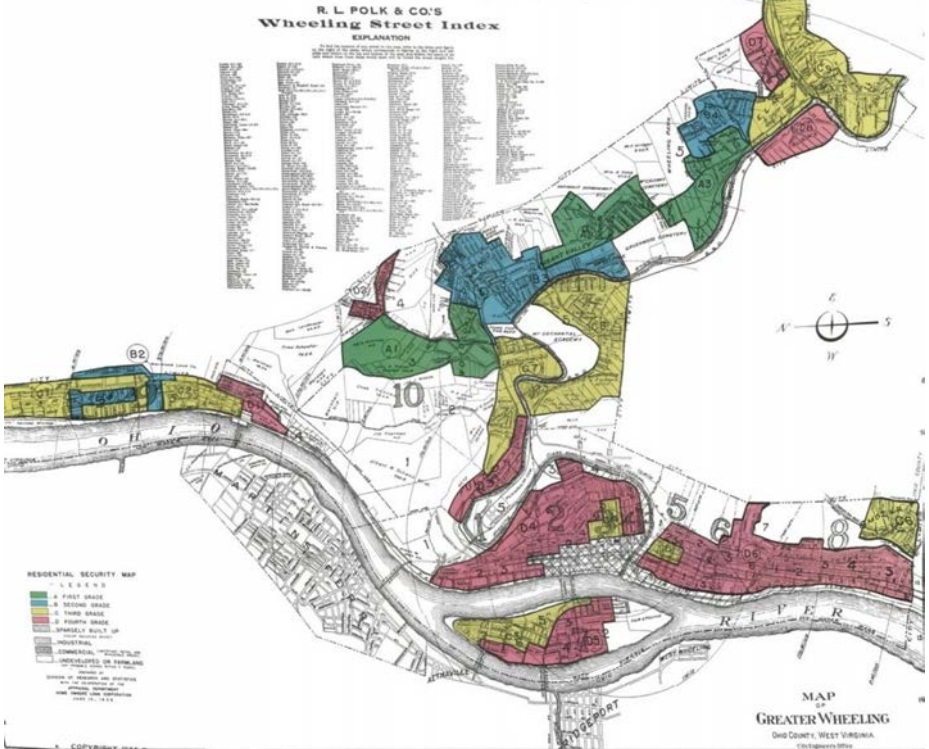


HISTORICAL REVIEW



UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW



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EDITING & LAYOUT: Seán Patrick Duffy

The UOVHR is generally published biannually. Neither the editor nor the Ohio County Public Library assumes responsibility for the facts or opinions expressed by contributors.

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UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

Single Copies: \$5.00

Founded by the Wheeling Area Historical Society in 1968, the **UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW** is the only publication of its kind in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. Dedicated solely to local history topics, it has become a treasured publication and valuable tool for studying and learning about our geographic area. Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation (WNHAC, later Wheeling Heritage) continued the tradition, editing and publishing the **REVIEW** from 2010-2018. Ownership of the **UOVHR** publication was transferred in the second half of 2018 to the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling.

UOVHR content has historically included articles, transcribed documents, book reviews, and accounts of the economic, political, social, and cultural history of the greater Wheeling area contributed by historians, researchers, and scholars. Any editorial views expressed by authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the **OCPL**.

OCPL is honored to publish the **UOVHR** and continue this great tradition for years to come.

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On the Cover: Top image courtesy “Mapping Inequality: redlining in New Deal America,” University of Richmond. See: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>; Wheeling, WV circa 1935.

Bottom: City of Wheeling Urban Renewal Authority. Ca 1970s.

UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers:

There have been some significant developments regarding the Chuck Howley sign efforts since the publication of our last issue.

First, on August 5, 2023, Mr. Howley was finally enshrined as a member of Pro Football Hall of Fame, Class of 2023. His son Scott delivered the acceptance speech.

Then the campaign to raise money to design, create, and install a welcome sign honoring Chuck for his Hall of Fame induction at the south entrance to Warwood. More than fifty people donated, including major donors like the Warwood Vets and the City of Wheeling, as well as dozens of individuals from Warwood and Wheeling. Sandra Caldwell at McClellan signs made the metal sign and a crew from the city completed the installation on Wednesday, October 18, 2023. The Wheeling crew also installed new signs to commemorate City Council’s unanimous vote to name the football field at Garden Park after Chuck Howley.

Finally, Mr. Howley’s number (66) was retired by West Virginia University on Nov. 4, 2023. He wore #54 for the Cowboys.

Transitioning to the content of the new issue you are reading, in my view, this is arguably one of the most important ever published by the Review, in that it explores race relations in Wheel-



The welcome sign seen above, deigned by yours truly and Erin Rothenbuehler, now stands near the south entrance to Warwood. Below, city workers install one of three new Chuck Howley Field signs at Garden Park.



Sean Duffy, Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean Duffy', written in a cursive style.

ing, particularly focusing on the modern era, from the latter Jim Crow “Green Book” years of the 1930s to 1960s, to a closer look at the impact of redlining and urban renewal on Wheeling’s African American neighborhoods by Brian Kammer, to the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s in a piece by Tim Trivetti. We hope these well researched articles will inspire additional scholarship on race relations in Wheeling and serve as a model for similar smaller, rust belt cities.

Making a Way Out of No Way: Wheeling in the Green Book

By Seán Duffy

As a prelude to what follows, it might help to examine the impact of “Jim Crow” policies on Wheeling’s African American community in the context of “The Negro Motorist Green Book.”

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.” ~ Mark Twain

I first learned about the existence of “The Negro Motorist Green Book” from Ann Thomas, when I interviewed her in 2012 for the second volume of *The Wheeling Family*.

Both sides of Ann’s family were originally from North Carolina before joining the Great Migration and moving north for better treatment and increased opportunity. Ann’s Aunt Esther May (her mother’s sister) and Uncle Maxton



Ann Thomas as a young nurse.

“Mac” Singletary were among the first of her family to choose Wheeling as their new home. They migrated from North Carolina and opened the New Dixie Restaurant, aka “Singletary’s,” in an old Victorian residence on Chapline Street in the middle of what was, at the time, an established African American neighborhood.

Wheeling’s “Little Harlem”

The family lived upstairs, and earned extra income by renting rooms to boarders. “Because of segregation,” Ann said, “there

was an economy in Wheeling that catered to the African American community.” There was a robust Black community on Chapline Street where the restaurant was located while Ann was growing up, primarily concentrated in the 1100 and 1200 blocks. Many of the businesses were Black-owned, but most of Wheeling remained segregated during Ann’s childhood – “Jim Crow laws” still forcibly separating blacks and whites in most public facilities. Thus, the Black neighborhood on Chapline Street north of 12th Street evolved into one of the nation’s thousands of “Little Harlems,” a reference (see Alvin Hall's *Driving the Green Book*) to the New York neighborhood that became the standard for Black culture during the Jim Crow era. It became, in effect, a second Wheeling, existing side-by-side with White Wheeling, but with virtually no interaction.

As Ann explained it, when the trains were still running in Wheeling, African American men who worked on the trains often needed a place to stay during an overnight layover. In segregated Wheeling, laws or policies prevented them from staying in the White-only hotels. Even when famous Black people, like heavyweight champion Joe Louis, visited Wheeling, they had no choice but to stay in the African American neighborhood.

In a 1936 speech delivered for the Blue Triangle Branch of the YWCA’s “Race Relations Day,” over radio station WWVA, Wheeling’s only Black attorney at the time, Harry H. Jones, provided some detail for the economy of “Wheeling’s Little Harlem,” the Chapline Street neighborhood:

“A brief survey of our local colored population shows: that the group has six churches of three denominations; that it owns real estate worth about \$500,000; that it manages one fraternal corporation worth nearly \$130,000; one drug store, one tailor shop, two restaurants, two billiard parlors, and two beauty shops. In the professions, business, trades and personal service, the group is represented by: four physicians; two dentists; twelve clergymen;

one lawyer; twenty-two school teachers; one chiropodist; two undertakers; two social workers; three tailors; four beauty parlor operators; two master hat cleaners, and a large number employed as cooks, maids, waiters, messengers, porters, bootblacks, janitors, elevator operators, chauffeurs, and barbers.”



This pencil was the only artifact remaining from her family's restaurant when I spoke with Ann in 2012.

The Bible of Black Travel



Victor Hugo Green

But for those who weren't from Wheeling – train workers or Black travelers, for example – how were they to know about the neighborhood and the safe places it offered?

It was in answer to this question that Ann first mentioned the *Green Book*, the first several editions of which lists the Singletarys' establishment as the only restaurant option in Wheeling. Conceived and published (from 1936 to 1967) by a mailman named Victor Hugo Green with his wife Alma, the publication was designed to help black travelers locate, “boarding houses, restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and various other services...” and to help them “avoid as many difficulties and embarrassments as possible.”

restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and various other services...” and to help them “avoid as many difficulties and embarrassments as possible.”

As the Library of Congress put it:

“The Green Book became 'the Bible of black travel' during the era of Jim Crow laws, when open and often legally prescribed discrimination against African Americans and other non-whites was widespread. Green wrote this guide to identify services and places relatively friendly to African-Americans so they could find lodgings, businesses, and gas stations that would serve them along the road. It was little known outside the African-American community.”

WANTED—FEMALE HELP.

WANTED—An experienced white girl for general housework.. Call Woodsdale 424. n-26-1

WANTED—Experienced white girl for general housework, small family. Phone Woodsdale 448-R. n-26-1

WAITRESS—Experienced only need apply. New Dixie Restaurant, 1051 Market. n-27-h

Tellingly, above this early newspaper ad for a waitress at the New Dixie are two ads for a “white girl” to do housework.

Ann’s aunt and uncle needed help with the restaurant, so, when Ann (born 1938) was just six months old, her mother, Laura, who grew up on a North Carolina tobacco and cotton farm with 13 siblings, moved with her daughter to Wheeling. Ann’s aunt and mother ran the restaurant while her Uncle Mac worked as a mailman in Bridgeport, Ohio. The arrangement was a typical one for segregated neighborhoods, where female entrepreneurship was essential to these new economies.

Jim Crow laws forbade African Americans from sitting down

and eating at any of the local restaurants, unless they were Black-owned. In addition, most of Wheeling's many theaters were white-only. "There was a black movie theater called the 'Fedo' located in the African American Pythian Building," Ann recalled, "which also offered a pool hall and barbershop in the basement area. There was a drugstore—Doc White's Pharmacy [two doors down from the movie theater]. Doc's store had a soda fountain in the back. The front was more of a drugstore or general store. In the basement of the drugstore was a jukebox, old wire tables and chairs, and Friday evenings or on Saturdays, that was kind of a social place to meet." Doc's pharmacy would also be listed in the *Green Book*.



Doc's pharmacy as it looked in the day.

Wheeling in the *Green Book*

"Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
 Healthy, free, the world before me,
 The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose."
 -Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road"

Wheeling establishments first appeared in the 1939 edition of the *Green Book*. These included the Verse Hotel at 1042 Market Street; the aforementioned Singletary Restaurant at 1043 Chap-



The “Black Elks Club” on Chapline St. as it appeared in the 1939 Green Book. -Urban Renewal photos

line; The American Legion at 1516 Main and Elks Club at 1010 Chapline (both listed under “Night Clubs”); and two beauty parlors Miss Hall on 11th St. and Miss Taylor on Chapline. Another beauty parlor, “Mode-Craft,” was listed from 1950-54 at 1028 1/2 Chapline.

Also listed were four addresses under “Tourist

Homes” – more or less rooms for rent or boarding houses. One of these, at 114 12th Street, belonged to Mrs. W. (Elizabeth) Turner, widow of Wheeling's first African-American police officer, William Turner, who died in 1928. Mrs. Turner's tourist home would remain in the *Green Book* until 1960. Other such homes were owned by Mrs. C. Early (132 12th), Mrs. R. Williams (1007 Chapline), and Mrs. J.T. Hughes (1021 Eoff St.). These businesses also verify the importance of female entrepreneurship in segregated Black neighborhoods.

The Verse Hotel disappeared from the 1941 edition, and the *Green Book* itself halted publication during the Second World War, resuming in 1946. The Blue Triangle (segregated) Branch of the Y.W.C.A. was first listed in the 1949 *Green Book* under

“Lodging,” which replaced “Tourist Homes” as a category. Located on 12th Street, the Blue Triangle, in addition to teaching life skills to African American girls, was highly active in trying



to improve race relations in Wheeling. Its archives, now a part of the collections of the Ohio County Public Library, are an invaluable resource.

1949 was also the last year for the Singletary Restaurant to be listed. It was replaced by the “Blue Goose” at 1035

Wheeling listings in the 1948 *Green Book*.

Chapline in 1950. Also

making its first appearance under “Drug Stores” in the 1950 edition was Doc White’s “North Side Pharmacy.”

So remained the Wheeling listings until 1956, when only the Blue Triangle, Blue Goose, and Mrs. Turner’s place were still listed. The Blue Triangle dropped out in 1957, and by 1958, only Mrs. Turner remained.

By 1961, there were no listings for Wheeling, while Moundsville still offered lodgings at Mrs. Blanche Campbell’s place at 1206 4th Street.

As the Library of Congress put it, “Shortly after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed the types of racial discrimination that made the Green Book necessary, publication ceased and it fell into obscurity.” Ironically, this progressive and necessary step forward also spelled the end for many of the Black-owned businesses of Chapline Street.

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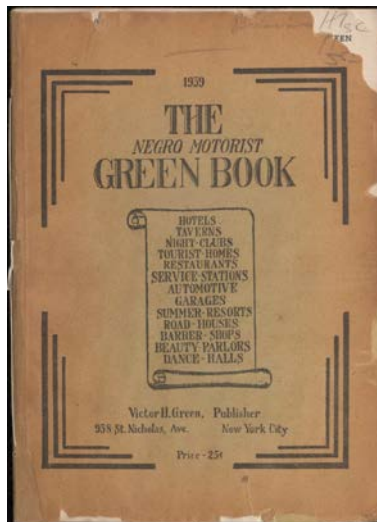
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Broken Promises: Redlining, Urban Renewal, and the Destruction of Wheeling's Multi-Racial and Black Neighborhoods (Part I)

By Brian Kammer

“We had what the white community had, but for us. We had established a good community – a small but strong community. It was like Black Wall Street. We took care of each other. We could withstand racism because there were positive things that reinforced against racism. Urban renewal was the annihilation of my community. We saw the bulldozers tear down our homes. When I think of the grief, heartache, and trauma that it brought to our lives, I cry.”

~Wheeling resident Donna Terry¹

“The whole African American social fabric was there on Chapline Street. When urban renewal did happen, people got displaced. Some people went to Ohio. It pretty much decimated the Black community. The Black community from that point has never been the same and will never be the same.”

~Wheeling resident Ann Thomas²

“When urban renewal came through, there was a thriving Black community in Wheeling, West Virginia, folks. It was wonderful! When you think of that thriving community, most of that history is not known. It's got lost. That history has scattered itself to a point where, to try to collect it back is a process, because so many of our individuals who lived it have passed on.”

~Darryl Clausell, President, Wheeling NAACP³

I. INTRODUCTION

History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past.

~Toni Morrison⁴

“Urban renewal” typically calls to mind government-sponsored demolition and construction projects in the 1960s and ‘70s that destroyed or reshaped whole neighborhoods and communities – disproportionately minority communities – in order to make way for new highways or commercial districts in America’s large cities, like New York, Detroit, and Chicago. Less understood is that the majority of urban renewal projects were carried out in small cities⁵ like Wheeling, West Virginia, an industrial city on the Ohio River, whose population peaked at about 75,000 in the first half of the 20th century, declining to about 23,000 currently. In Wheeling, “urban renewal” frequently evokes recollections of Interstate 70 and State Route 2 highway and tunnel construction during the late 1950s continuing through the early 1970s. These projects were destructive of mostly white neighborhoods, and so they are centered in the public memory of urban renewal in a city that is over 90 percent white. Left unsaid in wistful laments about lost East Wheeling and Elm Grove neighborhoods is that other Wheeling neighborhoods, like Elm Terrace, Edgewood, Oakmont, Beech Glen, Woodsdale, and Warwood, could readily absorb residents displaced by highway/tunnel projects – because in a segregated city, these were white neighborhoods willing to accommodate white newcomers.⁶

Rarely acknowledged is urban renewal’s far more devastating impact on Wheeling’s Black community, which, though small at about 5% of the population, had been, as Donna Terry’s words above convey, a thriving community in the downtown riverfront neighborhoods since immediately after the Civil War.⁷ In 1936, Harry S. Jones, a Black teacher at the segregated, all-Black Lincoln School and an attorney, described that community:

“About one out of every twenty persons living in Wheeling is of African descent. . . . A brief survey of our local colored population shows: that the group has six churches of three denominations; that it owns real estate worth about \$500,000; that it manages one fraternal corporation worth nearly \$150,000, one drug

store, one tailor shop, two restaurants, two billiard parlors, and two beauty shops. In the professions, business, trades and personal service, the group is represented by: four physicians; two dentists; twelve clergymen; one lawyer; twenty-two school teachers; one chiropodist; two undertakers; two social workers; three tailors; four beauty parlor operators; two master hat cleaners, and a large number employed as cooks, maids, waiters, messengers, porters, bootblacks, janitors, elevator operators, chauffeurs, and barbers.”⁸

At that time, Wheeling’s Black residents occupied a few neighborhoods in the downtown river-adjacent sections of the city, with working class elements and some small business operators concentrated in the Center Wheeling area. Teachers, doctors, lawyers, and other Black professionals concentrated among homes on the hillside above Chapline Street between 10th and 12th Streets, near Lincoln School.⁹ Anecdotal accounts, census records, and other historical documents show that during the early 20th century, Wheeling’s downtown population was, in fact, a mosaic of ethnicities where Black Americans, white Appalachians, and European and Middle-Eastern immigrants lived alongside and among one another. Though not necessarily an exemplar of “beloved community,” downtown nevertheless maintained a polyglot, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan character.¹⁰

At the same time, Wheeling’s suburban neighborhoods were, by dint of private prejudice and pro-segregation government policy and practice (e.g. racial exclusion covenants and “redlining”), off-limits to non-white homebuyers and renters.¹¹ Further, racial segregation in public accommodations (restaurants, theaters, etc.) was a social mandate if not encoded in black-letter law.¹² Especially in the early decades of the 20th century, intimidation tactics such as cross-burnings by the Ku Klux Klan enforced the color line in Wheeling.¹³

Housing segregation in Wheeling was to some extent the result of private white prejudice in an overwhelmingly white majority

city during the period of the “Great Migration” of Black Americans into northern urban centers during the early decades of the 20th century.¹⁴ More foundationally, pro-segregation federal government housing policies (such as “redlining”) institutionalized pervasive racial bias in the real estate and banking industries, systematically locking Black people out of housing markets in new suburban neighborhoods and from credit markets generally.¹⁵



Image 1 - 1935 Wheeling "Residential Security Map" showing color coded credit risk zones. “Redlined” areas indicated “hazardous” credit risk due to the presence of Black residents and “foreign born” immigrants.¹⁶

As housing scholar Arnold Hirsch has pointed out:

“[M]any blacks – especially those in the developing middle class – made frequent, repeated attempts to move beyond the confines of identifiably 'black' neighborhoods. They were re-

buffed not by invisible, impersonal, or anonymous forces, but by the overwhelming application of explicitly racial restrictions that reflected the desires of the dominant white majority. No other group had to face such an onslaught; it was the distinguishing characteristic that separated the black ghetto from the ethnic slum.”¹⁷

From the mid-1930s until the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, federal government policy not only sought to contain minority communities in increasingly deteriorating downtown neighborhoods, like Wheeling’s, it generously subsidized white settlement and wealth-accumulation in the suburbs.¹⁸ Thus, government housing policy, including repeated waves of urban renewal and white flight from the 1950s through the early 1970s, undid downtown Wheeling’s vibrant, multi-racial neighborhoods and accelerated segregation in the city.¹⁹ By 1971, what Wheeling Urban Renewal Authority (URA) planners that year called the “Chapline Street East” neighborhood, roughly bounded by 10th and 12th Streets, from High Street to Chapline, had become home to almost the entirety of Wheeling’s Black community and was almost entirely Black.²⁰

That year, the first phase of the ill-fated Fort Henry Mall Project – Wheeling’s last urban renewal experiment – began to be carried out in force. The never-completed project sought to radically alter the downtown central business district (CBD) and surrounding blocks by having most of it declared “blighted” land, allowing the city to use its eminent domain power to demolish dozens of homes and businesses, ostensibly to be replaced by a massive, futuristic new shopping mall – the Fort Henry Mall -- and beautiful new housing.²¹

Today, city residents typically recall the aborted shopping mall element of the project and lament the 1973 city-wide referendum that resulted in the project’s termination and the abolition of the Wheeling URA.²² This left an opening for a successful mall development in the late 1970s just across the Ohio River in St.

Clairsville, Ohio. It is widely assumed that the opening of the Ohio Valley Mall speeded the decline of Wheeling's downtown, the city's economy as a whole, as well as its population, during the 1980s and 1990s.

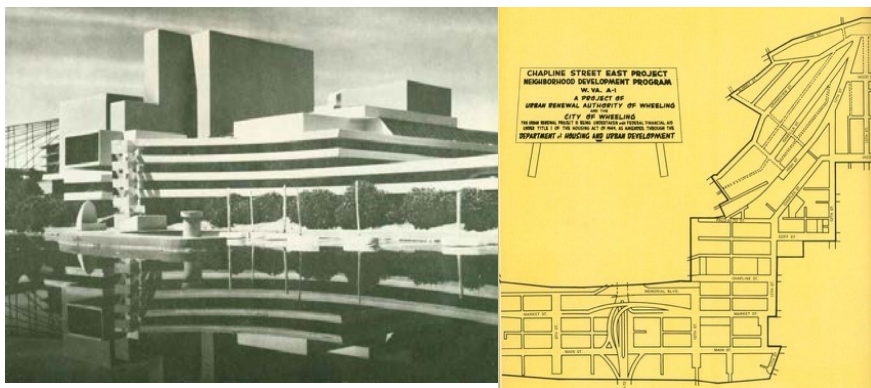


Image 2 - Chapline Street East Urban Renewal Plan and image of planned Ft. Henry Mall, 1971²³

Seemingly lost to the city's public memory – that is, primarily the memory of its white residents -- of urban renewal is that the only progress made towards the completion of the mall project before it was abruptly curtailed was the near complete demolition of the Chapline Street East neighborhood, a neighborhood that had been the heart of the Black community in Wheeling for a century and in many ways the vibrant, cosmopolitan heart of the city itself. For Black Wheeling residents, certainly, the trauma and pain of that loss is still very palpable. Today, the neighborhood is physically commemorated only by the Nelson Jordan Center, the city's sole publicly owned recreation center.

Once a major institution of Black social life in Wheeling, today it sits neglected on a stretch of pot-holed asphalt once known as Charles Street, surrounded by overgrown vegetation that has reclaimed the adjacent now-vacant properties, where only concrete steps remain to mark where houses once stood. Darryl Clausell, President of the Wheeling NAACP, expressed the sense of be-



Image 3 - Charles St and the Nelson Jordan Center (behind white house), 1971 and at present (red brick structure)

(Image on left courtesy Ohio Co. Public Library; on right, photo by the author)

trayal, anger, and sadness evoked by the ruined hillside community in 2022:

“The city made a promise. They told those individuals if you sell your land . . . we will rebuild everything as new apartments and houses . . . If you look at it today, there’s nothing.”²⁴

Within the Black community, as Mr. Clausell has pointed out, the displacement and loss caused by the neighborhood’s destruction has rendered a clear history of that time difficult to recover: “That history has scattered itself to a point where, to try to collect it back is a process, because so many of our individuals who lived it have passed on.”²⁵ Clausell’s testimony, along with that of Donna Terry and Ann Thomas above, expresses a sense of loss consistent with the phenomenon of “root shock,” identified by scholar Dr. Mindy Fullilove as the individual and collective trauma experienced by communities, especially of color, who have been directly impacted by urban renewal’s spatial and psychic dislocations:

“Root shock, at the level of the individual, is a profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual’s head . . . Root shock, at the level of the local community, be it neighborhood or something else, ruptures bonds, dispersing people to all the directions of the com-

pass. Even if they manage to regroup, they are not sure what to do with one another. People who were near are too far, and people who were far are too near. The elegance of the neighborhood – each person in his social and geographic slot – is destroyed, and even if the neighborhood is rebuilt exactly as it was, it won't work. The restored geography is not enough to repair the many injuries to the mazeway."²⁶

Indeed, Wheeling's experience is emblematic of that of Black communities in many small cities affected by urban renewal. As University of Pennsylvania history professor Brent Cebul writes, "the intimacy of clearance in small city renewal projects was no less devastating [than in larger American cities]. Communities that had lived and worked beside each other were ripped apart [T]he fullest expressions of identity and citizenship rest on the most intimate foundations—the spaces of home and community through which our lives take on meaning, a neighborhood to which we might return, memories created and that come rushing back. Returning to such spaces enables us to rediscover our roots, collapsing, for a moment, the distance between past and present. Urban renewal robbed generations of these formative spaces—and much more besides."²⁷

This article represents an effort, in the spirit of Toni Morrison's exhortation to 're-member' the past, to piece back together sometimes painful aspects of the city's history that have not been adequately documented: in this instance, the history of what Wheeling lost in that last, failed experiment with urban renewal. It is also an attempt to situate that loss in the context of larger forces – including explicitly racist government housing policies – that negatively impacted Wheeling's Black community and arguably caused the city as a whole to decline. The discussion begins on the eve of demolitions in the Chapline Street East neighborhood, takes a step back in time to about 50 years before that crisis, and then offers some conclusions from the perspective of 50 years after the citizens of Wheeling voted to

terminate the Fort Henry Mall project and dissolve the Wheeling URA, leaving trauma, destruction, and decline in its wake.

II. 1971: Racial Tensions Peak on the Eve of Urban Renewal Demolitions

In 1971, a time of national disillusionment with stalled civil rights “progress” and in the wake of national unrest over racial injustice in the late 1960s, tensions between the Black community and police in Wheeling were high. Wheeling had been spared the kind of unrest seen in larger cities, where uprisings in the late 1960s came in response to racist police violence, long-standing patterns of structural racism in housing and employment, and the assassination of beloved figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. However, Wheeling’s Black residents complained of the same kinds of discrimination fueling discontent nationwide: over-policing, especially directed at Black youth; racial bias in the job market; a lack of affordable housing; and segregation and discrimination in the rental and housing markets, just as a new “urban renewal” project was set to transform the city.²⁸

Late on the night of January 3, the Sunday after the New Year, these tensions came to a head. Black youths had gathered at the Pythian Building on the corner of Chapline and 11th, one of the only entertainment venues available to them in the city. Suddenly, dozens of Wheeling police officers, including Chief Art McKenzie, descended on the corner dressed in full riot gear. Heavily armed officers violently rounded up and jailed over a dozen young people and teenagers on charges of “abusive language,” disorderly conduct, and failure to obey orders to disperse. Those arrested included 20-year-old George “Farmer” Lee and 19-year-old Bobby Wade. Wade sustained a severe concussion after being beaten by police while in custody, according to Lee. In response to suffering unrelenting pain for several days afterward, Wade shot and killed himself in his family’s Lincoln Homes apartment not far from the Pythian Building.²⁹

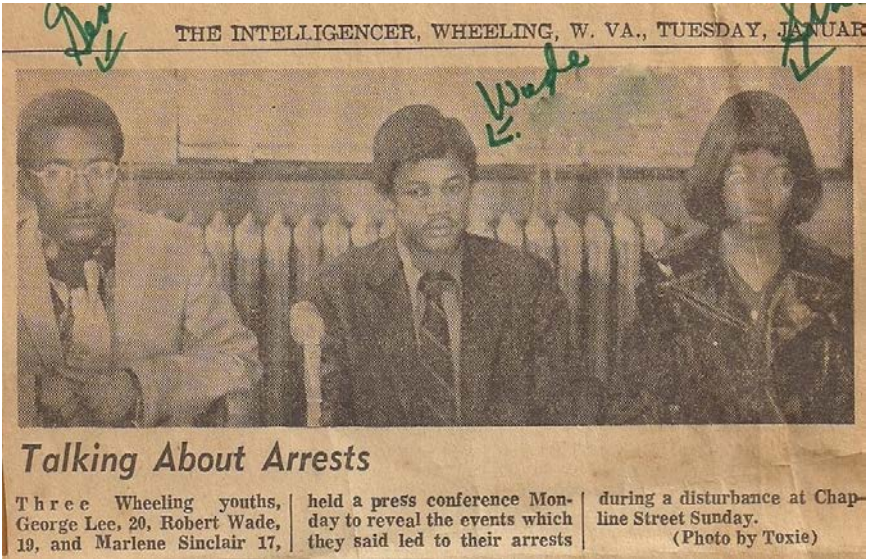


Image 4 - Bobby Wade, center.³⁰

Later, Chief McKenzie would claim in public hearings that the entire Chapline Street incident started when police received unverified reports of “firecrackers going off,” “rocks and bottles ... being thrown,” possibly at some white youth in a car, and an old Christmas tree laying in the street.³¹ Most of the arrested youth were quickly released and their cases dismissed for what Chief McKenzie and other officers would admit was a lack of evidence of wrongdoing.³² One neighborhood resident noted that Wheeling police would not have reacted similarly had such trivial complaints been called in from the all-white Warwood neighborhood further to the north.³³ In his autobiography published decades later, McKenzie would concede that he and his men had physically assaulted George Lee and others without cause, and that the rock-throwing and other trivial alleged mischief provided a useful opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of his department’s new heavily-armed riot squad with its cutting-edge gear and weaponry.³⁴

The evening after the Chapline Street disturbance, on January 4, the A&P grocery store on 29th Street in south Wheeling, far from the

site of the police crackdown on Chapline Street the night before, burned to the ground. A handful of evening purportedly involved bottles of flammable liquid thrown at homes and vehicles that did little to no damage. Citing no evidence other than unsupported conjecture by Chief McKenzie and the Wheeling fire marshal, the local *News-Register* and *Intelligencer* newspapers attributed the A&P fire to arson and breathlessly connected these so-called “fire-bombings” with the previous night’s disturbance at Chapline Street – insinuating that the “bombings” were perpetrated by Black youths retaliating for the police action the night before.³⁶ The *Intelligencer* editorial board accused unidentified Black “vandals,” without evidence, of the “fire-bombings,” questioned whether “outside agitation” was influencing events in the city, and called for a muscular police response.³⁷

The media characterization of the fires persisted even though the city fire marshal and local FBI and ATF agents claimed they had not “found anything that would indicate this was a fire-bombing” and could point to no evidence of arson.³⁸ Despite this, the arrests, the subsequent fires, and the tragic death of Bobby Wade, deeply unsettled the city and suggested that more significant problems, including over-aggressive, possibly racist police and structural discrimination in the housing and employment markets, needed to be addressed.

In February 1971, the West Virginia Human Rights Commission

other minor incidents that



Wheeling policeman James White portrays the many problems facing the Men in Blue today. No longer is he safe carrying only sidearms, his night stick and handcuffs. Today, he is often called upon to don riot gear including gas gun, shotgun, side arms, chemical mace, walkie-talkie, night stick, gas mask, and specially built helmet. But even with all that equipment he still isn't prepared. He has to carry his law book with him so he can know just what he is allowed to do. (N.R. Photo—Mableman)

Image 5 - Wheeling police obtain new riot gear.³⁵

convened public hearings in Wheeling ostensibly to address the events of January 3-4 as well as other issues facing the Black community there. The Commission invited Chief McKenzie, the fire marshal, members of the Black community, local business and church leaders, and representatives of labor unions, to testify. The testimony of community members and police and fire authorities further revealed the flimsy basis for the police raid on the Pythian building.³⁹ For their part, despite a total lack of evidence, police and fire officials insisted that the so-called A&P “fire-bombing” was in retaliation for the Chapline Street raid – even though local and federal fire and law enforcement officials had already publicly disavowed this theory and could point to no evidence of arson whatsoever.⁴⁰

However, the hearings allowed Black community members to document persistent racial discrimination in housing and employment, especially within all-white city government and law enforcement, as well as a lack of vocational training and meaningful access to recreation for Black youth. Witnesses described persistent racist treatment and over-policing by poorly trained all-white city law enforcement. More than one witness “cautioned that the current tension in Wheeling in the black community was not a black problem, but a white problem that is being ignored.”⁴¹ Tellingly, unions declined to send any representatives to the hearings to rebut testimony that craft unions had systematically shut Black workers out of the skilled trades.⁴²

The Human Rights Commission report issued in April 1971. The report documented a vibrant economy – for whites; but Black unemployment was nearly double that for white working age adults, and chronic under-employment of Black residents due to discrimination was impeding Black progress. For Black children living in East Wheeling, access to recreation was nearly non-existent. Oglebay Park “might just as well be out in the Rocky Mountains” for Black kids. The Commission also found racial discrimination in housing was a primary driver of ongoing ten-

sions in East Wheeling, exacerbated by the imminent Chapline-Street-East/Ft. Henry Mall urban renewal project:

“There was a consensus among those who testified that housing discrimination does exist in Wheeling. There is a shortage of rental housing in Wheeling and the Wheeling area which makes housing discrimination enormously burdensome for black citizens, most of whom rent and do not own housing accommodations. Urban renewal and interstate highway construction projects have chopped up the City of Wheeling, affecting mostly the poor neighborhoods and the black neighborhoods . . . A new urban urban renewal project is scheduled for a neighborhood which is 99% black . . .

The shortage of housing, the shortage of rental housing, the trend for whites to move to the suburbs with blacks concentrated in the ‘Inner City’ and the admitted prevalence of discrimination in housing, all have contributed to the general anxiety, apprehension, and discontent that has produced the racial tension that exists in Wheeling and the Wheeling area.”⁴³

The inequities described by Black community members and by the Commission in its report would have been depressingly familiar to former Wheeling NAACP President Harry S. Jones, whose powerful 1936 radio address, “Wheeling’s Twentieth Man,” was a nearly identical indictment of the segregation and pervasive discrimination restraining Black progress in the city.⁴⁴ Nothing, it seemed, had improved in nearly four decades.

The Commission concluded its report by noting that it would not attempt to make specific fact-findings regarding the incidents of January 3-4. With demolitions looming, the Commission found no fault as to the January 3 incident and issued only vague recommendations that failed to meet the urgency of the moment. It urged community leaders to come together with the nebulous goal of finding solutions to the problem of racial inequality in the city. The only concrete recommendation in the report was for the

re-constitution and funding of the hitherto ineffectual Wheeling Human Rights Commission.⁴⁵ White city and police officials found it easy to avoid any admissions of error or racial discrimination while publicly praising the Commission’s report and promising to work – at an unspecified, leisurely pace – on undefined solutions to racial tensions in Wheeling.⁴⁶ In this way the report strongly resembled the federal Kerner Commission Report, issued in 1967 in response to widespread racial unrest, which, although remembered for its acknowledgment that “white institutions created . . . and white society condones” segregated Black neighborhoods, had more impact in recommending that police forces be strengthened and given more legal authority to suppress riots, thus cementing passage of the notorious Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which funded the expansion and militarization of police forces.⁴⁷

Black community members were far less sanguine of the city’s commitment to racial justice. Their fears would prove justified as the city’s Urban Renewal Authority proceeded to raze Chapline Street East neighborhood homes and business to the ground, scattering its former residents, many of whom left the city altogether.

Wheeling Officials to Testify at Rights Investigation

By THOMAS STEINBERG
The hearing, which is the commission's assistant director, in their community, a black policeman
the black community was not for witness, Wade Martin, who the police to make arrests
of the city of Wheeling
ing are stated to offer testimony
an especially serious matter
to a forthcoming investigation
being conducted by the
Virginia House of Delegates
the hearing are G. Paul Cook,
Mayor of Wheeling, Ben J. Miller,
Chairman of the Urban Renewal
Authority, and James A. Jones,
Director of the Housing
Department.
The hearing will be held in
the city of Wheeling at the
courthouse at 10 o'clock
on Monday, Feb. 22.
The hearing will be held in
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the city of Wheeling at the
courthouse at 10 o'clock
on Monday, Feb. 22.

Demolition Phase For Chapline East Begins Next Week

By MARILENE HILL
The demolition of the first phase of the Chapline East project will begin next week.



George E. Lee, James C. Cook and Edward C. Reed, Jr., all of Wheeling, said they did not see anyone showing signs of hostility or any racial confrontation. The three asserted what they termed "polite brutality" in making arrests during the disturbance.
"I'm sure to another witness however, contended that events leading to the disturbance had had racial overtones."
Edward Lee said that Chapline St. had the commission there was a congregation for

Image 6 - Chapline-St-East faces demolitions as hearings begin (Feb 2, 1971 *Intelligencer*)

The city fulfilled many Black residents’ suspicion that what the city intended was not urban renewal so much as “Negro remov-

al.”⁴⁹ Certainly, by destroying the heart of a once thriving community that had called Wheeling home since the close of the Civil War, the city seemed to be executing its preferred solution to the urgent problems identified by Wheeling’s Black residents and validated by the state Human Rights Commission. Ann Thomas, a



Image 7 - Bulldozers on Chapline Street, 1971.⁴⁸

beloved former Ohio Valley General Hospital and later Clay School nurse, stated in a 2015 interview that, “[t]he Black community from that point has never been the same and will never be the same.”⁵⁰

Brian Kammer is a legal aid lawyer in Decatur, Georgia. But he grew up in Wheeling in the 1970s and 80s. He attended Wheeling Country Day School and Linsly School before leaving the state to attend college. He went on to become an attorney defending death-sentenced prisoners in Georgia for over two decades. That work necessarily involved investigating how class and racial inequality and injustice impacted his clients' lives and their communities. Brian never lost touch with his own hometown and retained a passionate interest in its history. In recent years he has documented the history of segregation and racial disenfranchisement in Wheeling, focusing on the impact of redlining and urban renewal on its multi-racial and Black neighborhoods.

End Notes

1 Interview with the author (11/2020)

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4 Morrison, T. (2019). *The Source of Self-Regard*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

5 Digital Scholarship Lab – University of Richmond. Urban Renewal, 1950-1966. Retrieved from <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>: “Scholars have long noted the violence of displacement that was often at the center of urban renewal projects. But by focusing their studies on larger cities, they have missed the preponderant story of the intimacy of racially-motivated clearance in smaller cities.”

6 See, e.g., Hirsch, A. (2009). *The Making of the Second Ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

7 See Cooper, D. (1920). *The Black Community in Wheeling*. Weelunk. Published 2/9/2017 at <https://weelunk.com/historic-weelunk-contribution-black-community-wheeling-1920/>; Sheeler, J. R. (1954). *The Negro in West Virginia Before 1900*. [Doctoral dissertation, West Virginia University]. West Virginia State Archives.

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9 Author interviews with George “Farmer” Lee (9/2020); Rufus Woods (9/2020); Donna Terry (11/2020).

10 George Lee interview (9/11/20); Rufus Woods interview (9/17/20); R.L. Polk & Co. Wheeling Residential Security Map – Area D4 annotations. (1935). Map and original annotations retrieved from https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map/WV/Wheeling/area_descriptions/D4; United States Census. (1950) Official U.S. Census records. Retrieved from <https://1950census.archives.gov/search/?county=Wheeling%2C%20Ohio>

11 For example, warranty deeds for properties in Wheeling’s suburban Oakmont neighborhood contained racial exclusion covenants from the early

1920s to the 1960s (retrieved from the Ohio County Clerk's Office, Wheeling, December 2022). See also discussions of redlining and racial exclusion covenants in, e.g., Hirsch, A. (2000). "Containment" On the Home Front. *Journal of Urban History*, 26(2), 158-89; Rothstein, R. *The Color of Law*. (2017). New York; London: Liveright Publishing; Wheeling Residential Security Map at <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map/WV/Wheeling/>

12 See Law, C. (1952). Letter to Lucie Fontaine, Secretary, Citizens' Committee on Human Relations, Huntington, WV, from the Chairman of the Interracial Committee of the YWCA, Wheeling:

"Some of the limitations of our privileges are: Negroes are not permitted to eat at lunch rooms or restaurants. They do not eat in the Woolworth five and ten cent Store, but may eat at certain designated counters at the Murphy's, McCrory's and Kresge's Stores.

"There's a special back room at the Bus Terminal where Negroes must eat and there's not a single theater in Wheeling except one Negro Theater, where Negroes might attend."

13 Author interview with Mike David (5/2022); Reports of cross-burnings in Wheeling: Was Junior Branch [of the Ku Klux Klan]. (1924). *Wheeling Register*, p12; Ku Klux Klan? (1946). *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p5. Retrieved from <http://ohiocountywv.advantage-preservation.com>.

14 See, e.g., Duffy (2020); Hirsch, A. (2000); Author interviews with Marvillis Webb (9/2020); and William Brooks (6/2021).

15 See, e.g., Rothstein, R. (2017); Hirsch, A. (1993). *With Or Without Jim Crow*. In A. Hirsch and R. Mohl (Eds.), *Urban Policy in Twentieth Century America* (pp. 65-99). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

16 Wheeling Residential Security Map at <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/map/WV/Wheeling/>

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18 Rothstein, R. (2017); Hirsch, A. (2000).

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February 1, 2, 3, 1971 Relative to the Racial Tension Situation in Wheeling on the Weekend of January 2, 1971. The Commission described the Chapline Street East neighborhood as “99 percent black.”

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23 Image from: Wheeling Urban Renewal Authority (1972). Annual Report. Copy provided by the Ohio County Public Library.

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29 George Lee interview (2020); Lee, G. (2017). Bobby Wade: Wheeling's Trayvon Martin 46 Year Ago. Of the Opinion. Retrieved from <http://oftheopinion.blogspot.com/2017/01/bobby-wade-wheelings-trayvon-martin-46.html>; Hamm, H. (1971, January 4). Wheeling Police Quell Disturbance. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p1; Mull, M. (1971, January 5). City, Blacks Confer. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p1,5; Mull, M. (1971, January 5). Black Youths Cite Police For Brutality. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p1,5; Article. (1971, January 9). City Youth Dies of Gunshot Wound. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p9; Sterling, T. (1971, January 15). Disturbance Trial of 5 Youths Delayed Until This Afternoon. *Wheeling Intelligencer*, p17; Sterling, T. (1971, January 16). Ruling on Chapline Street Incident Expected Monday. *Wheeling Intelligencer*.

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What to Expect in Part II

In the second and final installment of "Broken Promises," Mr. Kammer will focus on how racial exclusion covenants and explicitly racist federal government policies such as "redlining" undermined the multi-racial character of downtown Wheeling neighborhoods and accelerated housing segregation in the city, thus shutting Black residents out of wealth-accumulation opportunities lavished on whites and leading to "ghettoization" of the Black community. These policies paved the way, literally, for urban renewal, which crowded Black residents into one corner of the city (destined for destruction) and exacerbated the economic decline of the city as a whole.

The Turbulent Years, 1968-1971: A Review of Race Relations in Wheeling, WV and a Call for Community Action

By Tim Triveri

On the evening of January 8, 1971, nineteen-year old Robert (Bobby) Wade Jr. was relaxing at his mother Geraldine's home at the Lincoln Homes apartments in Wheeling, West Virginia with his seventeen-year old friend Marvin Paige.¹ Lincoln Homes was a public housing project situated on Wheeling's Vineyard Hills above the East Wheeling neighborhood.²

Initially an Italian-American enclave, by 1971, East Wheeling and the hills above it were primarily African American, the demographic change a part of the larger process of urban renewal and public housing construction in Wheeling during the 1950s and 1960s.³ Bobby Wade had recently returned home to Wheeling on leave from the United States Merchant Marine and for the past week had been struggling with debilitating headaches. Early Sunday January 3rd, he, Marvin, and sixteen other Black Wheeling youths attending a birthday party near the Pythian Building on Chapline Street, a center of Black life in Wheeling at the time, were arrested in a show of force by a special police unit commanded by police chief Arthur McKenzie.⁴ The unit was heavily outfitted with nightsticks, riot shields, body armor, and shotguns.⁵ Officers had been in the area after a fight broke out on the street near the party, but reports of young Black men throwing rocks, bottles, and a Christmas tree at motorists in the area brought a large police force in response.

One partygoer, Edward Lamb, later testified to the city that a car of "white youths" had started a "racial incident" that led to the rock, bottle, and tree-throwing and led to at least one commercial property being hit with rocks.⁶

After the initial incident, Wheeling police moved into the area and closed off both ends of the block where the party was taking

place: one unit at the top of the hill on Chapline and another at the bottom. After talking with some partygoers, police moved down the hill and arrested seventeen people, including Bobby; his cousin and fellow merchant mariner George “Farmer” Lee; cousin Gerald Saunders; and friends Marlene (née Sinclair) Midget, Pamela (née Paige) Dudley and her brother Marvin, and Douglas Larry “Bucky” Branham. Allen Manns, home on leave from the Air Force and wearing his uniform, was also arrested.⁷ According to testimony, during the arrest, officers used racial slurs and beat several partygoers, including Bobby and Lee with their nightsticks and flashlights, placing a shotgun under the chin of at least one person.⁸ After handcuffing Bobby, the officers painfully dragged his leg across the pavement before hoisting him into the back of the police car.

While being processed in jail, Bobby, provoked by racial slurs and repeated abuse of his wounded leg, “kicked” one of the arresting officers. Bobby later testified that the pressure on his wounded leg caused him to try to push his tormentor away with his knee.⁹ The officer wrestled Bobby to the ground and pistol-whipped him in the face, still handcuffed, at least once.¹⁰ According to an interview with the Wheeling newspaper, the *Intelligencer*, Bobby was offered medical treatment, but he refused. Bobby did not know it at the time, but he had suffered a skull fracture and a concussion, causing his brain to hemorrhage.¹¹ He was charged with disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and assaulting a police officer.¹²

The following evening, Wheeling’s A&P Supermarket at 29th and Wood Street burned down in an alleged firebombing, several other buildings were allegedly firebombed and sustained some damage, and at least two police officers’ lives were threatened.¹³ City officials, police, and the paper tied the disturbances to the arrests on January 3rd, though eyewitnesses dispute the official narrative.¹⁴ Marlene Midget later remembered “Many of us were in the Air Force, the Merchant Marine, or home from college, but in the

newspaper, we were ‘thugs.’”¹⁵

The all-Black empowerment group, We Exist (WE), met with the city to discuss the Chapline Street arrest, as well as broader issues between the city and police and the Black community, but meetings were generally unproductive.¹⁶ Early-1971 was in the middle of a prolonged period of vandalism and “juvenile delinquency” (the contemporary language) in Wheeling. The meeting revealed continued tensions between Wheeling’s Black community, city leaders, and above all, city police. The heavy-handed response on January 3rd is representative of such tensions. To Bucky Branham, “When you’re a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”¹⁷

Publicly, Bobby spent the next week testifying in court about the



Lee, Wade, and Sinclair at a news conference. WV State Archives.

incident and interviewing with the *Intelligencer*. At home, though, Bobby was not himself. His mother sometimes found Bobby in a darkened room in the fetal position, trying to find relief from light, sound, and headaches – all textbook examples of post-concussion syndrome.

Around 9:15 PM on January 8, 1971, after repeatedly singing the same song over and over, Bobby Wade shot himself in the head.¹⁸ His ten-year old sister Lolita was in the home at the time. Panicked family and friends attempted to transport Bobby for medical attention, but the gunshot was fatal.¹⁹ Marvin Sinclair was never the same again after witnessing his friend’s death, a silent victim of the incident on January 3rd, 1971.²⁰

Meetings between WE and the city continued after Bobby’s death, but the city’s position became entrenched, and the story, gleaned through Wheeling newspaper archives, gradually goes quiet. In 2023, the Lincoln Homes project is gone; replaced by an urban hillside farming project. Vineyard Hills, where Lincoln once stood was never redeveloped for housing, a victim of urban renewal and soft soil.²¹ Gone too is Bobby Wade. There are no public memorials to Bobby. It is unlikely that many people in Wheeling’s White community know the story or his name. If not for George Lee, who blogged about Bobby in 2016, the Ohio County Public Library’s archives of the *Intelligencer*, and a panel discussion of eyewitnesses held at the Ohio County Public Library on January 24, 2023, featuring Lee, Saunders, Sinclair-



Lunch With Books Panel featuring Saunders, Paige-Dudley, Branham, Lee, Sinclair-Midget, and host, Ron Scott, Jr.

Midget, Paige-Dudley, and Branham, all arrested in the same incident,²² Bobby Wade would have died two deaths; lost to history forever.

A City of Contradictions

Wheeling is a city of contradictions. Once a hub of shipping on the Ohio River and a steel and iron stronghold, the “Friendly City” has suffered a long and painful economic decline like so many other Rust Belt communities. Its nickname reflects the prideful feeling many current and former residents have for their home, but it is also an image that city leaders want to project to reverse the trend of population loss. The nickname is also indicative of its current and historical paradoxical status: a small city with a big city feel; a business-friendly, but socially liberal enclave in a deeply conservative state.²³ But for those who grew up in Wheeling’s marginalized communities, the “Friendly City” can project an uncaring image. Residents should ask, “Is Wheeling friendly and livable to all?”

Certainly, in the past decade there has been a push for socially progressive policies that are often at odds with the rest of the state. Wheeling was one of the first cities in West Virginia to adopt a non-discrimination clause for LGBTQ+ people. There are small but annual Pride celebrations downtown. Councilwoman Rosemary Ketchum became the first openly transgender person to be elected to public office in West Virginia in 2020.²⁴ There is an active human rights commission in the city government and at least one historical human rights commission. There have been several different Black and anti-racist groups in the city’s history. To prepare for the city’s 250th anniversary of its founding, the city government passed a 2019 Juneteenth Resolution acknowledging its past as a slave city and its Jim Crow legacy.²⁵ There were peaceful demonstrations against police brutality during the wider George Floyd protests in the summer of 2020, and Wheeling became the first city in West Virginia to declare racism a public health crisis.²⁶ But Wheeling has only ever had two Black city

councilmen and no African American persons have sat on city council since 1991.²⁷ Historically, there have been few Black police officers in Wheeling. Racial economic inequality is felt deeply in Wheeling. The White poverty rate in the city stands slightly above the national average at 13.7% (national average 10.3), but the Black poverty rate stands at whopping 41.6% (national average 25.2%).²⁸ Wheeling's Black population is only about 5.7% of the total population with an additional 1.8% identifying as "Two or More Races."²⁹ The legacy of housing discrimination is evident in neighborhood segregation.

Wheeling is essentially divided between its inner and outer neighborhoods, separated by Wheeling Hill.³⁰ In the 1930s, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) graded the inner neighborhoods – North Wheeling, East Wheeling, South Wheeling, and Wheeling Island – as "Definitely Declining" or "Hazardous."³¹ The outer neighborhoods, sometimes historically referred to as "out the Pike," that were further from industrial activity along Wheeling Creek and generally away from flood plains, were graded as "Best" or "Still Desirable."³² In 1940, Wheeling's Black population was mostly concentrated in what today is part of inner-Wheeling in sections of Downtown, East Wheeling, and Center Wheeling. During the period of urban renewal in the 1950s-1970s, many Black families lost their homes to the city's use of eminent domain through the Urban Renewal Authority and were forced to move from their historic enclave Downtown into East Wheeling and later Wheeling Island.³³ Articles from the *Intelligencer* and secondary literature from Seán Duffy and Allen Dieterich-Ward suggest a possible connection between the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the razing of Black neighborhoods near the central business district, but the possibility requires further study to ascertain the city's intent.

The "redlining" of specific neighborhoods contributed to exclusionary mortgage lending and aided in modern segregation in

Wheeling.³⁴ The continued effect of neighborhood segregation became most apparent in early 2020 when the Ohio County Board of Education proposed a school realignment which would have sent students from Wheeling Island to Wheeling Middle School in South Wheeling rather than to Triadelphia Middle School, which sits in a more affluent and White part of the city. The Board's intent was to use Wheeling Middle as the county hub for at-risk students since the school already serves a large at-risk population and has programs and staff in place. The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested the proposal, describing it as "economic segregation," while acknowledging that was not the intent of the board.³⁵ The episode demonstrates the ways in which "colorblind" policies can have a discriminatory effect.

Wheeling collectively needs a better understanding of the history of segregation and race relations in the city. The Ohio County Public Library, library-affiliated blog Archiving Wheeling, the Wheeling Heritage Foundation, local magazine *Weelunk*, and especially the work of local archivists and historians Duffy and Erin Rothenbuehler, have done enormous work in preserving Wheeling's history. Still, there are gaps in the city's history, most notably during the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was a period of Black activism, but also a turbulent period of race relations in Wheeling. In an effort to gain status as a National Heritage Area, the city contracted ethnographers Michael and Carrie Kline to conduct an oral history project between 1994 and 1996.³⁶ The "Wheeling Spoken History Project" is a great example of the power of oral and public histories. A wider public history project with Wheeling's African American community would serve to fill in the gaps of Black history in Wheeling, preserving Black heritage and Black sites that still stand, contextualizing neighborhood migration and segregation, and improving community relations.

While the history of race relations and disturbances in larger cities have been well-documented, there is a need for such analysis

in small cities. Historians Thomas Sugrue and Andrew Goodman suggested the 1967 riot in Plainfield, New Jersey provides context for race riots in comparable mid-sized and smaller cities during the Long Hot Summer.³⁷ Similarly, Wheeling's turbulent late-60s and early-70s can provide context for race relations in small Rust Belt cities. Exploring and remembering such histories will inform communities looking to improve community-government relations, improve community-police relations, inform policymaking, and take a crucial step toward restorative justice.

Wheeling's Turbulent Years: 1968-1971

Amidst the backdrop of urban renewal, displacement, and economic decline, Wheeling experienced the most contentious period of race relations in its modern history. During the mid-to late-1960s, major uprisings occurred in urban Black neighborhoods in the American North, Midwest, and West each summer. The 1960s race riots featured mass protests by African Americans in the streets, "looting and burning stores and battling their cities' mostly White police forces."³⁸ During the summer of 1967, there were 163 uprisings in over 150 American cities.³⁹ In response, President Lyndon Johnson formed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission, to study the causes of the riots and make suggestions for prevention. The Commission's report said in clear terms that pervasive White racism, poor relations between police and Black communities, and second-class status bestowed on African Americans in all facets of life caused the violence. Furthermore, "white terrorism" directed against non-violent protests created an environment that encouraged violence as a response to systemic racism. Feelings of frustration and powerlessness boiled over during the hot summers into explosive rioting.⁴⁰ Sugrue and Goodman have since shown that African Americans across the country were connected by television news media during the Long Hot Summer of 1967, and that a "virtual network" of the

Black experience helped shape the language of the riots, specifically the use of Black Power rhetoric of self-defense and self-determination.⁴¹

The U.S. saw further urban uprisings after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968. Riots occurred in nearby Pittsburgh and Baltimore. Regular Army troops were sent into Baltimore, while National Guardsmen were sent into Pittsburgh, specifically into the historically Black Hill District neighborhood.⁴²

Wheeling did not experience any largescale violence in 1967, but there was some limited violence in the aftermath of King's assassination. On the night of April 8th and into the morning hours of April 9th in the 10th and Chapline section of the city, at least one set fire spread to nearby buildings, which displaced at least two families. Reports of rocks and bricks being thrown at cars and buildings caused police to issue a warning to motorists to stay out of the area. There were unconfirmed reports of gunshots. Although the police chief did not anticipate the violence spiraling out of control, he did comment that they may close off that section of the city to prevent the violence from spreading into the central business district.⁴³ The proximity between the Black community on Chapline and the central business district almost certainly influenced the URA's decision to raze the properties in 1971 and relocate Wheeling's historic Black community further east to East Wheeling away from the downtown central business district.⁴⁴ This crucial sequence of events must be subjected to further study, including reviewing URA and city documents to ascertain whether or not explicit racial motivations were a factor in the razing of the Chapline neighborhood. In a telling connection with the Plainfield riot in 1967, some Wheeling residents remembered writing "Soul Brother" or "Soul Sister" on their homes to identify the owners as Black and prevent property destruction.⁴⁵ This reveals Black telephone and media networks between Wheeling and other Black neighborhoods across the

country as Sugrue and Goodman argued. In any case, the death of King kicked off a period of activism in Wheeling that initially demonstrated city leaders' willingness to negotiate and make reforms, but poor relations between the Black community and police saw these promises collapse into frustration amidst the backdrop of further economic decline and neighborhood change. This period culminated in frustration and violence in 1970 and 1971.

In what was a sign of things to come, the *Intelligencer* did not interview any local Black leaders in the immediate aftermath of the assassination and rioting. Instead, the paper ran a tepid op-ed about violence betraying King's message in the April 6th edition.⁴⁶ Along with his insistence of non-violence, King was a fierce advocate for radical change of American racial and economic conditions, famously chastising White moderates for their failure to support such changes in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Sanitizing King's more radical pronouncements, such as in the *Intelligencer's* 1968 op-ed, has become common in the decades since his death. On April 8th, the *Intelligencer* reported on an interfaith memorial service for King, which featured clergy from both White and Black churches from multiple Christian denominations, as well as a Jewish rabbi. The article remarked on the interracial and emotional atmosphere but notably pointed out an elderly Black woman who did not stand for the singing of the national anthem.⁴⁷ The *Intelligencer's* position demonstrates the limitations White city leaders would display in negotiations with groups displaying a more radical brand of Black politics in the coming years, as well as the general position of the White establishment in the U.S. in 1968.

In the aftermath of King's murder, the city formed a human rights council – a predecessor to the city's human rights commission – and began meetings by the end of April. One member was a local White professor, Walter Moss, who became active in civil rights actions in the city. Moss and his wife established a scholarship at Wheeling College (later Wheeling Jesuit University and presently Wheeling University) for Black students. Despite the college's

founding after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision and having no legal racial barriers for admission, according to Moss, Wheeling College had no Black students as of 1967.⁴⁸ Wheeling's public schools, though, were sites of student activism. On April 9th, Ohio County Schools announced students wishing to stay home would be excused from class. The day before, Black students at Wheeling High School and Clay School refused to attend class, feeling their schools did not adequately show respect to King's memory. Black students chanted "A prayer for spring, but not for King!," implying morning prayers were said that did not address Martin Luther King's murder.⁴⁹ Black youth activism increasingly fueled more radical politics frustrated with continued systemic racism and violence in the face of non-violent protests nationwide, and advocated for self-determination and self-defense for Black people, collectively known as the Black Power movement.⁵⁰

Around the same time as the formation of the Wheeling Human Rights Council, Wheeling resident Geraldine Paige called together a group of fourteen sets of African American parents to meet in a neighbor's home and discuss issues facing the Black community. They came to call themselves We Exist (WE). It was the first all-Black civil rights group formed in Wheeling. Members founded WE on the principles of Black self-determination, Black empowerment, and Black pride. A similar group called COMBAT formed in nearby Steubenville, Ohio sometime before April 1969, demonstrating the spread of Black empowerment groups in the upper-Ohio Valley during the late 1960s.⁵¹ Paige, elected as WE's vice president, said the purpose of the group was to "work itself out of existence" by preaching Black self-help. She believed too many African Americans were waiting for the "white man" to empower Blacks.⁵² While WE adopted some of the principles associated with the Black Power movement, non-violence was still at the heart of the group. Paige believed violence was damaging to people of all races and

blamed the news media for over-emphasizing violence.

WE's initial actions worked with the Greater Wheeling Area Development Council, which had also formed in the aftermath of King's murder, in implementing a survey of issues facing the Black community. They found most residents were not politically engaged, but those that were felt that city council was made-up of entrenched "yes-men."⁵³ Residents reported feeling ignored by health and fire regulations and by municipal services, many noting a lack of street cleaners in the Chapline Street neighborhood. The survey revealed poor relations with police, with some reporting that Black children grew up fearing policemen and that few wanted to become policemen. The survey exposed a major generational gap, with youths favoring more expansive change of all levels of society, while adults preferred a more conservative approach. Housing was a "major concern."⁵⁴ Paige told the newspaper that many Black residents were elderly and could not keep up their properties or had become cynical and given up hope for a better future. She also believed landlords were a problem, and that "something should be done," perhaps coyly alluding to collective tenant organizing or just simply expressing the desire for justice.⁵⁵ Both possibilities are indicative of WE's founding principles.

WE's early actions also included job placements and education. Paige reported that the group had solicited various banks and businesses to support the Black community, but none were interested, an illustrative example of the position of Wheeling's private sector leaders on grassroots Black activism. WE also planned to heavily lobby the Ohio County Board of Education to support Black students. The group was especially adamant that a "Negro history" class be taught as a supplemental history class in grades six through twelve.⁵⁶ In a separate article, the *Intelligencer* cited WE as having provided the new superintendent of Ohio County Schools, LeRoy Watt, a list of grievances, which Watt called "the result of a lack of communication."⁵⁷ A communica-

tions director had been appointed, but Watt warned against student militancy, saying students did not have the right to walk out of classes.⁵⁸ Although Watt did not specifically address Black protests, the implication was clear, and such a dismissive statement toward WE's list of grievances reveals institutional limitations to Black concerns during the turbulent years.

Wheeling newspapers first reported on WE on August 15, 1968. A downtown rally had been organized, and the *Intelligencer* ran a brief article on the main speaker, Don Pitts, a Wheeling native and former aide to Martin Luther King. Pitts had recently helped organize the Poor People's March on Washington D.C. after King's death in the summer of 1968.⁵⁹ Nearly 300 people attended the rally on Sunday, August 18th.⁶⁰ Aside from Pitts, WE president Edward Lamb, WE vice-president Geraldine Paige, Reverend Lewis Grady of the Wayman A.M.E. Church, Walter Moss, and Dr. Frank Horton, a recently hired Black professor of history at Wheeling College, all spoke to the crowd. The *Intelligencer* subtly emphasized Pitts's atypical (for Wheeling) appearance, describing his "gold medallion" worn "over his sky blue Afro-styled caftan." Pitts spoke of the long history of progress of Black people in America from slavery to the present as he urged "my people" not to "sleep during the revolution."⁶¹ Pitts's rhetoric called for a social revolution rather than a violent one, which was common to politically radical groups like the Maoist-oriented Black Panther Party. At various times throughout the speech, he spoke of changing times, brotherhood, and unity, and urged his "brothers" not to "succumb to the destructive force of violence, which would deny present and future generations their claim to freedom and justice."⁶² Lamb promoted the formation of a police academy for teenagers, saying it would benefit minorities after graduation who had trouble finding jobs.⁶³

Moss was the only White person to speak at the rally, using his time and academic expertise to dispel historical myths, such as the benevolent slave master trope, and stereotypes of African Americans by explaining the historical effect of systemic discrimination.

Moss told the audience “Mr. White,” referencing the White political establishment, was afraid of the term “Black Power,” which he believed was a call for African American self-empowerment.⁶⁴ Moss spoke of the hypocrisy of the American presence in Vietnam while politicians called for non-violent protests against racism. Moss told the audience he believed there were causes for which violence was justifiable, saying “If there was ever a just cause, this is it.”⁶⁵ Dr. Horton spoke about the reunification of the Black family, calling for Black fathers to return home, echoing Pitts on the need for a social revolution. To the wider community, Horton said Whites must “free themselves from the sickness” of racism.⁶⁶

The rally appears to have been a major success. In the following days, an *Intelligencer* op-ed hailed the rally and ran the profile on WE’s early activities. The *Intelligencer’s* op-ed did take somewhat of a pedantic tone, praising the orderly fashion of the crowd and the rhetoric of Black improvement, ignoring Moss’s more radical pronouncements. The op-ed blamed racial tensions in Wheeling as the result of “a lack of communication,” a seemingly common refrain from the city establishment, rather than deep-seated racial animosities, and told readers while they did not have to agree with all of the speakers, they should “appreciate the essential justice of the Negro’s [sic] case.”⁶⁷ While the *Intelligencer’s* tone leaves a lot to be desired, it demonstrates a cooperative atmosphere in Wheeling in late-summer 1968. The *Intelligencer’s* reports granted WE institutional legitimacy, but more importantly, grassroots energy in the community demonstrates WE’s popular legitimacy. In November, Horton and Moss gave lectures on the “Politics of Protest” at the Equinox, a student-centered coffee shop, which had re-opened in the Pythian Building on Chapline Street.⁶⁸

Momentum seemed to be with the forces of change, but there were worrying signs in the paper, which reported opposition to a proposed high-rise public housing project in the mostly White

Warwood neighborhood north of North Wheeling.⁶⁹ Though the high-rise was eventually built, in his work Richard Rothstein demonstrates how opposition to public housing can take on a racial context, with White residents in the proposed area usually complaining about an increase in crime or a decrease in property values.⁷⁰ The predicted opposition reveals the politics of race and urban space were factors in Wheeling during the late-1960s and early-1970s.

In February 1969, the *Intelligencer* ran a story on Horton's reaction to a report by the Urban Coalition and Urban America Inc., entitled "One Year Later." The report criticized the nation for not having done enough to implement the changes the Kerner Commission suggested in 1968. Horton had quickly become a major civil rights figure in Wheeling and an important leader for the Black community. He had at times been criticized for being too aggressive, but his position as a minister with the House of the Carpenter and as a history professor clearly gave him a degree of legitimacy with the people of Wheeling. Horton felt Wheeling was moving too "moderately" to implement racial reforms in a meaningful way.⁷¹ He pointed to the Kerner Commission's suggestions in housing, education, employment, and welfare as being an example of actions the city could take but had at that time only taken some steps toward improving the housing situation. Horton's interview revealed that in an act of racial solidarity, some White Wheeling residents had contacted him about properties they could sell to African Americans. The problem, Horton said, was not enough African Americans in Wheeling had the financial ability to buy houses. Horton's response exposes the limitations of simply increasing access to property in the face of structural wealth inequalities between Black and White families.

Horton hoped to see more city action taken in training Black teachers to help retain more young African Americans who typically left Wheeling for employment after their high school graduation. But in order to retain young people, he believed there need-

ed to be more high-paying jobs open to African Americans. At that time in Wheeling, Horton called such jobs “token” jobs.⁷² While the Board of Education had implemented a Black history course, not enough teachers had the training to properly teach it. However, Horton’s own students at Wheeling College and West Liberty State College were responding well to his Black history courses. In a sentiment that echoed the seminal Black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, in 1925, Horton believed Wheeling residents, White and Black, were too content: “There is an attitude in Wheeling of contentment, that it’s a nice town and we don’t want to change it. Many blacks and whites are satisfied with the way things are. The ones who are uncomfortable feel they don’t have the power to change it.”⁷³ Horton, though, moved on to a position in Pittsburgh in May 1969, depriving Wheeling of an important Black voice with institutional legitimacy connected to the mainline Civil Rights Movement.⁷⁴

WE continued to make its presence known to the city, but between 1969 and 1970, relations between WE and the city soured over issues of how to curb juvenile delinquency. In April 1969, a series of incidents in Vineyard Hills and around 11th Street led to the arrest of two Black youths, one of whom was a minor; the other, James Robert Lee, was 21.⁷⁵ In one incident, three Black youths mugged a person for “walking on black ground” near Vineyard Hills. Another incident involved rock and bottle throwing around 11th Street. At least one projectile damaged a police car.⁷⁶ Police arrested a minor for rock-throwing, and arrested Lee for trying to prevent the minor from being placed in the police car. It is unclear if either person had any connection to the mugging. WE president Lamb, speaking for 25 Black residents, insisted the city investigate three police officers for the use of force in the arrest of the two Black youths. City manager Charles Steele agreed to the investigation, telling the *Intelligencer* the accusation was serious enough to merit an investigation but ultimately found no wrongdoing and took no disciplinary action. Steele nor the Wheeling PD elaborated on the topic,

demonstrating institutional opacity when it came to issues of race relations.⁷⁷ However, at the same time, Steele proposed a curfew extension from 10:15 PM to midnight after a meeting with 25 Wheeling residents, calling the curfew unrealistic for Wheeling youth. That police chief Joseph Noll and WE both expressed support for the extension reveals the still conciliatory, if souring, relationship between WE and the city in early-1969.⁷⁸ It is unclear if Steele met with the same 25 that asked for the investigation, but the timeline of the events match each other. City council initially opposed the curfew extension, but a compromise moved the curfew from 10:15 PM to 11:00 PM in May 1969. Councilman Jack Adams was the only councilman to vote no on the compromise, saying gang activity on Wheeling Island would be easier to control with an earlier curfew, likely a thinly veiled implication of Black criminality.⁷⁹

Still, the incidents in April and Adams's objection point to a rising level of crime in Wheeling. By November 1969, after the arrest of a Black 17-year-old for the robbery and assault of an elderly woman, WE admitted failure in its efforts to curb the high rates of juvenile delinquency. Paige lamented that their programs could only provide activities and support for homework until 9:00 PM, and that parental support was necessary. In what was perhaps an admittance of a loss of community enthusiasm, or perhaps a reflection of socio-economic conditions, Paige believed many of the parents "simply don't care to help us."⁸⁰ WE and other civic organizations met with new Police Chief Arthur McKenzie and all parties expressed optimism but found no immediate solutions. Wheeling police had begun Youth Auxiliary programs to try to bring troubled young people into law enforcement, but the situation continued to deteriorate.

In March 1970, after what was deemed a "juvenile crime wave," Wheeling city council suspended its normal rules to move the amended curfew further back to 10:00 PM.⁸¹ The ordinance also included increased penalties for the parents of juvenile offenders with fines as high as \$100 and imprisonment up to thirty days. It

was left up to juvenile judges to decide whether an offender would have their name published. According to Steele, police forces had been “beefed up” to combat the “crime wave,” noting that many incidents also included adults.⁸² In late March, four Black women with WE picketed the City-County Building, claiming the city refused to meet with them to discuss their concerns on the city’s “inaction” on various issues.⁸³ Steele claimed he had scheduled a meeting with a WE official, but that the person did not show up to the meeting. One of the women carried a sign that said, “Curfew without Compassion is Unfair!” Another said the “responsible members” of the Black community “recognized the need for closer cooperation” and the necessity of upholding the law, but that the penalties came with “undue harshness” and “discrimination,” showing the growing rift between WE and the city.⁸⁴ The same day, police arrested a Black man living at the Hil-Dar public housing project for interfering with an officer and for unruly conduct.⁸⁵ The following day, Steele met with WE, but would not entertain relaxing the recent curfew ordinance. In opposition, new WE president Raymond Harvey claimed the harsh penalties placed unequal economic hardships on Black parents and that police unfairly targeted Black youths for curfew violations.⁸⁶

The curfew issue ruined the relationship between the city and WE. Withdrawing crucial institutional support, the *Intelligencer* criticized WE as being “uninformed” and “unfair” in their allegations of police racism.⁸⁷ The *Intelligencer* went into attack mode to defend the city and police, alleging tranquil race relations and claiming much of the national disorder had not been felt in Wheeling. Placing the burden on Black individuals rather than structural racism, the op-ed argued WE should not blame police for the fact that most of the incidents had occurred in Black neighborhoods. Perhaps most egregiously, the paper defended allegations that the police used racial slurs during arrests as just a fact of being human.⁸⁸

The *Intelligencer's* op-ed reflects an important shift in race relations in Wheeling in the early-1970s from one of optimism and cooperation to one of bitterness and frustration. The city invited WE to a URA housing seminar in May 1970, but race relations in Wheeling continued to deteriorate.⁸⁹ By May, Police Chief McKenzie expressed his frustration with the national decline in police reputation. In an interview that could have been given in 2020, McKenzie lamented the negative portrayal of police officers in the news media. He reported feeling that there would be a national police shortage soon as less and less people were growing up wanting to be police officers.⁹⁰

It is certainly true Wheeling police had their hands full in 1969-1970. In late July, three youths attacked Patrolman Alfred Darby. One of the attackers was an 18-year-old from Mozart, a White section of the city. McKenzie expressed “disgust.”⁹¹ Late in the evening on July 22nd, a massive racial brawl between some 60 young people broke out at a dance at Wheeling Park with 750 people in attendance. When park officials called police, they reported “gang fights between whites and blacks” had gotten “out of hand.” A fight between a White youth and a Black youth earlier in the evening may have been the initial spark that set off the brawl. Fights broke out sporadically after the initial one, until finally the situation deteriorated into an all-out brawl. One person was hit with a chair; one was stabbed. Attendees reported seeing weapons, but police did not find any. When the dust settled, eight people were injured, six of whom had to go to the hospital for treatment.⁹² The brawl marked a low point in what was a difficult year for race relations in Wheeling. That December, McKenzie and Steele recommended the creation of the Wheeling Bureau of Police Reserves to have a citizen police presence in all areas of the city at a moment’s notice.⁹³

The new year continued where 1970 left off. Shortly after the creation of the Police Reserves, Bobby Wade was arrested in the January 3rd incident, and the 29th Street A&P burned, though no evi-

dence of arson was found (see Kammer's article, p. 25).⁹⁴ The explosive incidents led to tense negotiations between the Black community, including WE, and the city. The Black community accused Steele of "sending the entire police department" to Chapline Street on January 3rd and accused the police department of brutality and racism. For his part, Steele denied both accusations and blamed Black organizations for turning the meeting into a shouting match like "every other meeting," reflecting the poor relationship between the Black community and the city between 1969-1971.⁹⁵ During the meeting, Black residents expressed a series of grievances with the city that reflected the goals of Black self-determination. Echoing national trends in Black neighborhood self-determination, many cited the hatred of police presence in their neighborhood and demanded the right to self-police the community. Others demanded more respect from police, reducing the level of "harassment" by displaying shotguns on the dashboard of patrol cars,⁹⁶ rather than asking for their total absence from Black neighborhoods. The consistent theme of the meeting was frustration. By January 1971, Steele appeared to be at the end of his rope. He admonished Black residents, reminding them of the steps taken in recent years to improve community relations, including 500 free swimming passes for Black youths and an open policy of communication, for which he accused Black residents of using to complain rather than to provide solutions to their problems.⁹⁷ The meeting was unproductive, ugly, and likely convinced many Black residents the city was no longer an ally. WE president Raymond Harvey issued a statement on behalf of Bobby Wade, George Lee, and Marlene Sinclair, who alleged police brutality during their arrests.⁹⁸ WE's statement echoed many of the themes from the Steele meeting and from previous years. WE contended that the police department had not taken enough serious steps to improve community relations, citing a lack of open communication with African Americans. WE believed the show of force of January 3rd was "distasteful," and reflected the feeling that many African Americans had that a heavy police

presence in a small area carried a racial context.⁹⁹ WE argued that until these fundamental issues were corrected, incidents like January 3rd would continue to happen.

The Black community and Steele held a second meeting the following day on January 6th.¹⁰⁰ Steele reiterated he would no longer attend unproductive meetings but was willing to have serious conversations. Steele, city leaders, and business leaders denied there was any racial context to the city's troubles. Many believed the issues to be complex, and that more solutions needed to be offered to solve the recent troubles. Lone Black city councilman Clyde Thomas blamed the unrest on a "small segment of people;" a failure of parents to control their kids.¹⁰¹ Thomas seemed to take the events personally, revealing fractures in the Black community over the events, by saying he "would no longer fight for these kids . . . The fact is most of them are looking for trouble . . . you can't expect law enforcement officers to treat them like kids. There's no way in the world I'll stand up for them, but I'll do anything for the rest of the community."¹⁰² The Greater Wheeling Community Development Council, represented the center. They posted bail for Wade, Lee, and Sinclair, and asked Wheeling residents to find common ground saying, "As the only black-white organization locally, we feel we must help find a meeting ground between the polarized factions in the city."¹⁰³ Three days later, Bobby Wade died, demonstrating the consequences of ignoring WE's demands.

The *Intelligencer* that same day reported on rising joblessness in Wheeling; as high as 9%, which disproportionately affected the Black community.¹⁰⁴ In February after Bobby's death, the West Virginia Human Rights Commission conducted a fact-finding investigation on the events of January 3rd to offer solutions to Wheeling's unrest. Black residents testified that a "lack of available jobs, discrimination in employment, inadequate recreational facilities, substandard housing, and strained, or non-existent, community police relations," as being the main problems facing

the Black community.¹⁰⁵

Two community leaders, Dr. Houston A. Lewis, a dentist, and Reverend Lee Wright, the president of Wheeling's NAACP, suggested more vocational training would alleviate Black material conditions in Wheeling. Unfortunately, in a city that was once the site of interracial class solidarity during the 1919 steel strike, a scarce occurrence in that era of labor-race relations, labor unions in Wheeling had fallen prey to the worst impulses of racially exclusive craft unionism, effectively telling Black workers not to apply for union jobs.¹⁰⁶ Lewis and Wright also suggested more African Americans on the police force would improve long-standing issues. But Raymond Harvey of WE testified the unrest was a "white issue."¹⁰⁷ He accused the URA of "establishing a new black ghetto by relocating residents to the Thirteenth Street area," and blamed police for being poorly trained and overreacting.¹⁰⁸ Harvey's accusation at worst confirms the racial motivations behind the URA's clearing of Chapline Street and at a low best confirms many African Americans in Wheeling felt there were racial motivations to urban renewal. Demolition of Chapline was set to begin the week after the investigation.¹⁰⁹ Others cited poor maintenance in public housing and blamed the news media for creating an environment where police were forced to make heavy-handed arrests. Perhaps the most poignant testimony came from Beatrice Parks, who exclaimed "the system has to be changed, or something terrible will happen."¹¹⁰ For the Wade family, it already had.

The West Virginia Human Rights Commission made numerous suggestions to improve community relations in Wheeling. In the *Intelligencer*, Steele accepted most of the suggestions as reasonable, but took a measured tone in committing to them. He denied the police force needed reform, claimed the city could not actively campaign for Black officers, and pointed to the eleven Black employees the city hired to supervise playgrounds the previous summer. The commission suggested strengthening the local human rights council, something Steele agreed with while blaming a lack of funding for

its inactivity. Most representative of the city's attitude at that time was Steele's emphasis that the commission's findings were only suggestions, and though the city would likely utilize them, much of the report "consisted of opinion."¹¹¹

The Wheeling human rights commission seemed more receptive. Its chairman said the members endorsed and supported the report and urged all Wheeling residents to read it and unite to follow through on its recommendations.¹¹² George Lee was skeptical, believing the report abdicated responsibility for real reforms. He was initially convicted for disorderly conduct and fined, but successfully appealed his conviction, which was overturned. Bobby Wade's name was dropped from the court proceedings since he could not be there to defend himself.¹¹³ The final mention of WE in the *Intelligencer* was in April 1971. Raymond Harvey spoke at a luncheon in Bellaire, Ohio, echoing many of the same concerns WE had in the past few years. He maintained WE was not advocating that Wheeling police lower their standards or establish a quota system for Black officers but lamented the lack of qualified Black youths to take the civil service exam to be policemen. Harvey hoped qualified candidates could somehow be brought in from Ohio, despite it being against municipal law. He again accused the URA of creating a new Black ghetto in Wheeling, calling its fair housing act worthless, and blamed the city's lack of recreational opportunities for young people, especially ones where Black and White children could interact, as being part of the cause the unrest of the past few years.¹¹⁴ Harvey moved to Bridgeport, Ohio sometime in 1971, where he remained active in Wheeling politics, especially lobbying for more Black policemen and teachers. He died in 1978. Ascertaining the fate of WE requires more research, including interviews with living former members.

Conclusion

The long history of economic decline, neighborhood destruction, poor housing, and racism caused an out-migration of young Black Wheeling residents. Resident Chip West, an African American,

believed young people turned to illicit means of income in order to survive the lack of legitimate employment.¹¹⁵ Clyde Thomas believed the declining Black population caused Wheeling African Americans to “self-segregate,” which prevented the city’s residents from “confronting their own prejudices.”¹¹⁶ But in an ironic twist of fate, Wheeling’s long economic decline has given it a direction for revitalization. In the 1990s, the Friends of Wheeling group became dedicated to the preservation of Victorian homes and buildings in Wheeling.¹¹⁷ The city and private developers have worked since the 1990s to maintain the historic character of Wheeling, and preservation has become central to the city’s economic plan. However, troubling trends remain. In 2018, racist social media posts caused racially motivated fights at Wheeling Park High School. Students and parents testified to the Board of Education that a “significant racist culture exists” at the school.¹¹⁸ The local NAACP suggested the creation of a Black History class, which was implemented the following year.¹¹⁹ In 2020, after George Floyd’s murder, a former student published a petition asking for Ohio County Schools to pledge to implement anti-racist reforms. The petition, which allowed for students and former students to share their experiences with racism, drew a significant amount of attention from the public.¹²⁰ The county implemented a community book study, and the high school created an anti-racist club.¹²¹ Right-wing attacks on the teaching of history, though, threatens to hinder the ability of public school teachers to adequately address racism.

As young developers move to revitalize older homes in Center and East Wheeling, the threat of gentrification has the potential to displace people in the new century. As the city again considers urban revitalization, Black communities should be given a greater voice to avoid the mistakes of the past. In many ways, this is already happening. Black grassroots movements such as Men of Change are working within their communities to bring great attention to cultural diversity and issues facing the Black community in Wheeling.¹²² The city’s mayor and council have shown themselves

to be actively involved in anti-racist measures. If preservation is to remain a focus of the city government, the city must take greater steps to show the Black community that their lives and their histories matter. In doing so, Wheeling could avoid what Sugrue called the “neoliberalization of the city” – the development of economically-exclusive commercial spaces for the middle- and upper-classes – and democratically respond to the macroeconomic forces that heralded its decline.¹²³

There are several ways in which a city-backed public history project with Wheeling’s Black community can accomplish this. First, consistent funding to the Ohio County Public Library is vital to the preservation of Wheeling’s memory. Their recent focus on elevating Black stories has proved invaluable to the study of Black history in Wheeling. Second, historic markers with information should be placed around the former Chapline Street neighborhood. If Wheeling is to prioritize its downtown, pedestrians should have the opportunity to learn the history of urban renewal and its effect on the former historic Black neighborhood. Learning the history of the urban spaces where it happened will create a museum-like atmosphere of reflection for those willing to stop and read. Similarly, and third, historic Black sites should be preserved. The historic Clay School still sits in East Wheeling, deteriorating inside, but “the bones are still good.”¹²⁴ It once served as the center of the East Wheeling community. It would take a major investment, one outside of the city’s economic reality, but if the right investor can be found, Clay can and should again be an East Wheeling anchor. The Pythian Building on Chapline still stands but is vacant. A city-backed public history project would almost certainly spur interest in these sites. The Jim Crow-era Lincoln School building is still in use as a juvenile corrections facility, but the historic school, its staff, and its tradition of academic excellence should not be forgotten. Fourth, as the city considers a Wheeling museum, a walking route with markers and information can create an urban museum experience. Using preserved historic buildings as satellite museums to complement a main museum

would ensure many Wheeling stories are told.¹²⁵ The Pythian Building could be used to tell the story of and memorialize Bobby Wade.

But statues, museums, and buildings without true steps toward restorative justice are only acts of tokenism. By prioritizing Wheeling's complex racial history, the city can partner with Black community groups and private investors to right the wrongs of the Chapline Street and Center Wheeling urban renewal. Dieterich-Ward has asserted Wheeling's economic failures were due to the lack of a strong private-public foundation that characterized Pittsburgh's economic revival. That may be true economically, but the human and cultural cost of the Pittsburgh Renaissance must be remembered. Indeed, Pittsburgh has taken steps toward restorative justice with Hill District groups.¹²⁶ Without understanding Wheeling's tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, a new private-public foundation that is undemocratic has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities.¹²⁷

The history of race relations in Wheeling is a topic which requires further study. This paper largely focused on the mechanisms of urban segregation and race relations in Wheeling during the latter stages of the Civil Rights Movement. There is much to be explored including: the history and role of the NAACP in Wheeling, the history of Black-Jewish solidarity in Wheeling, the fate of We Exist, the histories of Wheeling's school consolidations, the role of Black churches in Wheeling, the various Black fraternal organizations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the long fight for recreational urban spaces, the role of organized labor and working-class politics in race relations (making use of the dissertations of David Javersak, William Hal Gorby, and Allen Dietrich-Ward), and the role of discriminatory real estate practices in Wheeling neighborhood segregation. A city-backed public history project could prioritize oral histories, akin to the Wheeling Spoken Project, from any of the living figures from the turbulent years in the 1960s and 1970s to fill in the

gaps and preserve the memory of a difficult period in Wheeling's history. Doing so would be a real step toward informing policy-makers and citizens alike of race relations and issues in the community, ensuring that, to paraphrase Bucky Branham, history is told not by the "predator" but rather by the "prey,"¹²⁸ that is to say, from the bottom-up. Some may criticize the effort. To echo Frank Horton, many are content and do not want things to change. But according to Marlene Midget and George Lee, "Wheeling is stuck. It's not moving;" "It's unfortunate how when I come back here, things are all the same."¹²⁹ Wheeling collectively must come to grips with its racist past and present. It is not nor has it ever been a raceless or an apolitical haven from society's larger issues. To confront the past as a community and right its wrongs democratically is to make good on the promises of the Friendly City.

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