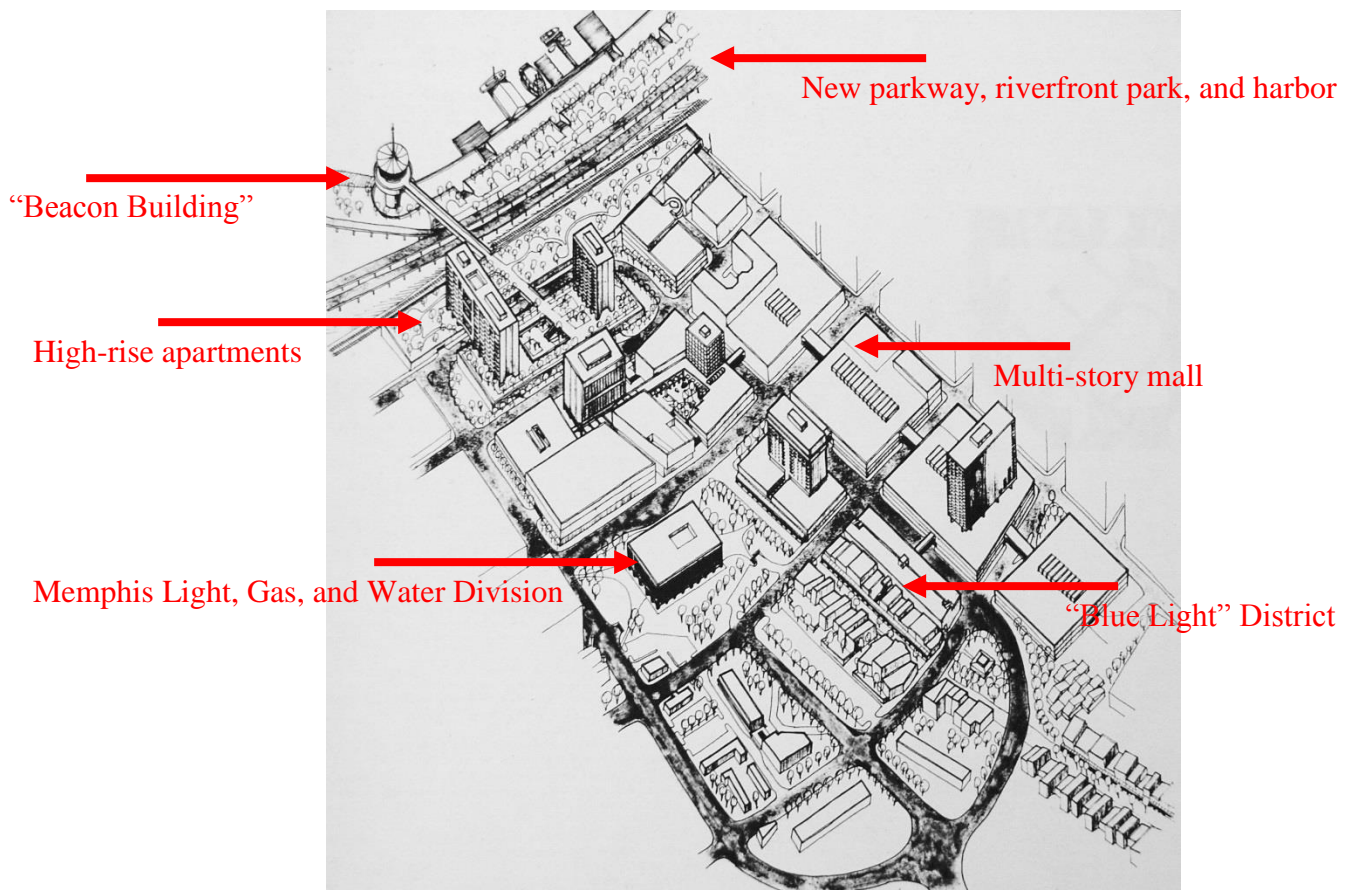


Figure 44: Plan of the Beale Street “Blue Light” District from the Ewald and Associates plans commissioned by the MHA, SCA, UR Files, Box 40

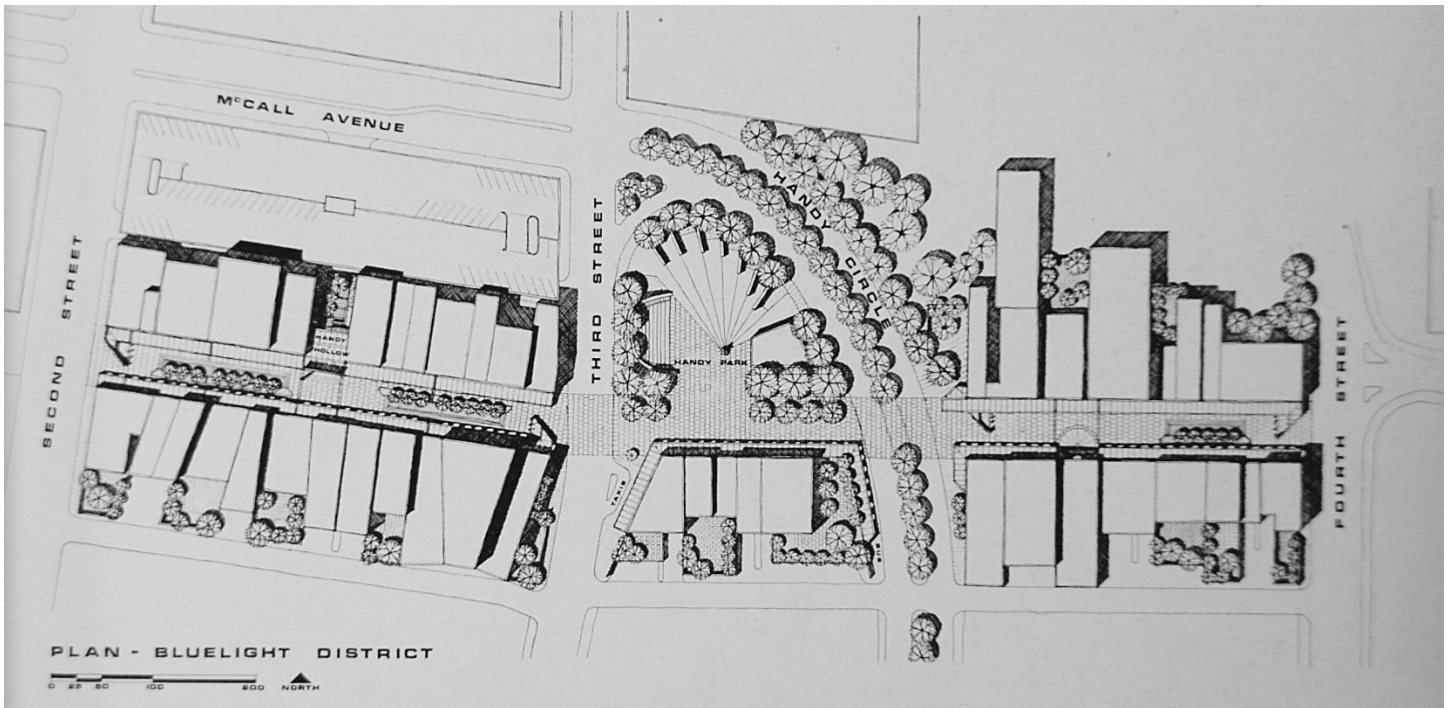


Figure 45: Ewald and Associates perspective of the proposed bandstand on Beale, SCA, UR Files, Box 40

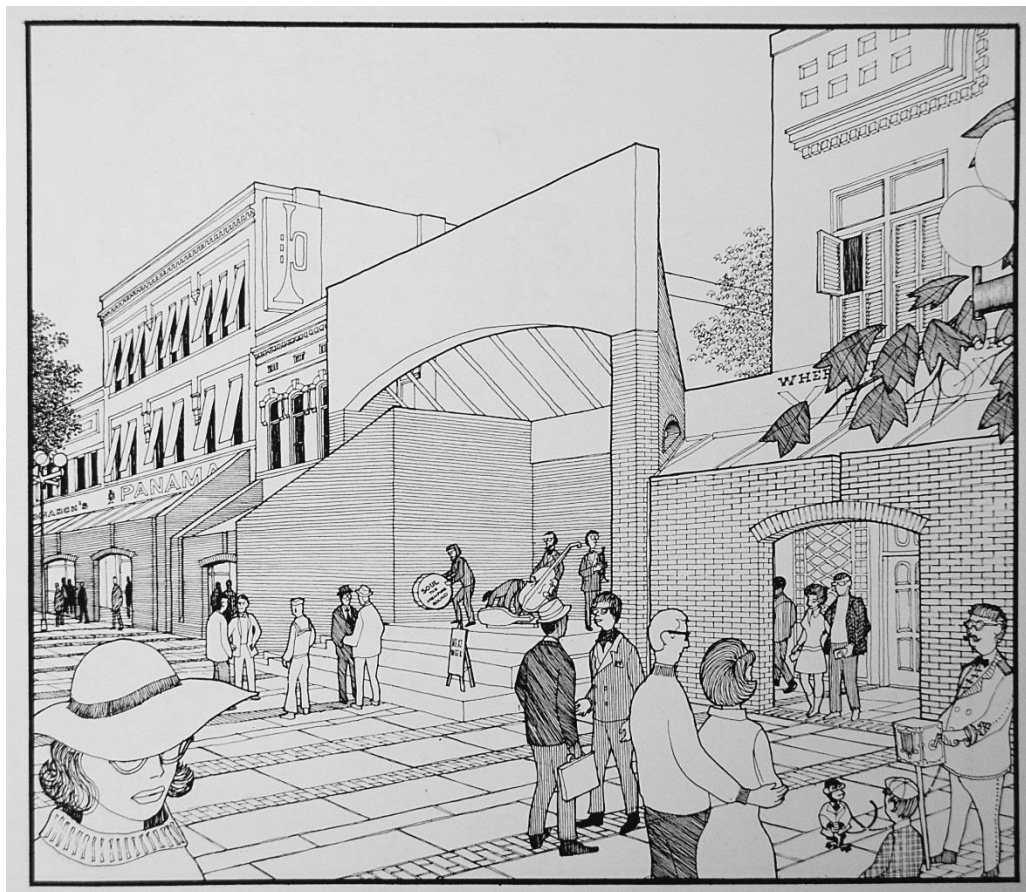


Figure 46: Detail of Ewald and Associates rendering of Handy Park, SCA, UR Files, Box 40

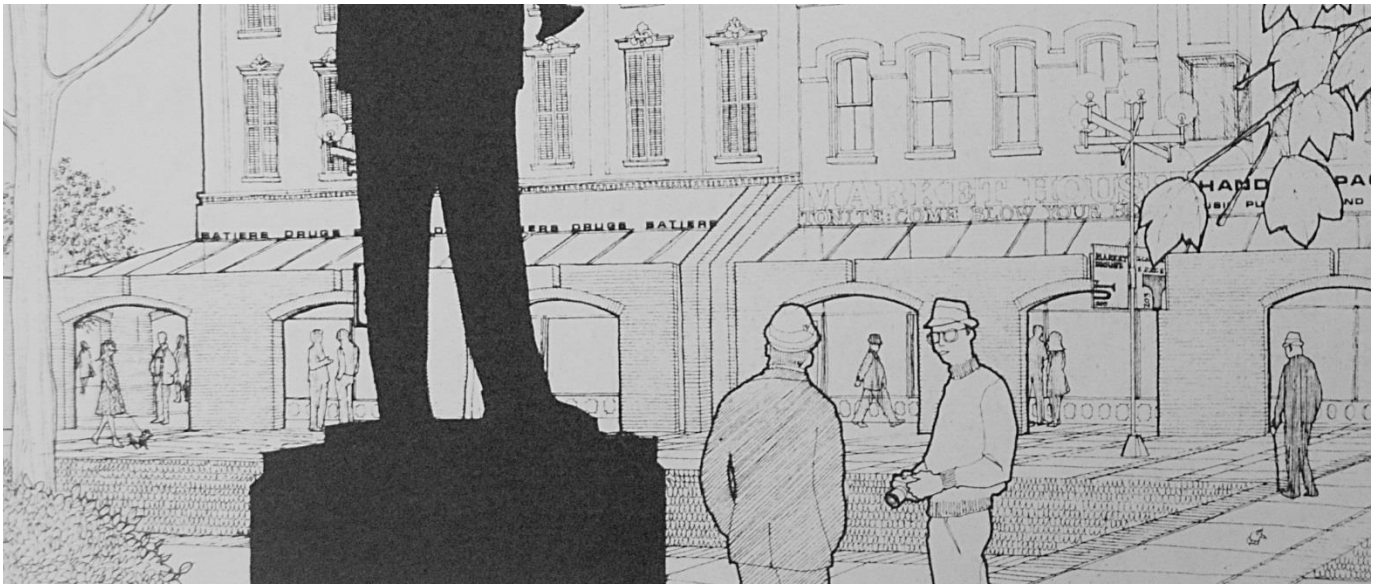


Figure 47: Ewald and Associates rendering of a relocated Charlie Vergo's Rendezvous Barbeque Restaurant, SCA, UR Files, Box 40.

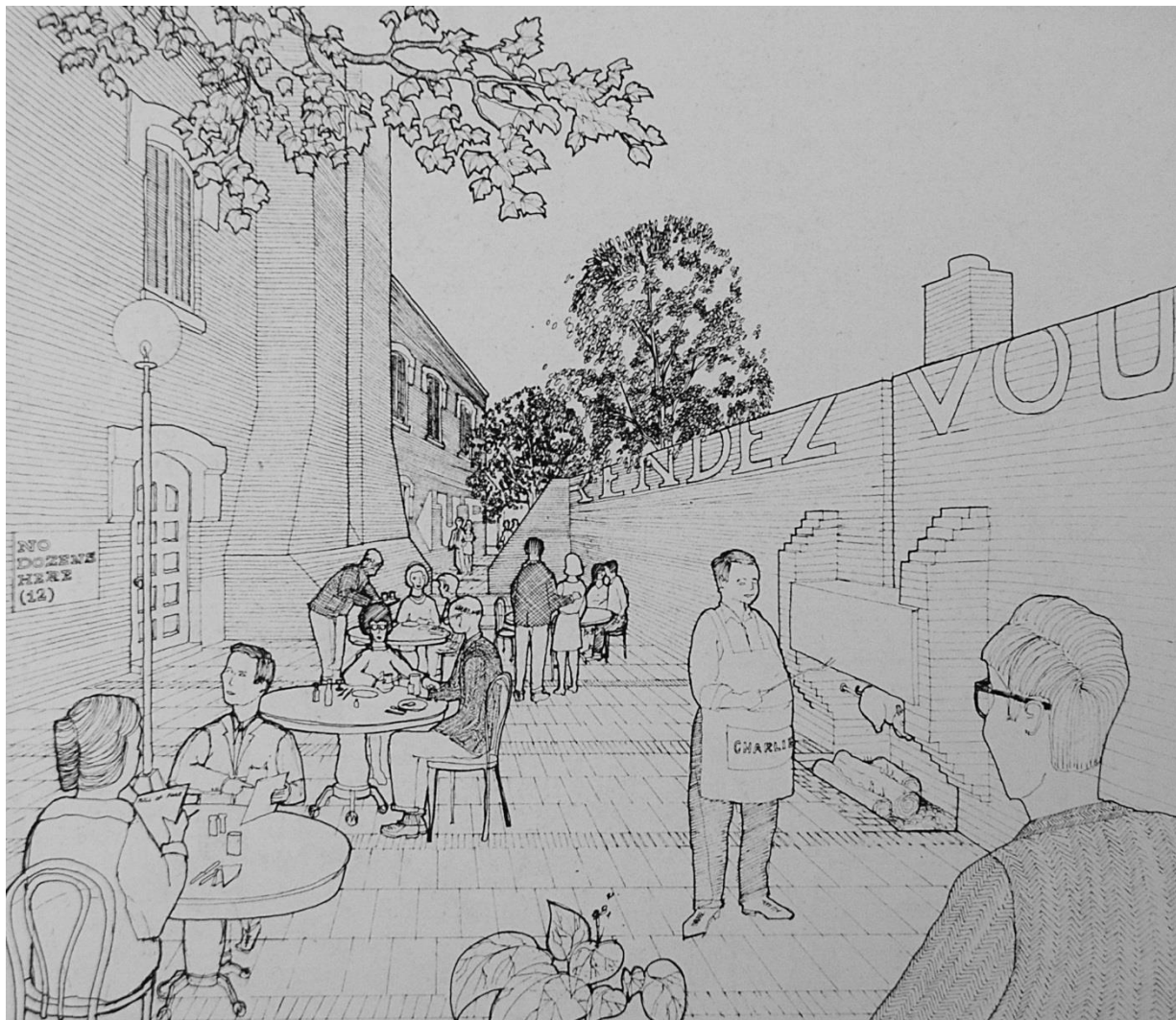
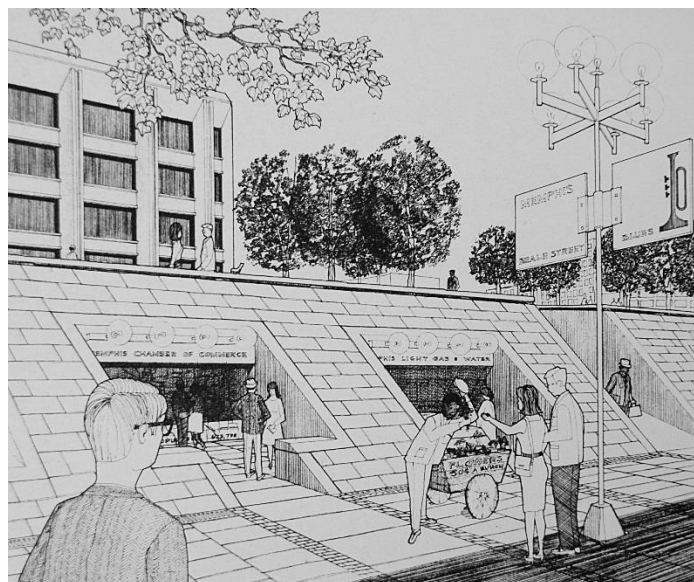


Figure 50: Edwald and Associates rendering of a restored Daisy Theater on the redeveloped Beale Street, SCA, UR Files, Box 40.



Figures 48 and 49: Edwald and Associates rendering and detail of rendering of the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division Building from Beale Street



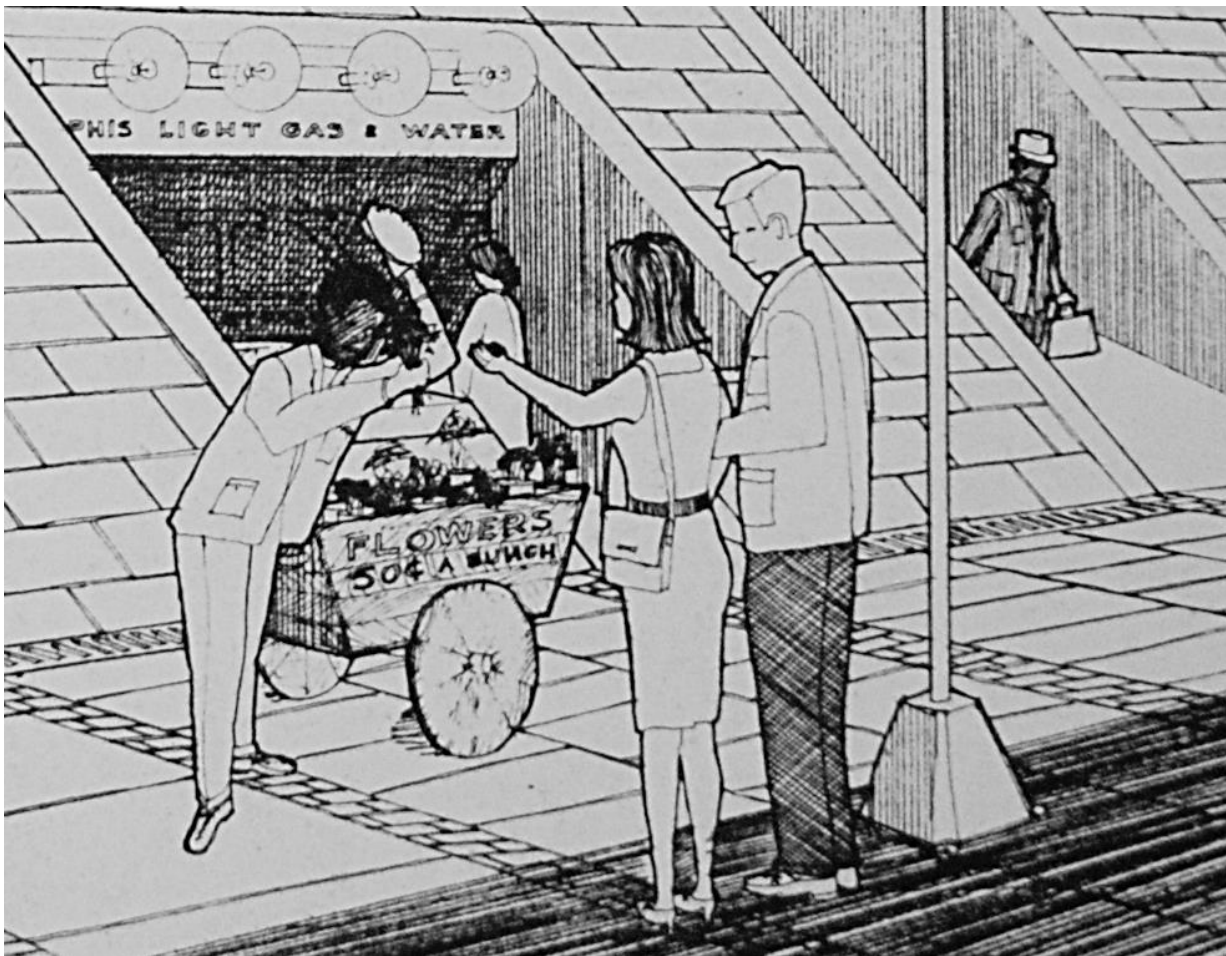


Figure 51: Map of the LeMoynes Urban Renewal Area (Project R-114), SCA, UR Files, Box 256

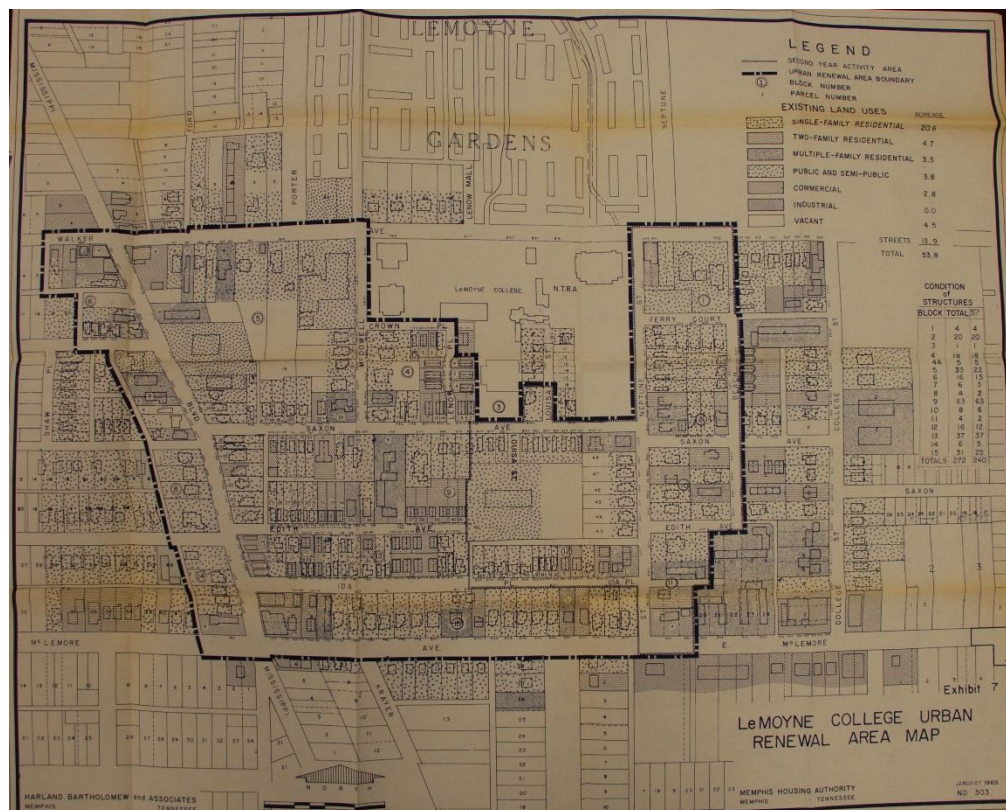
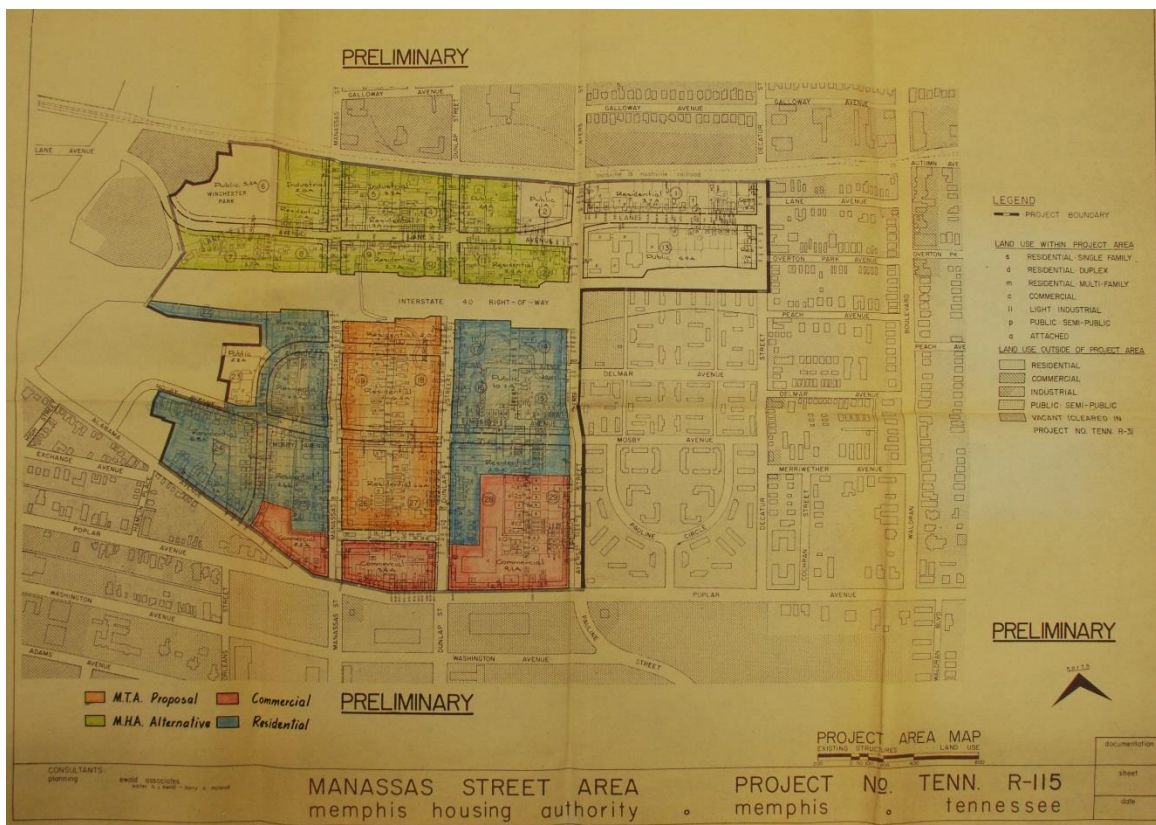


Figure 52: Manassas Street Urban Renewal Area (Project R-115), SCA, UR Files, Box 179



Chapter 5 Images

Figure 1: Policeman carrying a young girl as onlookers watch on Elvis Presley's death day, Saul Brown Photograph Collection (MPL), Box 2, Folder 1.



Figure 2: Crowds outside Graceland on Elvis's first birthday after his death, January 8, 1978, Saul Brown Photograph Collection, Box 2, Folder 1



Figure 3: Crowds outside Graceland on Elvis's first birthday after his death, January 8, 1978, Saul Brown Photograph Collection, Box 2, Folder 1.



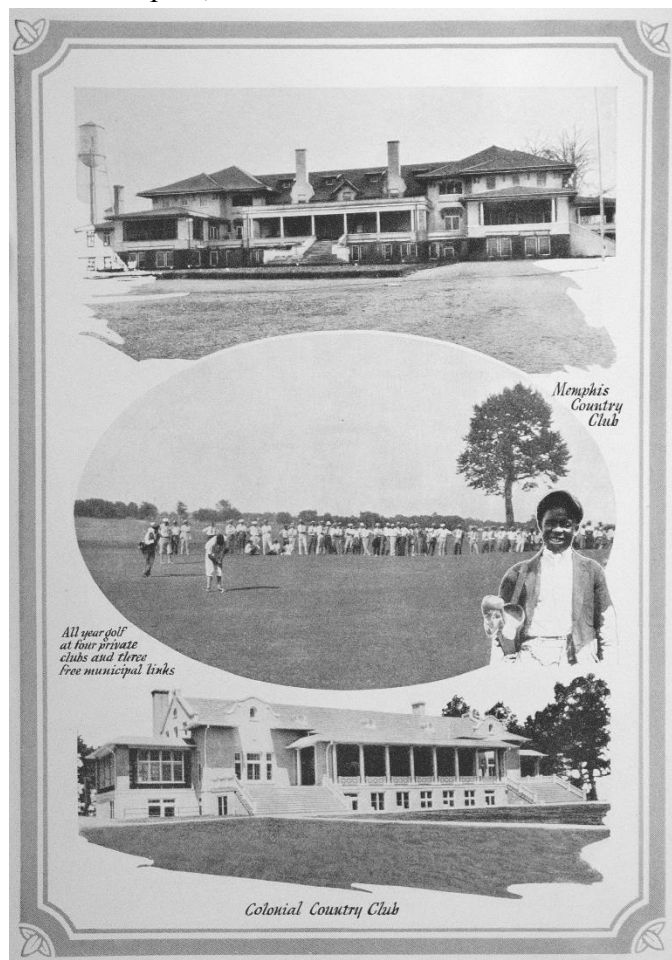
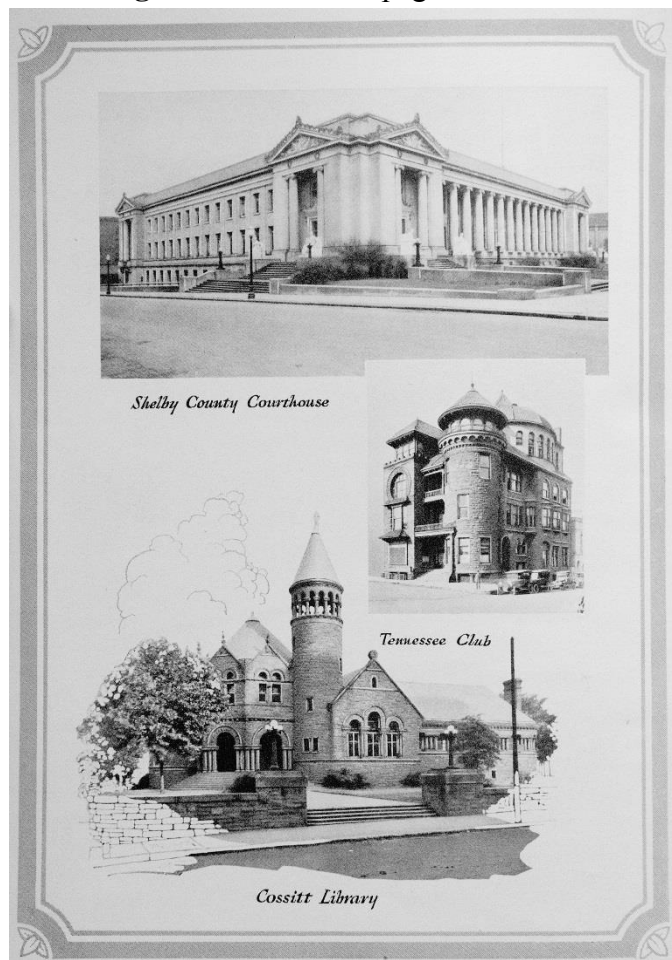
Figure 4: Group of German tourists at Elvis's grave in the "Memorial Garden" at Graceland, October 26, 1978, Saul Brown Photograph Collection, Box 2, Folder 1



Figure 5: World Championship Barbeque Contest at the Memphis in May Festival below the bluffs, May 16, 1983, photograph by Ken Ross, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 6 and 7: Two pages from “For Conventions: Memphis,” from the 1920s



Figures 8 and 9: Page 10 of “Memphis on the Mississippi” tourist brochure from 1949 showing parks and other attractions in Memphis. Page 6 of “Memphis on the Mississippi” depicting the Memphis Cotton Carnival

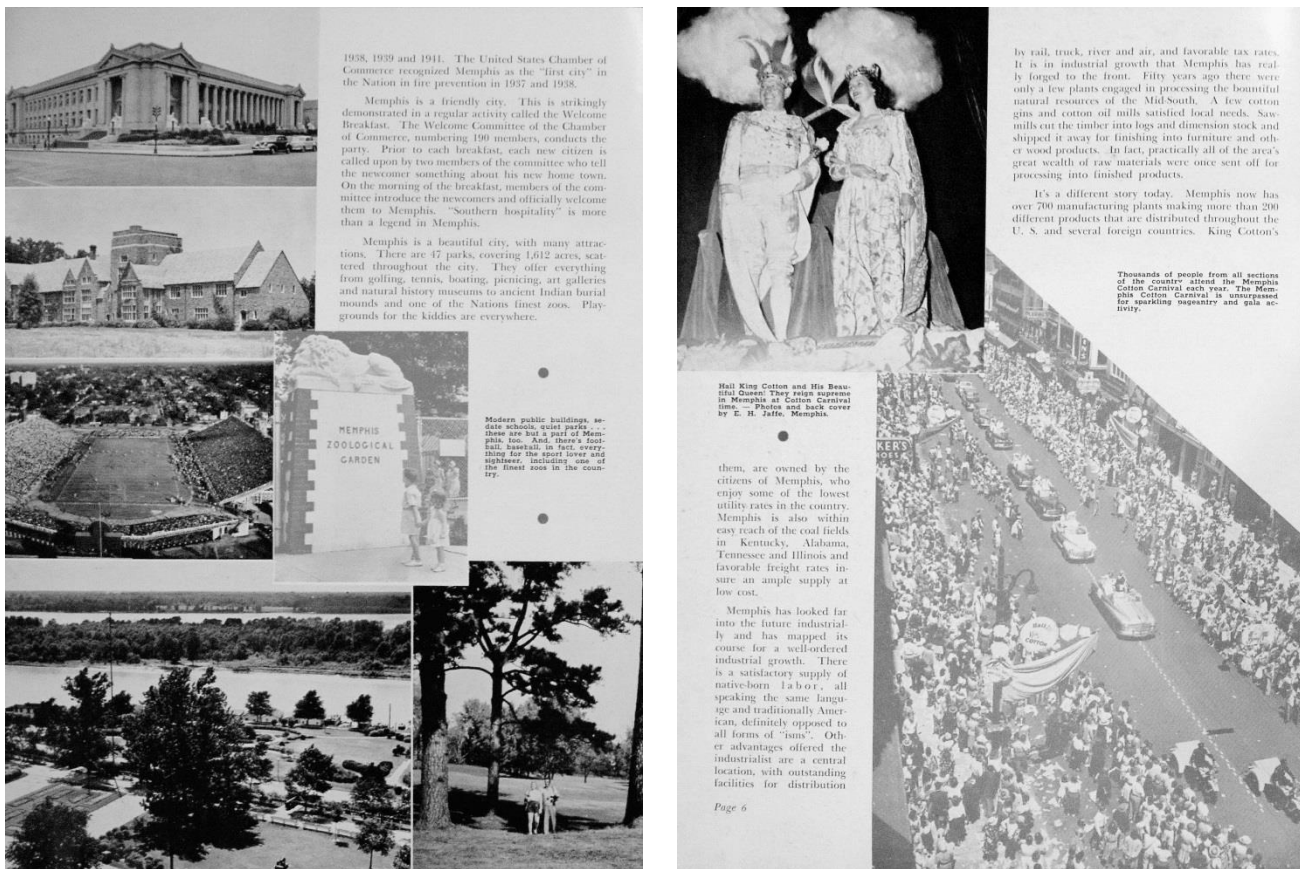


Figure 10: “Southern Charm...and Beauty,” from “Memphis Magic,” 1963, MPL, MSCR, MIF

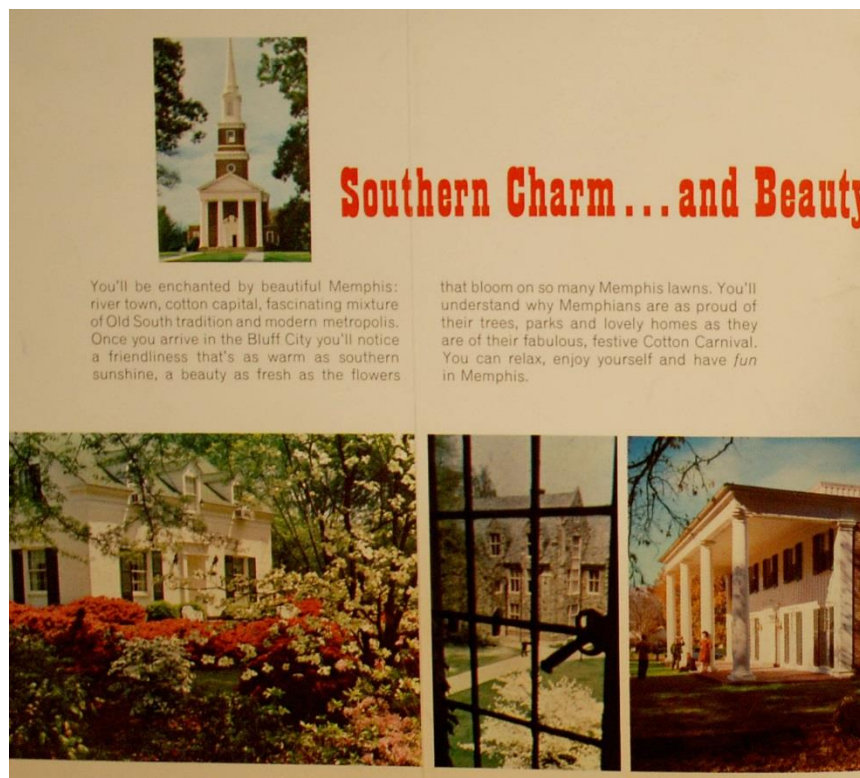


Figure 11: Dining and nightlife options in “Memphis Magic,” 1963, MPL, MSCR, MIF.



Figure 12: “Sports – as great as all outdoors,” from “Memphis Magic,” 1963, MPL, MSCR, MIF



Figure 13: Graceland and Beale Street in “Magic Memphis,” 1963, MPL, MSCR, MIF.

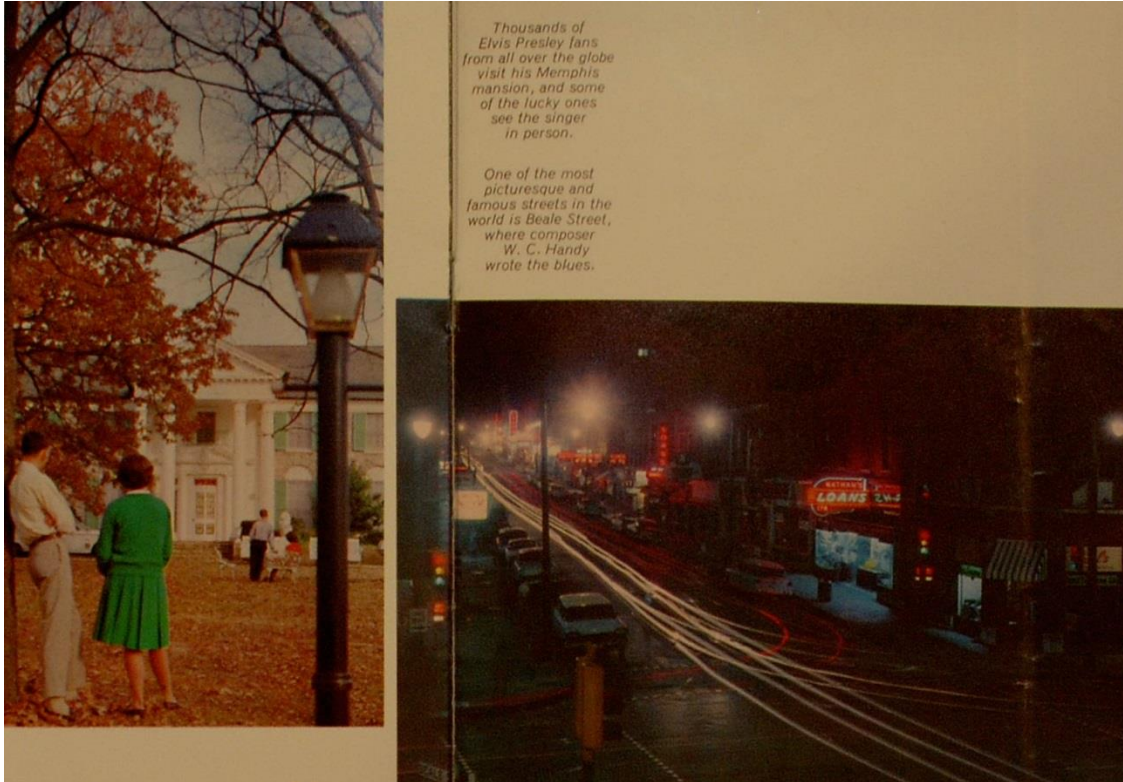


Figure 14: Cartoon accompanying the *Commercial Appeal* article, “How Do We Get ‘Em to Sit Back and Stay a Spell,” May 11, 1980.



Figure 15: Photographs promoting the city's downtown entertainment options, *Memphis: New Visions, New Horizons*, 1997.



Figure 16: Beale Street's double-page spread in *Memphis: New Visions, New Horizons*, 1997.

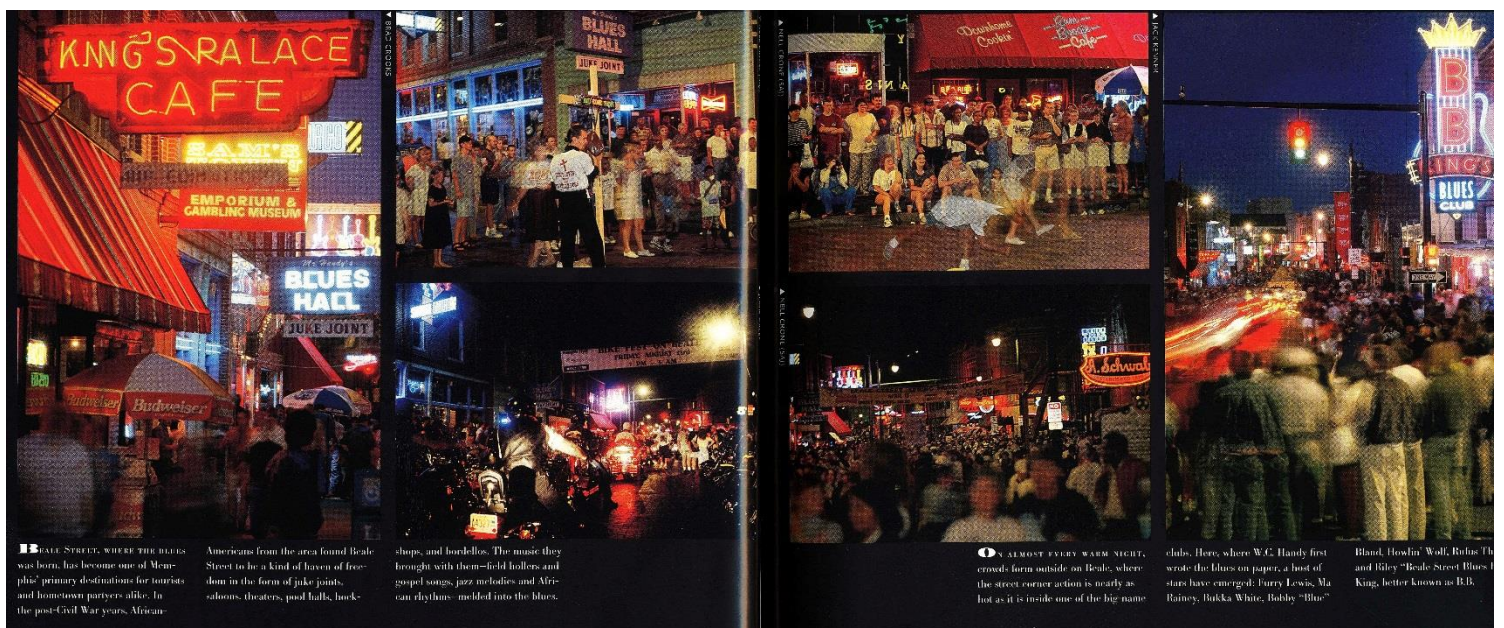


Figure 17 and 18: Photographs promoting the city's Egyptian ties and its Civil War past from *Memphis: New Visions, New Horizons*, 1997.

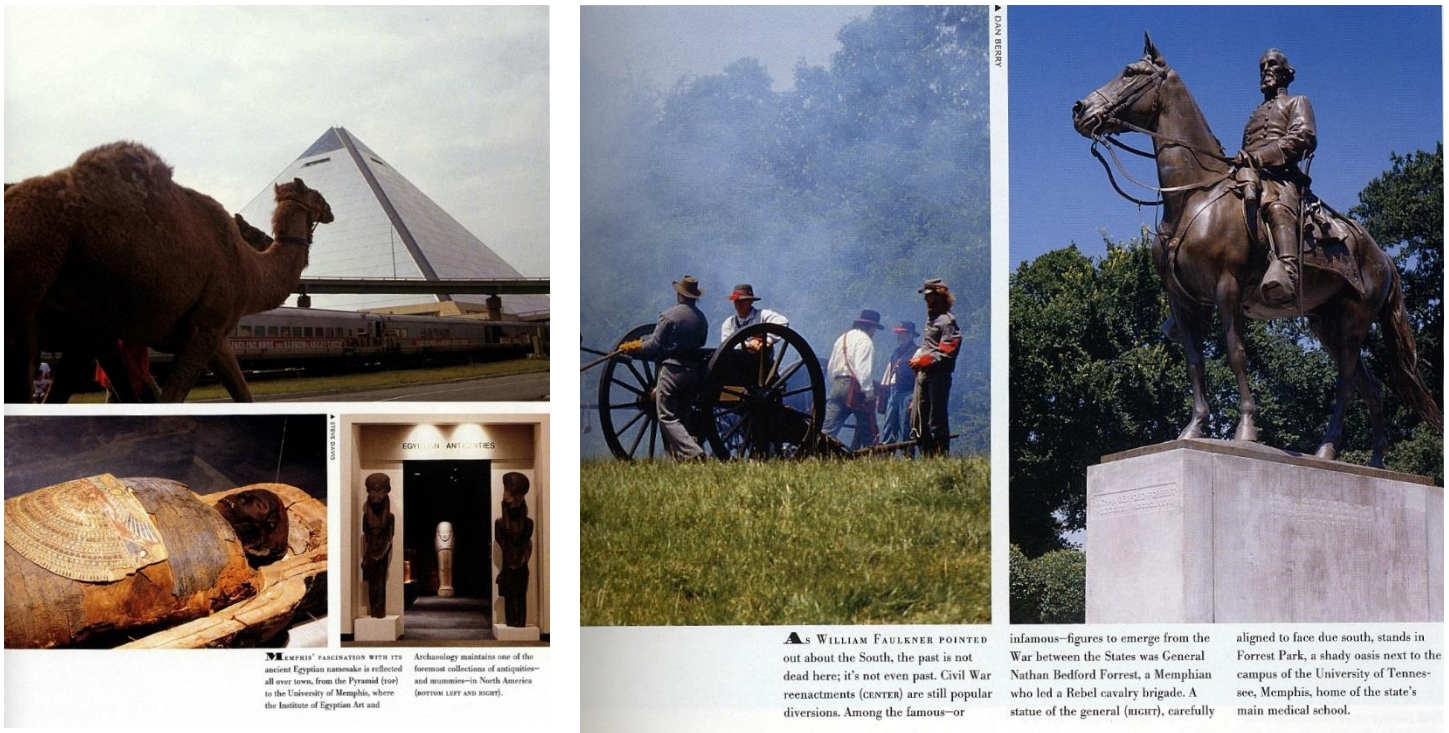


Figure 19: Page highlighting Memphis's appearance in two popular John Grisham films in *Memphis: New Visions, New Horizons*, 1997.

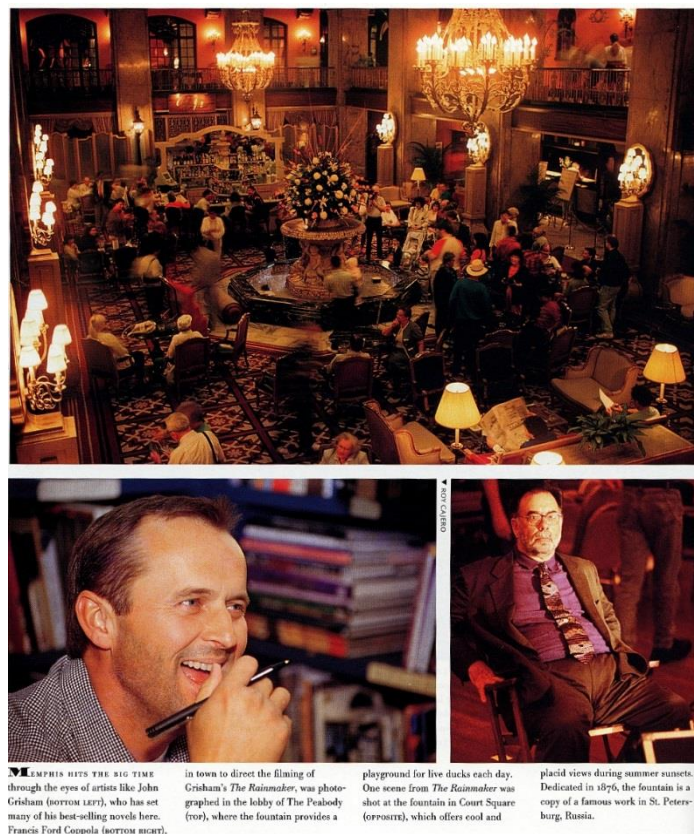


Figure 20: Bellboy, Cinque Lee, and desk clerk, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, inside the Arcade Hotel, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 21: Amtrak train heading toward Memphis, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 22: Mitzuko and Jun at Memphis's Central Station with Rufus Thomas sitting on the same bench, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 23: Mitzuko and Jun walking on the fictional Chaucer Street, *Mystery Train* (1989)





Figure 25: Mitzuko, Jun, and three tourists inside Sun Studios, *Mystery Train* (1989)





Figure 27: Mizuko and Jun in front of “Charlie’s Barber Shop,” *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 28: Mitzuko and Jun on Linden Street where the present-day FedEx Forum stands, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 29: The statue of Elvis Presley in front of the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division Building on Beale Street, *Mystery Train* (1989)

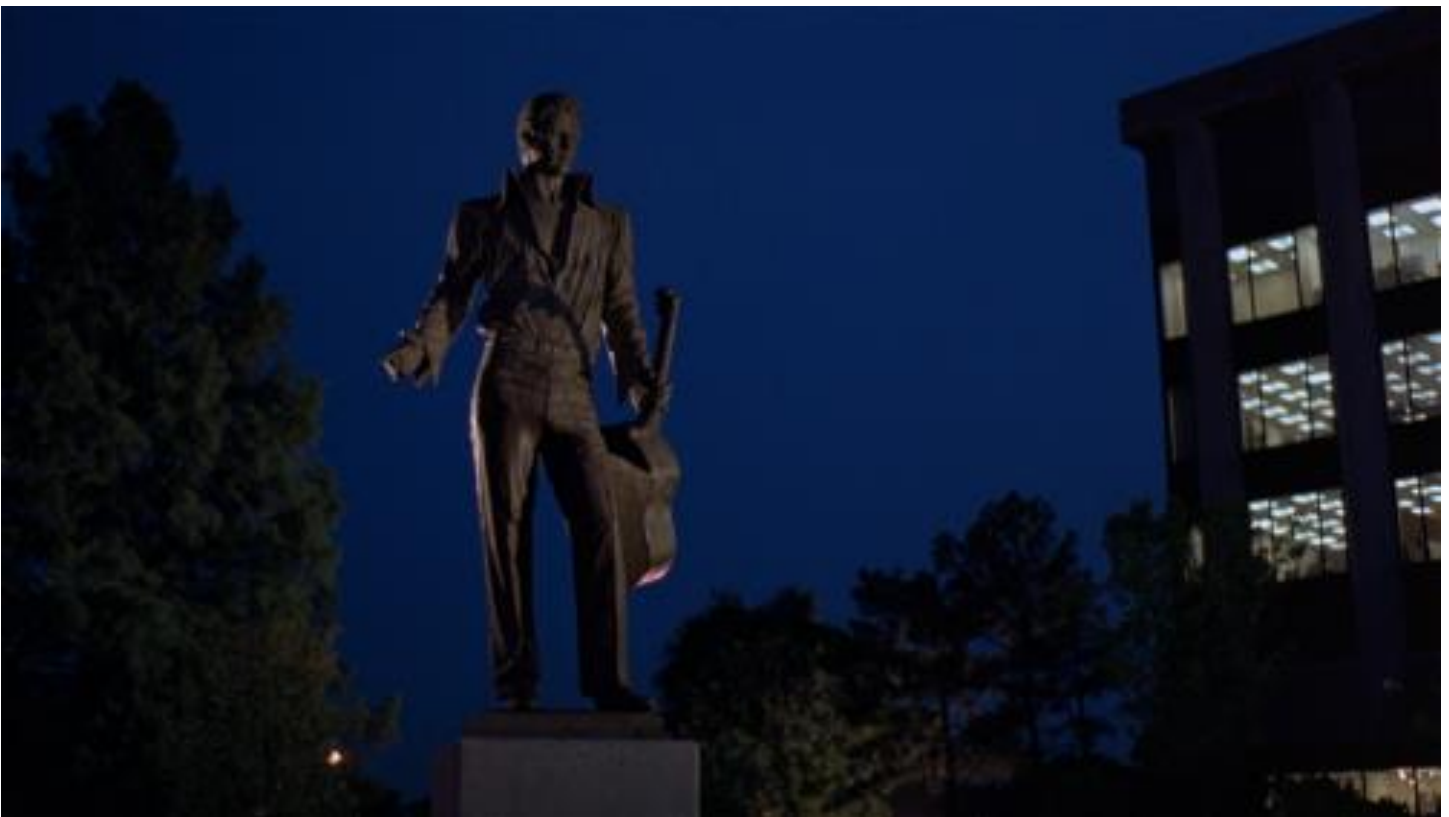


Figure 30: Mizuko and Jun outside the Arcade Restaurant and the Arcade Hotel, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 31: Jun photographing the portrait of Elvis in their hotel room, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 32: Luisa's Cab in front of A. Schwab's on Beale, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 33: Luisa walking through the desolate South Main area, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 34: The “Ghost” of Elvis, Stephen Jones, in Luisa’s hotel room, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 35: Johnny and Ed in the Shades Bar and Lounge. The central figure behind the pool table is Memphis Circuit Court Judge D’Army Bailey, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 36: Johnny playing “The Memphis Train,” on the jukebox, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 37: Johnny shooting the racist store clerk as Charlie and Will watch in horror, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 38: Johnny, Charlie, and Will driving around after shooting the store clerk, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 39: Will, Charlie, and Johnny in “Room 22” of the Arcade Hotel, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 40: Will's truck and the Amtrak train leaving Memphis, *Mystery Train* (1989)



Figure 41: Gene Carlisle, December 21, 1981, photograph by James R. Reid, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 42: One of several buildings with braced facades during the reconstruction process, December 3, 1980, photograph by James R. Reid, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 43: Building shells on south side of Beale Street between Third and Hernando including the Beale Avenue Market (far right), October 12, 1981, James R. Reid, UMSC, MVC



Figure 44: Morgan Keegan Building, photograph by Brandon Dill, *Memphis Daily News*



Figure 45: Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown Plan for the Peabody Place, from Vol. XVII: Plan for the Beale Street – Peabody Place Sub-Area, MPL, MSCR.

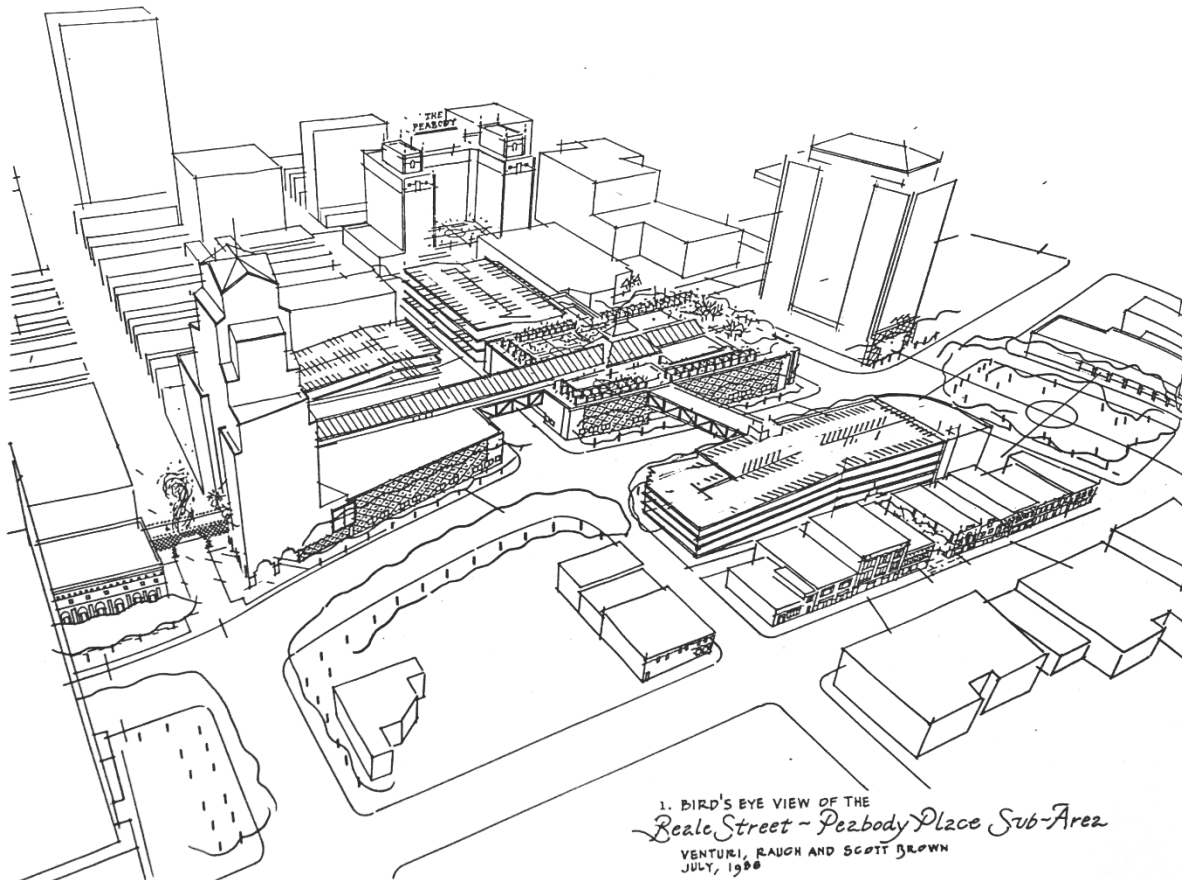


Figure 46: Proposed Treatment of the Memphis Riverfront and “the Island,” from the 1924 Harland Bartholomew Plan

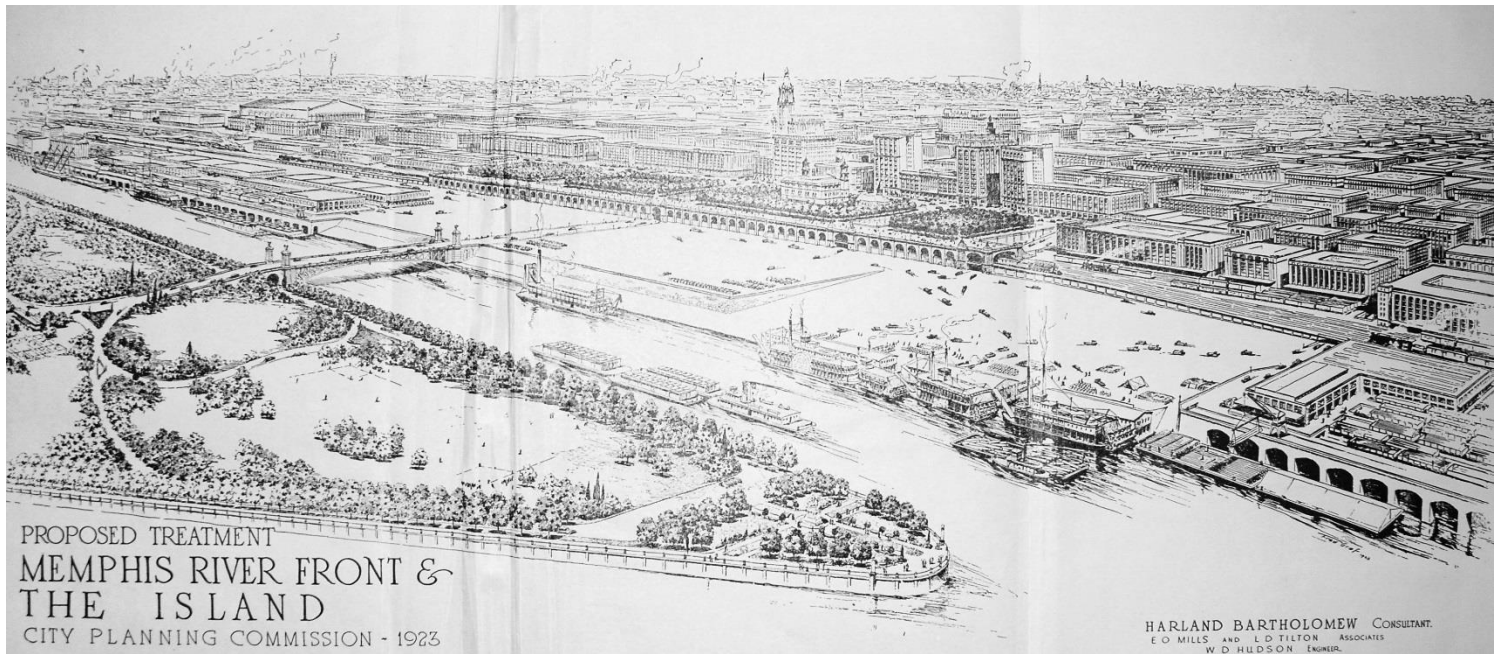


Figure 47: Possible Riverfront Improvements, from the 1955 Bartholomew Plan

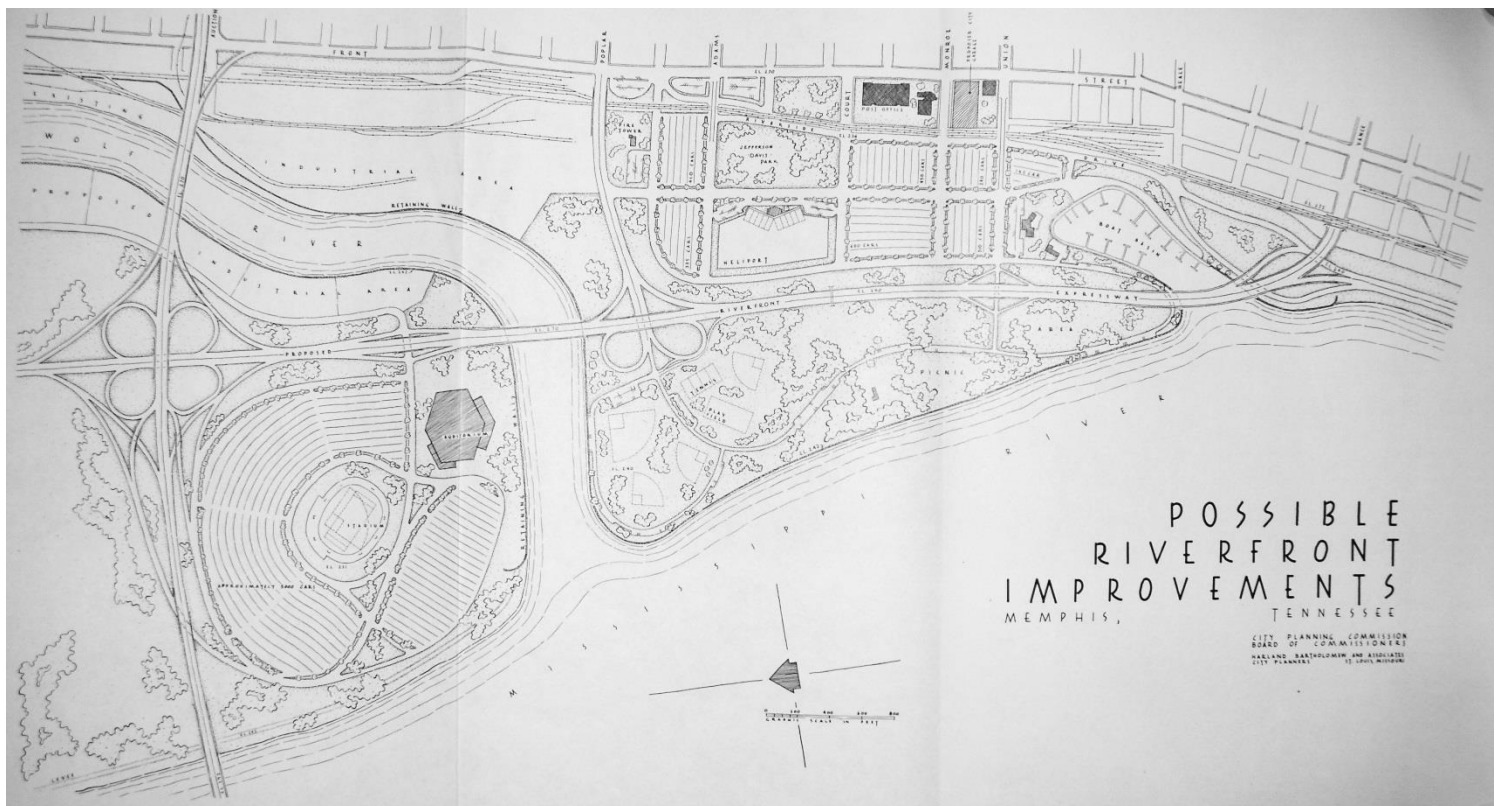


Figure 48: The Downtown Airport on Mud Island, February 1966, UMSC, MVC



Figure 49: Walkway to Mud Island, photograph by Jack Gurner, 1981, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 50: Monorail and walkway to Mud Island (note the Civic Center Plaza in the background), photograph by Ken Ross, August 8, 1983, UMSC, MVC



Figure 51: One of the music displays in the Mud Island Museum, photograph by Jack E. Cantrell, March 31, 1982, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 52: Mud Island Amphitheater, photograph by Paul Daggs, July 1, 1982, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 53: Crawdaddy's Restaurant, photograph by Paul Daggs, July 1, 1982, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 54: The Riverwalk with the slate and steel map of Memphis in the bottom left, photograph by Jack E. Cantrell, March 14, 1983, UMSC, MVC.



Figure 55: Sidney Shlenker's plan for "Rakapolis," from "Mud Island Makeover Highlights the Festive," *Commercial Appeal*, May 13, 1990.

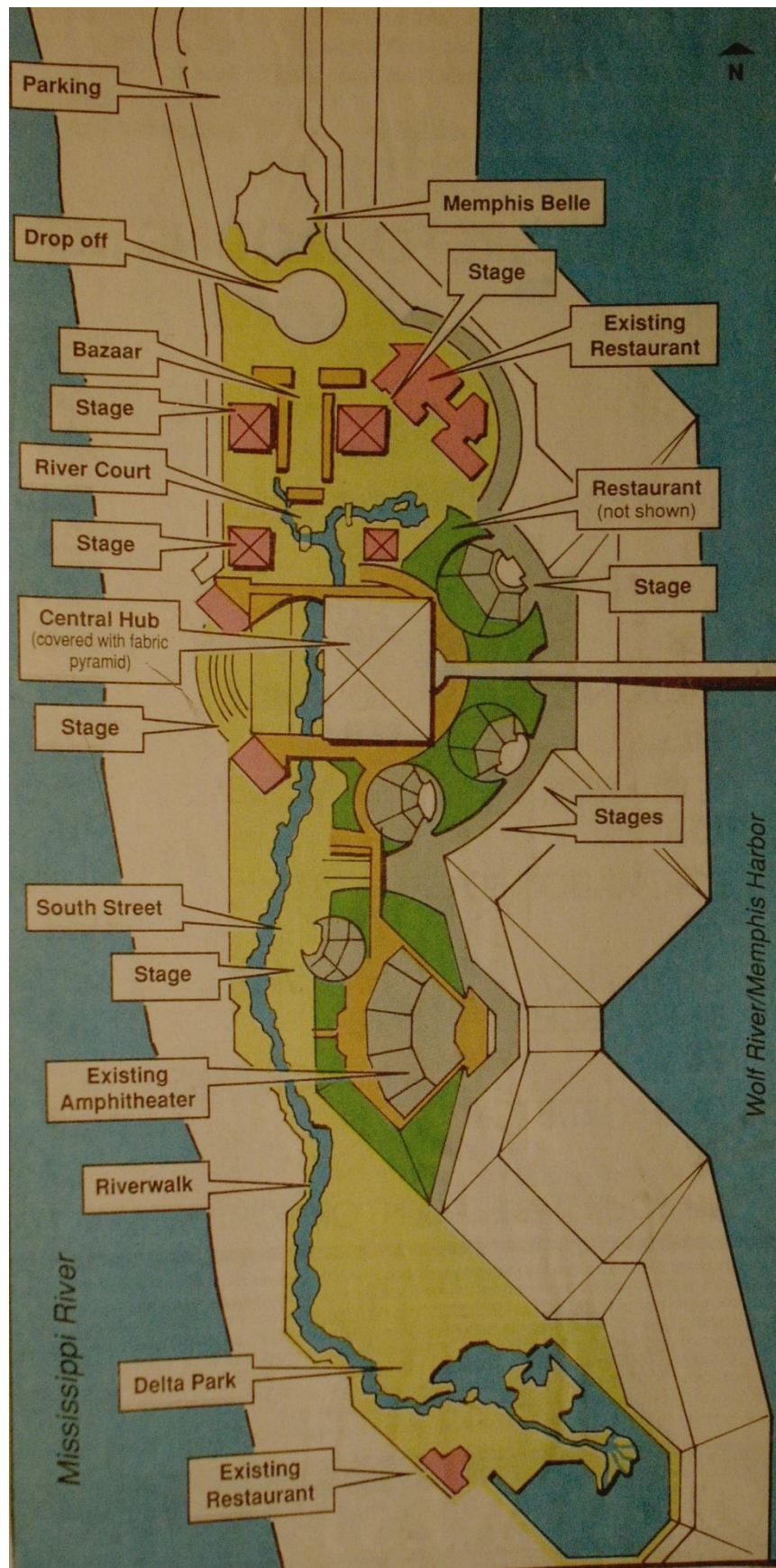


Figure 56: The Pyramid Exhibition Building at the 1897 World's Fair.



Figure 57: 1975 pyramid museum proposal, UMSC, MVC, *Press-Scimitar* Morgue File 6576.

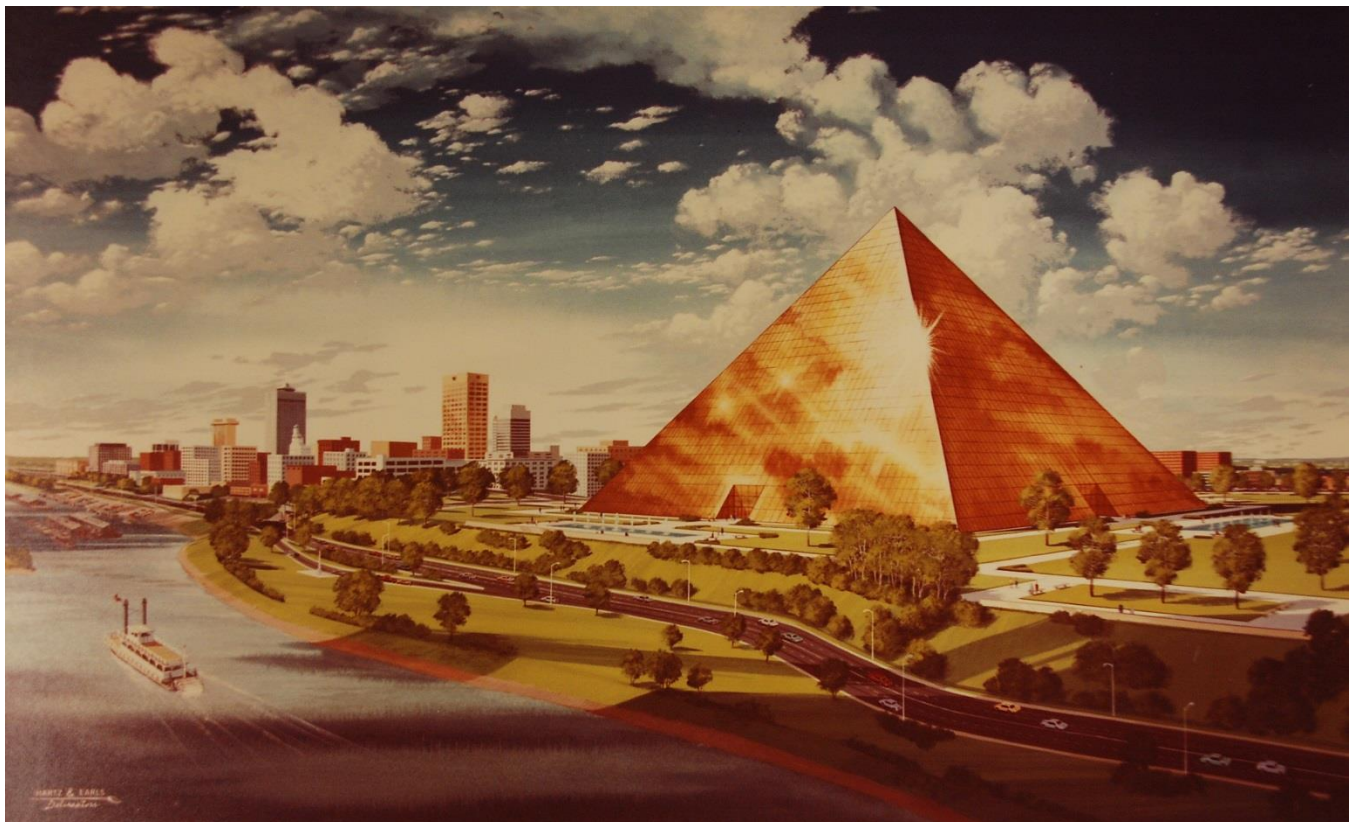


Figure 58: Pyramid museum design, section, UMSC, MVC, *Press-Scimitar* Morgue File 6576.

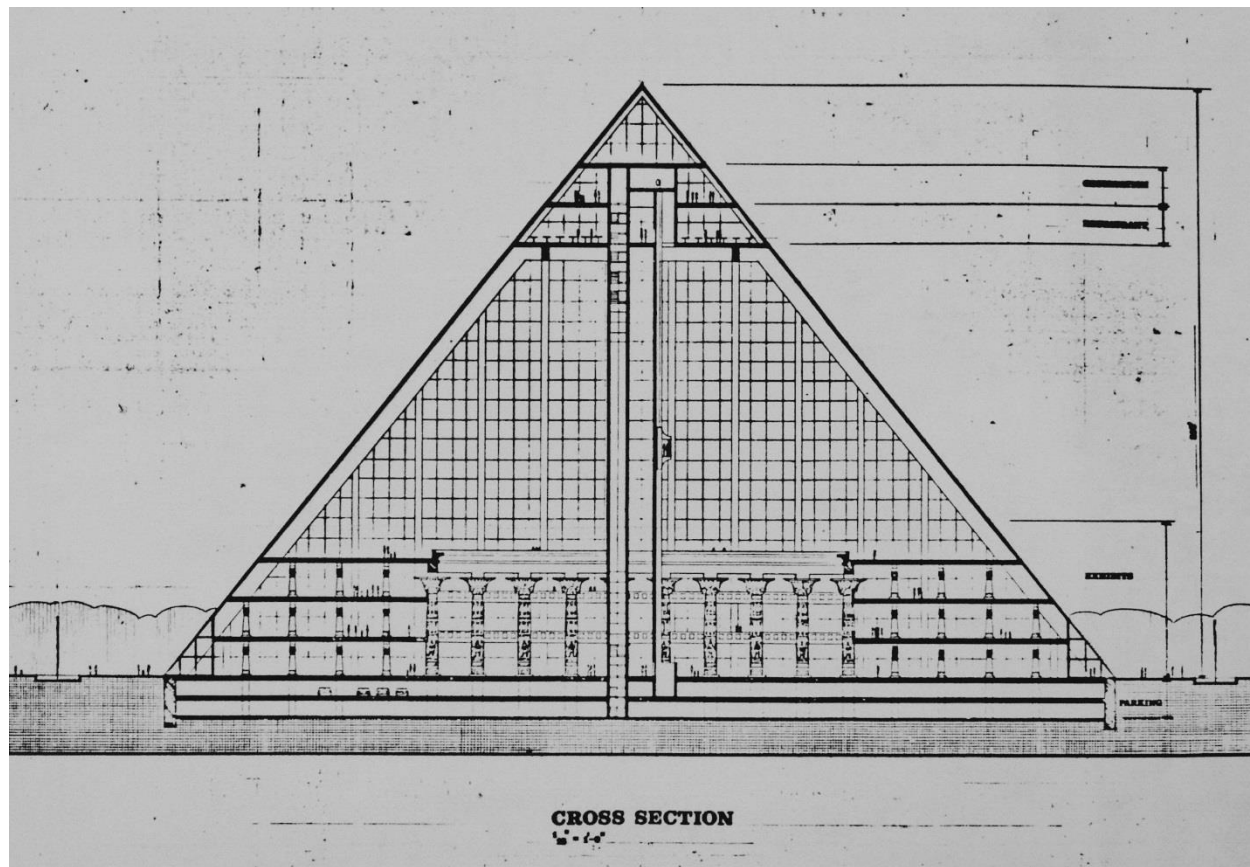


Figure 59: Site plan for proposed pyramid museum, UMSC, MVC, *Press-Scimitar* Morgue File 6576.

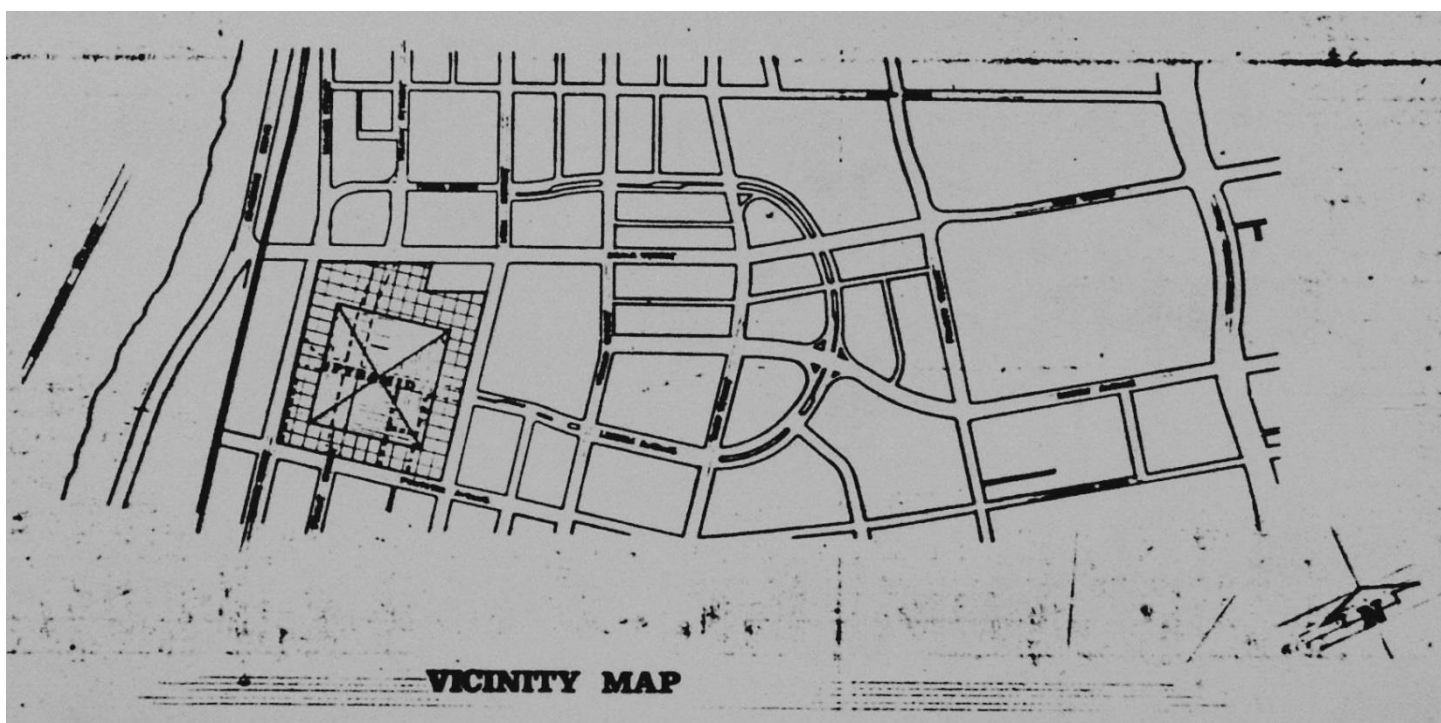


Figure 60: Double-page advertisement for the “Big Dig,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 15, 1989.



Figure 61: Pyramid under construction, April 1990, photograph by Michael McMullen, *Commercial Appeal*.



Figure 62: Pyramid Arena, photograph by Dave Darnell, *Commercial Appeal*.

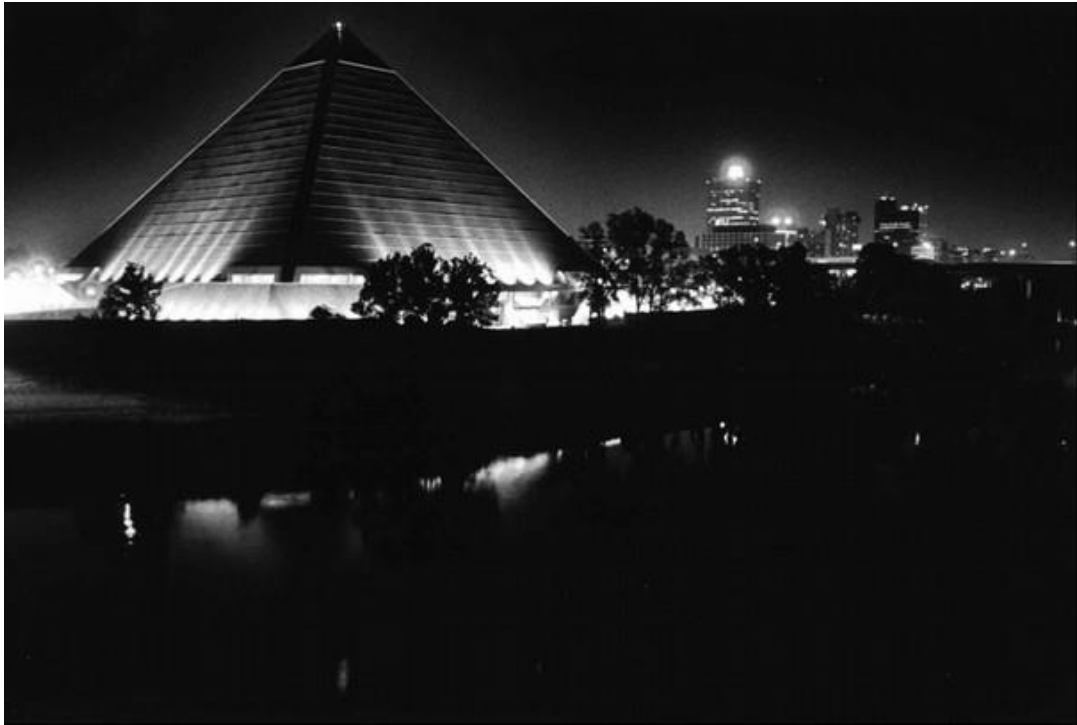


Figure 63: Rendering of the Bass Pro Shop bowling alley, from Michael Sheffield, “A Look Inside Bass Pro’s Pyramid Plans,” *Memphis Business Journal*, June 21, 2012.

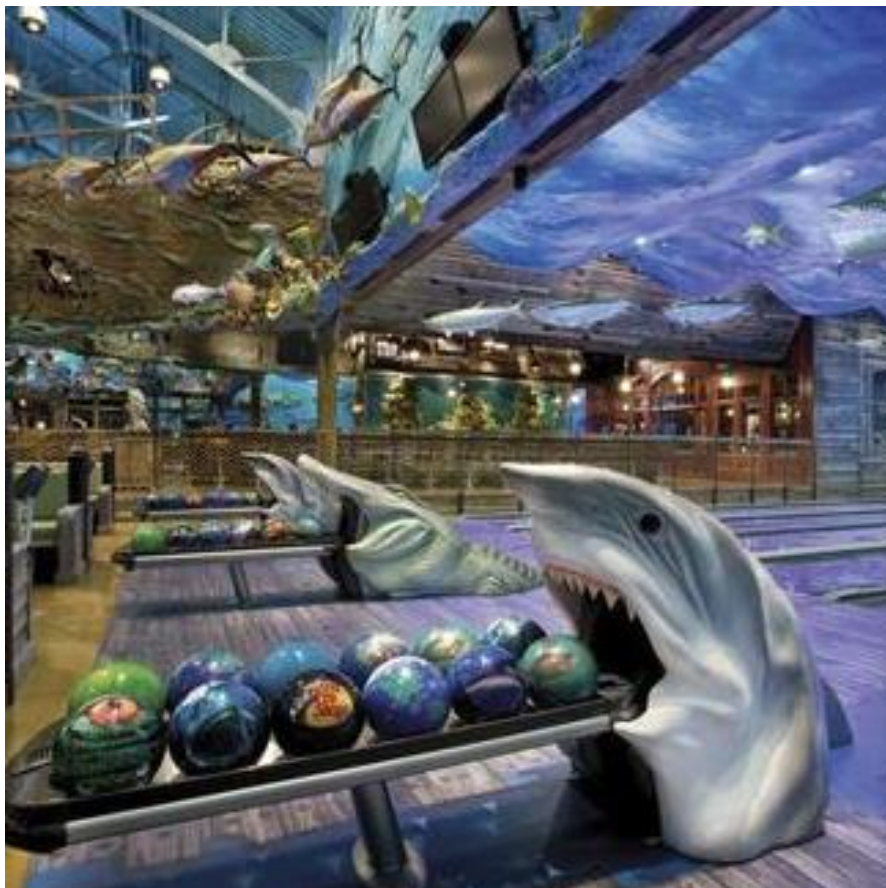


Figure 64: Water elements in the Bass Pro's Pyramid, "A Look Inside Bass Pro's Pyramid Plans," *Memphis Business Journal*, June 21, 2012.

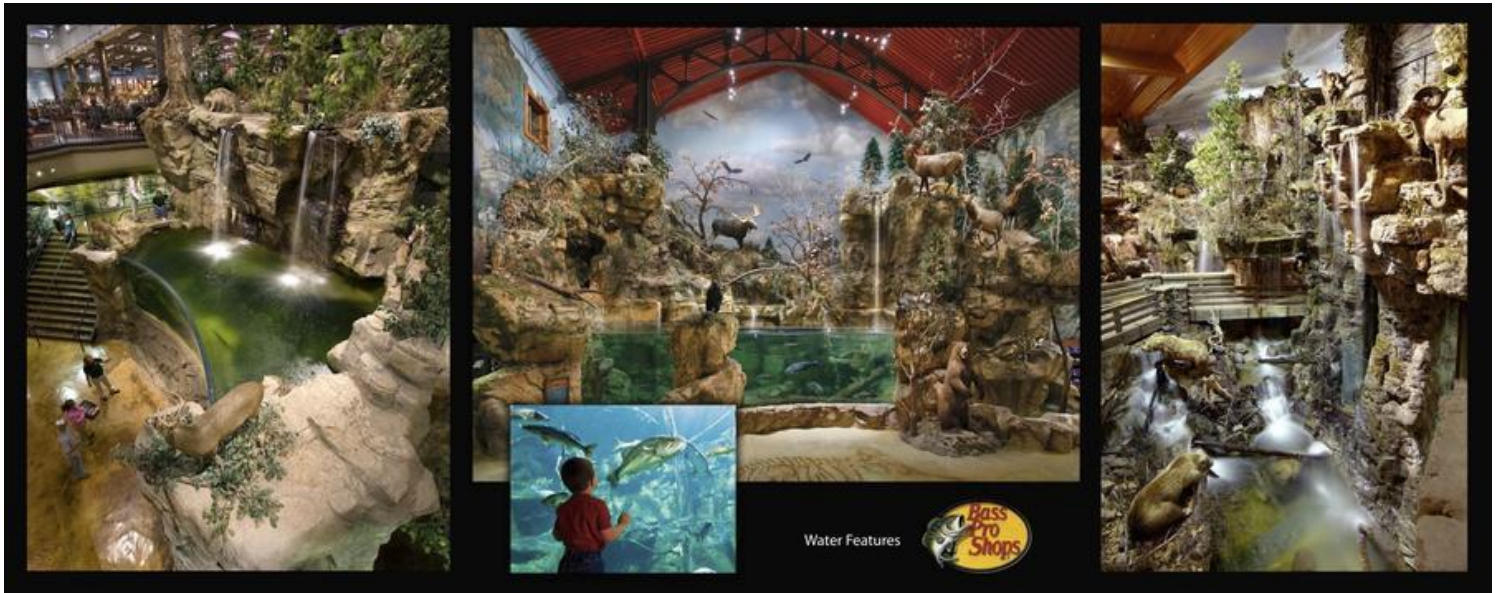


Figure 65: Jacqueline Smith in freezing rain outside the National Civil Rights Museum, January 15, 2013, photograph by Nikki Boertman, *Commercial Appeal*.

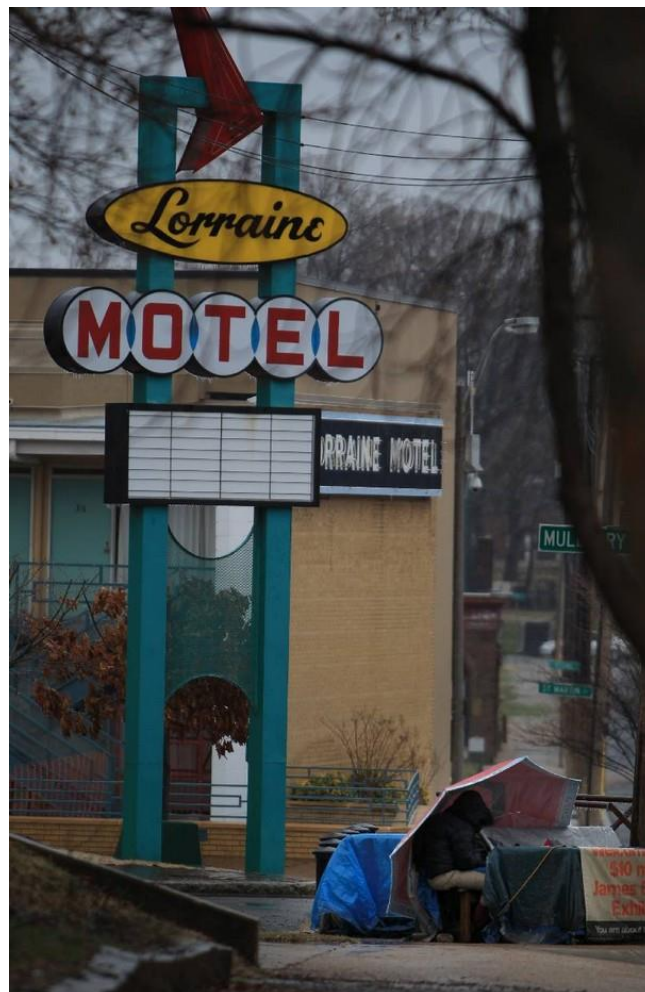


Figure 66: National Civil Rights Museum, photograph by author.



Figure 67: Rosa Parks sculpture in the Montgomery city bus, photograph by Alan Spearman, *Commercial Appeal*



Figure 68: Barrel-shaped garbage truck and exhibit on the Sanitation Workers' Strike, photograph from www.flicker.com



Figure 69: B.B. King outside the B.B. King Blues Club on Beale Street, September 24, 1991, photograph by Dave Darnell, *Commercial Appeal*.



Conclusion Images

Figure 1: Stax Records in September of 1967. The structure was torn down in 1989 and reconstructed in the early 2000s for the creation of the Stax Rock and Soul Museum

