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Social justice and Baltimore
A brief history

During the spring of 2015, Baltimore made national headlines due to the death of Freddie Gray and the resulting Baltimore Uprising. Gray died April 19, 2015, a week after being critically injured while riding in a police van. Reports about his treatment during arrest and the van ride, and his resulting injuries, contributed to long-standing tension between the police and local communities.

Protests began in Baltimore on April 18, 2015, and continued for almost a week, before a few violent acts occurred during an otherwise peaceful demonstration in downtown Baltimore.

A few days later, these tensions erupted once more when a large group of students were confronted by police officers, resulting in an evening of looting and vandalism, which was condemned by Gray's family and many people in Baltimore's communities. This event led the mayor of Baltimore to enact a citywide curfew, but it also brought about many cleanup efforts and events that brought portions of the city together.

Several days later, Gray's death was officially declared a homicide, and the state's attorney brought charges against the six officers involved. The curfew was lifted six days later, but the long process of healing the city had just begun. Convictions will not be part of that process, as all charges were dropped in July 2016. After a mistrial and three acquittals, it became clear that the prosecution would be unsuccessful in holding the officers legally responsible for Gray's death.

Nationally, this event was part of an ongoing narrative surrounding policing and bias due to increased media attention on the deaths of black men during encounters with law enforcement. In Baltimore, these events aggravated an already tense relationship between police and the city's long-marginalized black communities. Contextualizing these events within the city's history of structural inequality is important, as, historically, African American residents were victims of state-endorsed discriminatory policies that perpetuated racial inequality well beyond the reforms initiated by the civil rights movement, including the desegregation of schools and the passage of the Fair Housing Act.[1] Economic disparities, never adequately addressed due to systemic racism, continue to this day through the uneven allocation of resources to segregated neighborhoods, redistricted schools, and increased disinvestment in the city.

Many visitors will come to Baltimore knowing only what they learned from cover-

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age of the Uprising, and perhaps from *The Wire* television series, but Baltimore's African American communities have long histories that are composed of not only racial oppression and violence, but also resilience, survival, and numerous struggles for justice and equality.

Decades of segregation

At the beginning of the 19th century, Maryland had the largest free black population in the country, comprising 40% of its total black population. This ratio was unmatched by any other location in North America.[2] However, since Maryland still maintained a substantial white majority, the free black population was largely unable to join the classes of small business owners.[3]

At this time, Baltimore occupied a unique place in the margins, the largest city in a border state, where agricultural shifts from tobacco to grain led to a boom in the population of free blacks as the labor needs changed. In addition, Baltimore was a milling center, and its port location positioned it as a center for commerce and trade. Its economy was not directly dependent on slave labor, though its port was extremely important to the slave trade.[4]

By 1860, Baltimore was home to a booming cotton textile industry and was a growing place of opportunity for free blacks in the state, though they faced competition from the influx of European immigrants who often would work for less pay. Both free African Americans and slaves who were permitted to hire themselves out were constantly confronted with hostility from the white population as well as the risk of kidnapping or capture.[5] One of these slaves was Frederick Douglass, who wrote about Baltimore when he worked as an enslaved caulker in Baltimore's shipyards prior to his escape in 1838.

In Baltimore, free blacks outnumbered enslaved black people by more than 8 to 1 before the Civil War.[6] Afterwards, a surge in European immigration led to an increase in ethnic white enclaves in the city. Between 1880 and 1910, the city's population doubled to approximately 550,000, of which 88,000 were African American.[7] At the same time,

the large land tracts around Baltimore City and increased transportation led to suburbanization.[8] The nature of the service economy meant that African American households were spread throughout the community in second half of the 19th century. Alley houses, small and set back from main streets, highlighted inequalities between poor African Americans and white elites.[9]

These migration patterns, as well as overcrowded conditions and insufficient city services in the alley districts, led to the development of the first segregated African American neighborhood in "Old West Baltimore." The expanding railroads in South Baltimore displaced even more families as their homes were demolished for Camden Station.[10] This area became the home of many prominent black citizens, a thriving black entertainment district, and *The Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper. Prominent black churches formed social, cultural, and political centers in these communities, and were often involved in organizing and activism for the communities they served. This area was referred to as the "Harlem of Baltimore" and was home to many distinguished black citizens such as Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Mitchell Jr.[11]

By 1904, half of the city's African American population of the city had moved to West Baltimore. There, they created a socially and economically diverse neighborhood, with the poorest residents continuing to live in alley houses with insufficient infrastructure and city services.

These conditions were exacerbated by the Great Fire in 1904, which led to increased flight from the city.[12] Employment discrimination kept many African Americans from escaping poverty and life-threatening living conditions.[13] Many city departments refused to hire African Americans at all, and those that did provided little job mobility. These practices would not improve until the mid-1950s.[14]

In the years leading up to the passage of the first residential segregation bill in 1910, unofficial segregation existed in common eating areas, theaters, parks, and shopping districts.[15] Three bills passed before World War

I that forbid African Americans from moving into white neighborhoods. The courts would eventually overturn these laws, but they were indicative of the systemic discrimination and racist sentiment.[16] From 1910 to 1940, the African American population in Baltimore doubled due to The Great Migration, seeking job opportunities and greater political freedoms. This expansion of the population in conjunction with New Deal reforms and economic expansion brought on by World War II helped to increase economic advancement for many African Americans.[17]

The population increased further due to temporary war workers, but the housing situation continued to deteriorate as construction projects were halted and city services slowed. Restrictive race covenants, discriminatory lending practices, and segregation in public housing kept many black families in substandard housing. In the late 1940s, covenants were declared unconstitutional, and African Americans began moving into white neighborhoods that were previously unavailable to them.[18] This led to an increase in white flight and racist blockbusting tactics that significantly changed the racial distribution of the city,[19] and African Americans faced limited access to the segregated amenities of their new neighborhoods. Through petitions and demonstrations, black families fought for their right to use pools, golf courses, parks, and other public recreational facilities while organizations such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) staged sit-ins downtown to protest their limited access to eating and shopping establishments.[20]

A legacy of activism

These stories, as well as those of the 2015 Uprising, fit in with the long legacy of black activism and the struggle against injustice in Baltimore. The Lillie Mae Carroll Jackson Civil Rights Museum recently reopened in west Baltimore to honor Jackson, head of the Baltimore NAACP and the legacy of the movement. Starting in the early 1930s, Jackson, along with Carl Murphy of *The Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper, organized the resistance to segregation. Over the next 40 years, she and her daughter Juanita Jackson would conduct campaigns against discrimination, segregation, and racial injustice. The work of these activists and organizations led to the elimination of most Jim Crow laws in Baltimore before the 1960s and laid a strong foundation for the nonviolent protests of the ongoing civil rights movement.[21]

The riots of 1968 were part of a larger context of experience across the United States. As early as 1963, a pattern of protest and resistance by African Americans in urban communities had begun. In April 1968, following the shooting of Martin Luther King Jr., there was disruption, looting, and violence in 36 states. In Baltimore, six people were killed during the events that were mostly isolated to black neighborhoods.[22] The riots had a lasting impact on Baltimore, accelerating the departure of white residents from the city due to fear of crime. This resulted in fewer middle class residents, progressively concentrated poverty, and fewer people contributing to the city's success overall. As a result, problems grew and compounded: schools declined as the tax base decreased, jobs were lost as businesses left the city and industries declined, economic development stagnated, and empty buildings were not reoccupied.[23]

As unemployment has steadily risen over the years, so has crime and drug use, perpetuating the challenging conditions in neighborhoods. Violent crime rates and arrests had risen to disproportionate levels by 2000.[24] In fact, disproportionate policing has magnified difficult conditions for African American communities over the years, resulting in highly visible citizen-police conflict, like the Baltimore Uprising. The 2016 investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division into the Baltimore City Police Department confirms that biased practices are longstanding, systemic, and have contributed to disparity.[25]

Federal government response to the problems in some urban neighborhoods include low-income housing developments and other antipoverty programs, which have had questionable success in actually improving the underlying factors contributing to the decline

of Baltimore neighborhoods and those in other U.S. cities facing similar issues. These policy actions have also sustained and extended segregation within the city, and eventually led to a majority African American population in Baltimore in the 1970s.[26]

Further, although integration of schools was the law and had been an enthusiastic initiative of mayor Thomas D'Alesandro III before the 1968 riots, black and white leaders clashed, efforts deteriorated, and desegregation was challenged and stalled. It wasn't until 1987 that the Department of Education declared that there was no remaining evidence of the previous segregation practices in city schools.[27]

Efforts from local government to reverse the decline have also created periodic spurts of development over the years, including revitalizing areas of downtown, marketing and tourism promotion, and a new Inner Harbor that includes a shopping center, science center, and other attractions. Many of these developments came under William Donald Schaefer, a four-term mayor credited with making important positive economic impacts for Baltimore.[28] Unfortunately, federal grants meant to re-energize inner cities were used for the development of hotels and tourist attractions that were arguably aimed at those with expendable income, rather than low-income residents. The funding tools and incentives for development were meant to convey a business-friendly Baltimore, but they came at the cost of reduced budgets for municipal projects and schools.[29]

Contrasted with federal efforts, local organizations like the Greater Homewood Community Corporation worked on a model that acted based on neighborhood residents' priorities, doing what they could to maintain neighborhood stability and racial integration. These groups focused on keeping school quality up, advocating against disruptive highway projects, and other issues important to the cross section of people who lived within the communities, rather than direct appeals to white residents to prevent their departure.[30]

Small scale projects across the city, like the rehabilitation of homes, resold at affordable prices for low- and middle-income families, did not make a big enough dent in the overwhelming deterioration of largely abandoned neighborhoods. In the 1990s, as these conditions surrounded the Johns Hopkins medical campus in East Baltimore, the administration made a conscious effort to change its image, from an unengaged behemoth to an active participant in community improvement. They focused on rebuilding the area of East Baltimore. However, slow improvement, displacement of families, and distrust of the actions and intentions of the organization have limited change. Critics charge that Johns Hopkins and cooperating officials are not intent on changing the underlying problems or engaging local communities in the process, but instead are painting over the disrepair and removing the already disenfranchised residents.[31]

Political change has been slow, but steady. A majority African American voting population in the 1970s meant that political leaders eventually began to reflect the community they were representing. In 1970, Parren Mitchell was the first African American elected to the U.S. Congress from Maryland. Clarence "Du" Burns established a political career by progressing through city government to chair of the city council, and became the first African American mayor after Schaefer resigned to become governor of Maryland in 1987. Following Burns' term, Kurt Schmoke was the first African American mayor elected to that position. There was a continual increase in African American membership of city council through the next couple of decades, and the model of rising through city council and other roles to become mayor was repeated by other African American political leaders.[32]

The city has made some positive efforts to reduce crime and other indicators of public health and safety stability over the decades, but for many communities, there is still much work to be done. Baltimore has also increased business with minority-owned organizations,[33] although their success is not highly ranked.[34]

Learn more

Today's Baltimore is a majority black city with

pockets of white minority, but amenities and privileges are often conveyed to traditionally white neighborhoods, as described in the work of Lawrence Brown of Morgan State University.[35] Over the past five decades, developers have exploited these areas of disinvestment, leading to booms in gentrification. These booms disproportionately affect low-income residents, as the increased property values, rents, and taxes, which the 24% of Baltimore's residents living below the poverty line cannot afford. Sixty percent of those living below the poverty line are African American, so even as Baltimore renews itself, it does so largely at the detriment of these residents.

Baltimore is a vibrant and complex city with a long history of injustice and subsequent activism. It is a community with a beating heart, and the stories and nuances of its tensions and successes cannot be told in a few pages. Luckily, a number of excellent resources are available for those who wish to explore the rich history of Baltimore. The book *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* tells the story of historical systemic racism and discriminatory government policy in Baltimore and in the United States.

For a personal and compelling view of the lives of children who grow up in Baltimore and are often surrounded by poverty and violence, the author D. Watkins has published two books: *The Beast Side: Living and Dying While Black in America* and *The Cook Up: A Crack Rock Memoir*.

You can also use local organizations to learn more before your visit to Baltimore for ACRL 2017. The following organizations all tell the story of this city and document the factors that shaped what it is today:

• The Baltimore Historical Society, www.baltimoregaslight.net/
• The Maryland Historical Society, www.mdhs.org/
• Preserve the Baltimore Uprising, http://baltimoreuprising2015.org/home

The following grassroots, activist-led organizations are actively working for change in our city:

• Leaders for a Beautiful Struggle, http://lbsbaltimore.com/
• Baltimore Bloc, www.baltimorebloc.com/

We look forward to greeting you in Baltimore and hope that by knowing about the legacy of our communities you will be drawn in to experience them more fully.

Notes

1. Emily Badger, "The Long, Painful and Repetitive History of How Baltimore Became Baltimore," *Washington Post,* April 29, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/04/29/the-long-painful-and-repetitive-history-of-how-baltimore-became-baltimore/ (accessed October 28, 2016).

2. Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985): 2.

3. Ibid., 3.

4. Ibid., 5-7.

5. Ibid., 27.

6. Ibid., 62.

7. Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010): 9.

8. Ibid.

9. Sherry H. Olson, *Baltimore, the Building of an American City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 61.

10. Ibid., 59.

11. Stacia Brown, "Building for the Future Versus Preserving the Past," *Curbed,* October 25, 2016, www.curbed.com/a/10-streets-that-define-america/legacy?21214 (accessed October 27, 2016).

12. Pietila, *Not in my Neighborhood,* 10.

13. Oslon, *Baltimore,* 59-61.

14. David Taft Terry,"Dismantling Jim Crow: Challenges to racial segregation, 1935-1955," *Black History Bulletin* 67, no. 1-4 (2004): 15.

15. Pietila, *Not in my Neighborhood,* 10.

is the creation of a ULS-wide weekly update email. We also have observed an improved environment throughout the organization where people know more about the current plan and think more about our work as a whole and the direction of the library system.

Our model of inclusive planning does build relationships to the point where flexibility in communication across organization levels is common. It allows for deeper ownership of work and ideas. We continue to see ripples of this planning change, in big and small ways. The strong cohesion formed in the committee and the committee alumni creates a shared experience and language. The environmental scanning, discussion forums, poster sessions, and fresh outside perspectives allow everyone in the organization to step outside of their day-to-day job and ask what is possible. What can make us better at what we are doing now? What can make us better for next year, the next three years, and the next five years?

Collectively working through these questions has led us to improvements in the operational realm and in strategic direction. Try fostering an inclusive and collaborative strategic planning process to figure out those answers for your library together.

Acknowledgements

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16. Olson, *Baltimore,* 61.

17. Terry, *Dismantling Jim Crow,* 14.

18. Ibid., 15.

19. Edward W. Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village story.* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1994): 4.

20. Terry, "Dismantling Jim Crow," 15.

21. Olson, *Baltimore,* 68.

22. Elizabeth Nix, *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011): 5.

23. Jo Ann E. Argersinger, "Baltimore, Maryland," in *Encyclopedia of American Urban History,* ed. D. R. Goldfield (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007), Vol. 2, 59-60. doi: 10.4135/9781412952620.n31.

24. Jim Mendelsohn, "Baltimore, Maryland," *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience,* eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Oxford, 2008).

25. "Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department," U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2016, https:// www.justice.gov/opa/file/883366/download (accessed October 26, 2016).

26. Mendelsohn, "Baltimore, Maryland."

27. Nix, *Baltimore '68,* 159-170.

28. Argersinger, "Baltimore, Maryland," 59.

29. Olson, *Baltimore,* 390.

30. Nix, *Baltimore '68,* 212-213.

31. Marisela B. Gomez, *Race, Class, Power, and Organizing in East Baltimore: Rebuilding Abandoned Communities in America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013): 54-59.

32. Mendelsohn, "Baltimore, Maryland."

33. Thomas E. Carney, "Baltimore," in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century,* ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Oxford, 2009).

34. Olson, *Baltimore,* 397

35. Lawrence Brown, "Two Baltimores: The White L Vs. The Black Butterfly," *City Paper,* June 28, 2016, www.citypaper.com /bcpnews-two-baltimores-the-white-l-vs -the-black-butterfly-20160628-htmlstory.html (accessed October 27, 2016). ℵ