THE CONSCIENCE OF A CITY

A History of the Citizens' Planning and Housing
Association and Efforts to Improve Housing for
the Poor in Baltimore, Maryland, 1937-1954

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1936 Baltimore contained a number of slums
and blighted areas known by few except those who
lived therein. Frances Morton, a graduate of Smith
College, discovered some of them by conducting a
social survey of Wards Five and Ten for her master's
thesis in 1936. Disturbed, highly motivated and
talented, she organized a group of local citizens
to campaign for federally financed public housing
which became available as a result of the Housing
Act of 1937.

Although a number of public housing units were
constructed by the newly organized Baltimore Housing
Authority, Morton and her friends quickly learned
that economic, political, administrative, and racial
institutions combined to cause serious deficiencies
in housing construction and maintenance. The city,
in 1940, had no system for housing inspection and

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little vision regarding equal rights or opportunities for Negroes who were migrating in increasing numbers. In 1941 a number of concerned professional and business people united to form the Citizens' Planning and Housing Association. They launched a campaign for more public housing, better low income housing practices and rights for the minority poor.

By 1945, increasingly critical of Baltimore housing institutions, CPHA determined to radically change both the people and procedures involved. The housing authority was attacked and overthrown; urban redevelopment was studied and a campaign devised to get public support. CPHA also realized that housing law enforcement was necessary to curb the spread of blight. This required new laws, new inspection practices and establishment of the nation's first housing court, these all coordinated under the Baltimore Plan of housing law enforcement. The campaign for improved housing also took CPHA into fields of politics, rent policies, and zoning.

Nevertheless all the activities centered around the single cause of good housing for the poor, supported in 1949 by over 1,000 CPHA members. Partly because of their success, 28 members of the association served on several related city commissions or advisory boards and a number of CPHA members were employed in city housing agencies. As a result of its success CPHA, which originally sought to be a constructive critic, by 1950 became closely allied with many city administrative departments, their personnel and procedures. One important independent function which remained involved education of the public by means of the public and private school system as well as radio and T.V. stations and the press. All of this activity led the CPHA members to close civic and social interaction.

By 1950 CPHA and the city conceived of a Pilot Program wherein attempts at physical and social improvement would be directed at a specific 27 block area, the same wards surveyed by Frances Morton 14 years earlier. A forerunner to urban renewal,

the program combined social services, education, law enforcement, neighborhood groups, and private financial support to attempt to raise community social and housing standards. While a temporary impact raised the morale of the neighborhood's inhabitants and housing conditions improved somewhat in the experimental area, these were more of form than of substance. A major problem seemed to involve failure at attempts to coordinate activities of the different city agencies involved.

An examination of the program's ultimate failure reveals insufficient attention to the causes brought on by economic, political, vocational, and other factors powerful in urban institutional life. Community organizational efforts were insignificant in the light of these realities. A serious split occurred in CPHA itself as a result of efforts to overcome the administrative and procedural problems. In this struggle the dynamics of a civic organization, which had to deal with challenges to its own leadership as well as the city's fail-

ures, demonstrated the tensions inherent to all groups wherein establishment and criticism, innovation and implementation, are keys to the process of growth. Behind this problem, as it related to CPHA and housing, lay the nation's social incompetency to distribute housing as a commodity to the poor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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along with Dean Lawrence Bridgham and Harry Amtower

made this program possible through their considera-

tion.

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INTRODUCTION

We have, in some way, constituted
ourselves the City's conscience.
We aim to get rid of "the stench --
moral, physical, and financial" --
of Baltimore's slums

Hans Froelicher, President of the
Citizens' Planning and Housing
Association, 1944-1956.

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I. The City as a Grid of Intersecting Communities

The first known ideogram for the city is a cross surrounded by a circle, thus: ⊕ It symbolizes the intersection of two paths surrounded by a protective wall. The same symbol also represents motherhood. It depicts and relates the realities of communication and security, the one communal and the other personal in terms of their function and role. Both, the hieroglyphic suggests, are necessary to urban survival as well as the survival of individual men.[1]

Around these two fundamental needs a city's leadership organizes its economic base and its culture. The base involves the city's system of

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[1] Oscar Handlin, The Historian and the City (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 27-43. The symbol given here is used in the chapter title, "The Crossroads within the Wall."

production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Today it includes everything from the products of agriculture to industry. The city's culture involves its accepted norms, its processes of socialization and its means of social control. In a homogeneous society these latter may well be defined and generally accepted, while in a pluralistic society cultural differences place added strains on the city's leadership. Those who are responsible to develop a city's institutions must create, maintain or refine procedures through which the necessary functions of production and trade proceed without clashing unduly with the cultural norms and ideals of each group.

The facilities developed by the leadership involve both social and physical structures. The social structures sustain the functions of religion, education, business, public safety, sanitation and the like. These offer citizens occupation and

reward and give them opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the entire social body. The physical structures, of course, are the houses, commercial and industrial buildings, and other material objects which people use. When the efforts of leaders fit the institutions and the associations of an urban population in a manner which satisfies the expectations of the populace, there exists a high degree of social cohesion. On the other hand when social or cultural or economic conflicts produce challenges with which the leadership is unable to cope, the society's cohesion suffers. Communication and security are troubled and so are the cities.[2]

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[2] Roland Warren, The Community in America (Chicago, 1963); chapters 5, 8, 9, elaborate the forms and functions of these aspects of community. Sociologists are by no means agreed on these matters. Herold C. Hanberry in a forthcoming dissertation at Florida State University presents seventy-nine different definitions of community he has found among sociologists.

The classic urban ideals in western thought combine the notions of city and community. The ancient polis symbolized a union of life which was both voluntary and communal because citizens shared the essence of community, namely, common language, mutual trust, and agreement on both goals and means.[3] These were exemplified in historic Athens and mythical Camelot. However in both myth and reality, success was but momentary because man possesses, or is possessed by, a questioning mind and a will for power. This quest for understanding and power has continually upset whatever temporary ability urban populations developed to communicate and work interdependently for the achievement of common goals. It has also challenged general definitions of community aimed

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[3] For a discussion of the Greek polis see Humphery Davy Kitto, The Greeks (Middlesex, 1951); John W. Chapman in "Voluntary Associations and the Political Theory of Pluralism" in Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., Voluntary Associations (New York, 1969), 87-118.

at promoting a uniform spirit or mental state among a people, such as Ferdinand Toennies' concept of <u>Gemeinschaft</u> vs. <u>Gesellschaft</u> or the similarly dualistic distinctions set out in the writings of Georg Simmel, Max Weber, or Emil Durkheim.[4]

This makes suspect any attempt to define urban community on a geographic (or "horizontal") basis and it makes equally difficult the application of the concept of community to the so-called "vertical" structures -- corporate, political, or religious -- in which people participate voluntarily or by custom, if at all. While one may

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[4] Robert K. Merton, "Patterns of Influence: A Study of Interpersonal Influence and of Communications Behaviour in a Local Community" in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton, <u>Communications Research</u> (New York, 1949), 189-202; Ferdinand Toennies, <u>Fundamental Concepts of Sociology</u> (New York, 1940), translated by C. P. Loomis; Carle C. Zimmermen, <u>The Changing Community</u> (New York, 1938), 80.

appreciate St. Augustine's sensitive definition of political organization as "a group of rational beings, associated on the basis of a common tie in respect of these things which they love,"[5] I find George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany Hall more realistic. Comparing reformers and politicians, Plunkitt said that the former "were mornin' glories -- looked lovely in the mornin; and withered up in a short time," while the latter, organized as "regular machines went on flourishin' forever, like fine old oaks."[6] Thus life in the American city resembles not so much a wedding as a stock car race.

Each modern city is in fact a grid of inter-

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[5] Augustine, The City of God (Chicago, 1952), Book XIX, chapter XXIV, 528.

[6] William L. Riordin, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (New York, 1948), 17.

secting subcommunities rather than a single
community. The attainment of communal harmony
in the geographical locus we identify as a city
or among the large and powerful corporate bodies
we identify as associations has rarely, if ever,
occurred. A part of the anti-urban tradition
among intellectuals has stemmed from the explosion
of their assumption that the city could provide
community. Those who share the illusion that the
city is a center for cooperation rather than an
arena of competition are bound to be disappointed.
But the majority of the city's inhabitants do not
make this mistake. Rather the history of cities
reveals that the millions who have crowded into
them sought to be involved in competition and to
be freed from the imposed restrictions of an aris-
tocratic or agrarian order. In the city they be-
lieved they could win status and wealth on the
basis of skill and deed rather than blood and

tradition. To be sure, newcomers often settled
in neighborhoods where they could maintain ties
to family, friends, and congregation and thus
fulfill their needs for belonging and community.
But they have also entered eagerly into the
city's competing swirls of vocation and business,
education and politics. These were strange but
not overwhelming to those who aspired to achieve,
in the midst of diverse and conflicting opportu-
nity. While the inner security provided by their
own traditions and religious beliefs supported
the relationships of family and friends, these
immigrants had a love for their new residence
which gave their competitive spirit a chance to
thrive. Many of them, perhaps the majority,
found in the city for the first time the place
to learn, to communicate, and to live in relative
security. The city thus represented to them a

welcome release from constraint.[7]

II. The City as a Center of Opportunity

In 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner observed that the agricultural frontier had exercised a profound influence on American history. Later others noted that with the passing of a clearly marked "frontier of settlement" in the open areas of the Far West, a frontier of opportunity was opening in expanding cities which contained many elements Turner associated with the westward movement of pioneer farmers. The frontier, said Turner, was the place where an "expanding people" exhibited a new "American social development" characterized by "perennial rebirth." New oppor-

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[7] Timothy L. Smith, "Immigrant Social Aspirations and American Education, 1880-1930," American Quarterly, vol. XXI, Fall 1969, number 3; "Lay Initiative in the Religious Life of American Immigrants, 1880-1950," in Tamara K. Hareven, ed., Anonymous Americans (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971), 212-249.

tunities kept them in continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society and so generated "the forces dominating American character."[8] It resulted in "the promotion of democracy here and in Europe," it was productive of "individualism," and showed "antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control." On the other hand it promoted "the formation of a composite nationality for the American people."[9]

The import of all this to urban history impressed Frederic C. Howe. Receiving his doctorate from the Johns Hopkins University several years after Turner, Howe wrote in his first book, The City: The Hope of Democracy, that the modern American city

>   marks an epoch in our civilization.
>   Through it, a new society has been

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[8] Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), 2, 3.

[9] Ibid., 22, 30.

created. Life in all its relations has been altered. A new civilization has been born, a civilization whose identity with the past is one of historical continuity only... The modern city marks a revolution -- a revolution in industry, politics, society, and life itself... Its coming has destroyed a rural society... Man has entered an urban age. He has become a communal being... It has already become the problem of society and the measure of our civilization.[10]

Howe identifies the frontier nature of the city as he notes its expansive dynamics but he is also simply accurate as he stresses the "communal ideal" on the one hand while recognizing definite conflicts which threaten it.

Samuel Lubell also noted the similarity of new opportunities in the city to those on the old frontier. He dedicated his book, The Future of American Politics, to the memory of his mother, who, he said, "pioneered on the urban frontier."

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10 Frederic C. Howe, The City, The Hope of Democracy (New York, 1905), 9-11.

Under the theme of "The Old Tenement Trail"
Lubell noted that "beginning all over again"
held for the "urban masses (with) each advance
into a new neighborhood" a chance to repeat the
frontier experience noted by Turner where "'men
of all races were melted down and fused into a
new race.'" The role of the pioneer mother was
repeated by the urban immigrant's wife, who "with
the sieve of drudgery, rescued the savings which
enabled the family to climb to higher rental
reaches. The immigrant mother was also the
guardian of respectability on the urban frontier."
The move up the ladder of social respectability
was, he said, accompanied by Anglicizing of names,
dropping of alien garb,

> more American food in the grocery
> stores, less orthodoxy in worship,
> more intermarriage with other ethnic
> elements and -- as an ironical index
> of Americanization -- more divorce...
> Like the Old West, the ever-changing
> urban frontier has been more 'a form
> of society' than a geographical area.
> And as the story of America's social

> evolution could be read page by page
> in the successive frontier zones through
> which the pioneer pushed, so the march
> of the urban masses can be charted by
> tracing the neighborhoods through which
> these groups climbed.[11]

As early as 1881 Henry James, speaking through one
of the characters in his novels, said: "At the
end of three or four years we'll move. That is
the way to live in New York -- to move every three
or four years." By living in a new house "you get
all the improvements."[12]

The physical and fiscal growth of the ever-
expanding urban centers produced heavy problems,
augmented by increasing density of the city's
residences. Robert Wiebe has noted that the rush
to the cities brought an influx of inexperienced

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[11] Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics
(New York, 1952), 65-67.

[12] Morris Townsend speaking in Henry James, Wash-
ington Square (1950), 38.

newcomers "who required jobs, homes, and a sense
of belonging, but who also came to urban centers
which lacked sources of authority and information
which might alleviate dislocation and bewilder-
ment." Thus, he argues, "America in the late 19th
century was a society without a core."[13] Richard
Hofstadter, while attacking part of Turner's
thesis as expanded by John D. Hicks in The Popu-
list Revolt, nevertheless recognizes the "miraculous
rapidity" with which cities grew between 1860 and
1910. Middle Western cities "grew wildly," he
wrote. Chicago more than doubled its population
in the single decade from 1880 to 1890. He traced
"the Progressive Impulse" to the efforts of pro-
gressive leaders to make amends for cultural break-
downs.[14] However their efforts were often thwarted

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[13] Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order (New
York, 1967), 12.

[14] Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New
York, 1960), 48-51, 174-214.

because the profits from urban enterprise went to a relative few rather than being distributed more evenly among the public. Many pockets of settlement in the nation's cities became noted for their social chaos.

Thus the accelerating pace of urban growth produced a variety of conditions, some having positive and others negative effects. Many situations provided newness, freedom, and assurance of success for the strong. But within this variegated system also occurred the strikes, the riots, and panics which called public attention to labor's struggles with the financial empires which emerged during the last two decades of the 19th century. Individual leaders came forth to work for the common man. Henry George, who aspired to be mayor of New York as a labor-party leader, finally came to focus on the single tax also subscribed to by Howe; Terence Powderly and

the Knights of Labor sought better wages and
working conditions through union organization
while the Populists, rural but affected by
industrialization, organized cooperatives for
market reforms only to be countered by the
efforts of men like J. P. Morgan and Jay Gould.
Yet underlying all these victories and defeats
was the general consensus of culture, morality,
and progress Henry May has noted.[15]

Beneath this consensus was a foundation of
economic achievement. The forces of economics
identified the city, not the farm, as location
of American democracy and opportunity for the
average immigrant. During the 1880's, the pro-
duction of manufactured goods surpassed farm goods
in dollar value and the majority of the nation's
work force became engaged in nonagricultural

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[15] Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence
(New York, 1959).

vocations. Between the 1890 Census and the Census
of 1920, the urban growth rate averaged ten million
per decade while the average rate of rural growth
for the same period was 3.75 million. By 1920 our
urban population surpassed the rural population
numerically.[16] By 1920, if one was new to the city
and if the labor he had to offer was unskilled, he
would be among the last new-comers for whom the
urban areas were still full of opportunity.

III. Opportunity and Obsolescence in the Maturing
      City

⌐ The late nineteenth and early twentieth century
American city has been presented as the place of

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[16] Carl N. Degler, "American Political Parties and
the Rise of the City: An Interpretation," Journal
of American History, vol. LI #1 (June, 1964), 41-59;
Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven,
1950). Degler takes issue with Commager who wrote
that "the decade of the nineties is the watershed in
American history." Census Bureau statistical abstract
supplement, Historical Statistics of the U.S. (Wash-
ington, 1957).

opportunity, amid conflict, for the millions of immigrants and native Americans who jammed its gates. During this period cities expanded geographically as well as economically to keep pace with their "streetcar suburbs." Baltimore extended its borders in 1888 and again in 1918. In this way the "old city" kept pace with industrialization and urbanization. It did not lose, significantly, its industry or its more affluent and growing middle class. Rather its corporate boundaries followed them as they moved. It was also equal to the task of absorbing into its enterprises its newest residents, whether from overseas or elsewhere in America. However, beginning with the decade of the 1920's, steps were taken to reduce the number of foreign immigrants; and the proportion of blacks rose significantly. The experience of the "latecomers" differed from the earlier immigrant's sense of

opportunity. Black newcomers especially encountered physical and social obsolescence; the site of opportunity lay outside the old city geographically, economically, and culturally.

At the same time that opportunity in the central city declined, the proportion of unskilled rural migrants who were black began to rise. This was coupled with rises in public assistance and a lowering of the indices of economic opportunity open to urban migrants between 1930 and 1950. The 1930 census recorded a 10-year migration of 363,000 black people to the mid-Atlantic area bounded by New York on the north and Washington on the south. The 1940 census reported an influx of 226,300 and the 1950 census showed an increase of 480,300 during the 1940's. During this same period, the southeastern states gave up 1,401,300 Negroes.

The metropolitan areas grew accordingly. In 1930 the population in 140 metropolitan districts

was over 59 million with 70% living in central city areas which surrounded the central business district. By 1960 the population of 216 standard metropolitan statistical areas had risen over 115 million while the percentage living in central cities declined to 50%. The 1950 census recorded that the Baltimore Standard Metropolitan Area population exceeded one and one-third million. However, while the city growth slightly exceeded 10%, Baltimore County showed a 73.4% increase. But 83% of the non-white population growth during this period was in Baltimore city.

During this time, access to new job opportunities depended on color and class. Between 1930 and 1950 the number of employees in the engineering vocations rose by 85%. Business expanded to employ 136% more people and retail trade in the automotive sales and service industry alone increased by 48%. But during the same period

the rise in hotel employment increased by only
one-fifth, unskilled labor demands of the con-
struction enterprises by one-tenth, while the
Railroad Pullman companies actually employed 11%
fewer in 1950 than in 1930.[17] These latter occu-
pations were the type open to the rural migrants:
some white, most black.[18]

The need for additional public services to
those to whom the urban environment offered less
immediate opportunity is demonstrated in the rise
of governmental expenditures aimed to provide
shelter. In 1930 there was no public housing.

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[17] A review of some of these statistics and their
implication is given by Homer Hoyt in "Recent
Distortions of Classical Models of Urban Structure"
in Land Economics, vol. XL (May, 1964), 199-212.

[18] The Baltimore Community Self-Survey of Inter-
Group Relations, Maryland Commission on Interracial
Problems and Relations, An American City in Transi-
tion (Baltimore, 1955), 97-99. Table I gives
statistics for Baltimore which reflect the national
trends noted above.

By 1940, as a result of the Housing Act of 1937,
60,907 public housing units had been built, 1,203
of them in Baltimore. Between 1940 and 1950,
despite World War II, the nation built 876,451
units of public housing, low rent and war and
defense housing with 9,364 units in the Baltimore
area.[19] To fill the void created by losses of
opportunity for the new migrants other federal
public service expenditures increased as well.
A comparison for two years, separated by two
decades, shows:[20]

(figures in millions)

	EDUCATION	PUBLIC WELFARE	EMPLOYMENT SECURITY	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
1932	12	1	0	0
1952	436	1,181	182	106

[19] Ibid., 239.

[20] Historical Statistics; Morton Hoffman, "The Role
of Government in Influencing Changes in Housing in
Baltimore," Land Economics, vol. XXX, #2 (May, 1954),
129.

Many of the social institutions which served the new immigrants were also deteriorating. Changes in Baltimore's school situation demonstrate that some of those who needed help the most received the least. In 1939 a survey of 32 elementary schools built in Baltimore after 1920 revealed that 16 out of the 28 serving only white children enrolled at least 100 students less than their capacity, whereas of the 4 Negro schools included in the survey, at least two were seriously overcrowded. The pupil-staff ratio was 34.3 in the white schools and 40.4 in the Negro schools. Between 1946 and 1953 the total public school enrollment increased by 17.15% but that of Negro pupils shot up by 33.53%[21] whereas

21 Commission on Governmental Efficiency and Economy, "Towards Greater Efficiency and Economy in the Baltimore Municipal Government" (Baltimore, 1939), 71-2. Non-public school enrollment increased by 10.37% from 37,504 to 41,394 between 1946 and 1953. Between 1943 and 1953 white population in the city fell continuously from 760,000 to 715,800, but white enrollment continued to rise as many suburban families continued to bring children to outlying Baltimore City public schools.

white enrollment gained only 9.62%. The pupil-
staff ratios in 1953 were 37.5 for Negro pupils
and 34 for whites in elementary schools and 27
for Negroes and 21 for whites in secondary schools.
Class sizes also differed substantially, as the
following table shows:

	ELEMENTARY (1-6)		HIGH SCHOOL (7-12)	
	White	Colored	White	Colored
1943	42.6	43.6	25.4	32.5
1953	38.8	42.0	32.2	27.5

While the opening of several temporary units helped,
the fact still remains that in 1950 over one-third
of the Negro children in the city's central tracts
were attending school part-time.[22]

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[22] _An American City in Transition_, chapter IV,
95-130; The year, 1950, indicates 34.39% part time
pupils, up over 0% in 1940. The heavy black migra-
tion to the city during the war is reflected herein.
The percentage of white pupils attending part time
in 1940 was 0%; in 1950, 3.46%.

Thus while the new urban frontier of the early decades in this century nurtured a psychology of opportunity which attracted the rural migrants, it suffered from a sociology of obsolescence. From the moment the first house was erected, the first street laid or the first public utility installed, there began a process of obsolescence, augmented by continually improved industrial production. Rather than preserving old buildings many citizens thought that to "begin all over again" meant tear down, rebuild and relocate. "Discard the old, purchase the new" became the byword as the more successful residents left old streets, old cars, and old houses to others. Yet rising land, material, and labor costs made each successive cycle of expansion or improvement more expensive. The loose social structure which had earlier encouraged social mobility among city dwellers, allowing the more fortunate to escape

the obsolescent areas, did not work for the city's later migrants.

With the level of basic skills required in employment rising sharply, far fewer men could find jobs just because they were of sound body and mind. Far more were designated as "functionally unemployable." The machine began taking over many of the less skilled occupations at the same time that the black migrants from the South were excluded from apprenticeship into trades which might have offered them vocational and economic mobility. Men were available to work and there was work to be done, as decaying neighborhoods and neglected houses, streets, and schools made evident. But the consortiums of banks, contractors, labor, and the government, which could provide the necessary capital, did not provide the opportunities for unskilled manpower to be harnessed. The advice of Booker T. Washington, given to Negroes at Atlanta in 1895, to "cast down your

bucket where you are," no longer applied.[23]

When the black migrant was able to afford new housing in a new neighborhood and decided to move, he found that the whites who had gotten there first, whether of immigrant or of native American stock, didn't want him. This situation helped prevent the decline in the value of older houses in the city which should have taken place. In addition public policy interfered with the normal fluctuations of the market. The black migrant's buying power may even have been reduced

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[23] Ibid., 125; Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Exposition Address, 1895. In this address Washington encouraged his fellow Negroes to go to work "in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service..." Reprinted in Gilberg Osofsky, ed., The Burden of Race (New York, 1966), 209-214; A good review of the economic problems is given in Robert C. Wood, Metropolis Against Itself (New York, 1959), and Raymond Vernon, The Changing Economic Function of the Central City (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), chapter I; Miles Colean, Renewing Our Cities (New York, 1953), chapters 1-3.

by slum clearance. The real estate owners, who extracted rents equal to those in suburban parts of the city, operated under a system whereby ownership of a majority of homes remained in the hands of absentee landlords. When the property deteriorated to such a state that it had to be demolished as part of a slum clearance area, the owners insisted upon and got "full market value" for the land on which the decayed houses stood. Although this often resulted in payment of inflated prices for the land, a legal fiction established by the cities themselves made the procedure defensible. Desperately trying to survive the decline of their tax base threatened by the exodus of much of the white middle class and of many industries, the cities continued to raise real estate assessments and tax rates. This battle imposed unreal values on much city land and it placed an economic penalty on new construction or renovation.

By the end of World War II, then, the
frontier of urban opportunity had shifted to
the suburbs, leaving the obsolescent "old city"
and its people behind. Successful sons and
grandsons of European immigrants were able to
begin all over again, as they moved to more
spacious neighborhoods and better houses. But
those of immigrant stock who lacked funds, like
the latest round of migrants from the south,
many of them sons and grandsons of slaves who
were likewise affected by the spirit of oppor-
tunity, were caught in the web of obsolescence.

Initiated as oases for life, many of the
nation's cities became deserts of decay. But
these urban wastelands usually surrounded a
vigorous central business district. Suburban[24]

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[24] Perhaps the word should be "superurban," for
that is the way many perceived it.

commuters raced or tunneled through these areas
of decay on their way to and from the inner and
outer belts of institutional strength. These
migrants to the city's outer reaches also took
many of their own institutional strengths with
them when they moved. For instance the well
known Catholic parochial school had symbolized
a center of learning and friendship which pro-
vided a sense of tradition and belonging to the
families of "strangers in the land" and their
sons. Also the temples of orthodox Jews and
even the local taverns, where "strangers" met
nightly to reminisce and share present experiences,
provided a sense of identity and continuity. In
these settings the native American was the "alien."
When these people, their sons and daughters some-
times before them, moved from the urban centers
they took many of their institutions with them.
The failures who remained and the rural blacks

and the whites who replaced them in the aging
houses had few such traditions and experiences
to share or institutions to help them find their
place.

IV. The Emergence of a Civic Community

Into the setting thus described a company
of Baltimore civic reformers moved in the late
1930's and early 40's. Shortly I will quote
some who have questioned the sincerity of their
motivation and the worth of their program, public
housing. First, however, I want to register a
suspicion of the question's worth. An examination
of the thoughts and actions of these reformers in
their social context is really necessary to eval-
uate what happened.

Recently a number of calls have been made
for studies which center on the efforts of civic
leaders working within a pluralistic urban setting.

Melvin M. Webber, noting the propensity of
Americans to overact to events of the day, cites
the need for studies which will probe beneath
manifest urban problems to less visible issues.[25]
Robert Presthus has added that study is needed
to discern the relationship between the "elitist"
leadership structure emphasized by many sociolo-
gists and the "pluralistic system" which has
been observed by the political scientists who
see power shared among several competing groups.
This is important, he concludes, because demo-
cratic theory has long been concerned with such
matters.[26] Roy Lubove and Dwight W. Hoover have
commented on a diversity of approaches to the
study of 20th century urban history; they agree

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[25] Melvin M. Webber, "Post-City Age," Daedalus
(Fall, 1968), 1092.

[26] Robert Presthus, "Theories of Community Power:
Pluralism and Elitism," Men at the Top, A Study in
Community Power (Oxford, 1964).

that such study needs to include both intellectuals
and leaders of popular culture.[27] In 1965 Charles
Abrams, one of the early civic leaders interested
in low cost and public housing, described the city
as the locus of "opportunity" and "excitement,"
the "frontier." He thought the decline of the
central cities a contradiction. While still empha-
sizing the need for more and better urban renewal,
Abrams confessed that "the real weakness in all
federal programs bearing on city problems is that
they lack a clear objective and are harnessed to
no identifiable purpose."[28] Scott Greer has listed
three weaknesses in the conceptualization of urban
society: "the inadequate empirical relevance of

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[27] Roy Lubove, "The Urbanization Process: An
Approach to Historical Research," Journal of the
American Institute of Planners, XXXIII (January,
1967); Dwight W. Hoover, "The Diverging Paths of
American Urban History," American Quarterly (June,
1968).

[28] Charles Abrams, The City is the Frontier (New
York, 1965), IX, 1-2.

many of our images of the city, the partial

nature of the approaches and their limited scope

and special nature."[29] Robert Wiebe supports

these observations writing of an archaic system

of urban government and of outmoded values of

individualism. The city dweller cannot protect

himself from fire, he writes, or rid his street

of garbage "by the spontaneous voluntarism that

had raised cabins along the frontier."[30] While

the opportunity to express individuality and to

achieve success may well have existed in the

rural frontier and existed also to a limited

degree in the urban frontier of 1890-1930, the

characteristic of the present urban world is

accurately described by John Chapman as one of

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[29] Scott Greer, The Emerging City, Myth and Reality (New York, 1962), 22.

[30] Wiebe, op. cit., 12-15.

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"grossly unequal opportunity." Ownership of
property is "frozen" and its value inflated as
a result of what Louis Hartz calls "irrational
Lockean liberalism."[31]

I have struggled to find terms adequate to
describe the group of Baltimore citizens who in
the late 30's and early 40's formed the Citizens'
Planning and Housing Association. Most of them
were well educated, many in private schools.
Many were leaders in business, the professions,
or government. All revealed a high degree of
civic consciousness, and through study and involve-
ment they developed into a homogeneous group. They
developed a consensus on public problems and achieved

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31 John W. Chapman, "Voluntary Association and the
Political Theory of Pluralism" in Roland Pennock
and John W. Chapman, eds., Voluntary Associations
(New York, 1969), chapter 7, 87-118; Louis Hartz,
The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpreta-
tion of American Political Thought since the Revo-
lution (New York, 1955), 250.

an *esprit de corps* through open discussion and an acceptance of each other in a context which permitted both trial and error. Becoming thus dependent on one another for the accomplishment of their common goals, they formed an important community in the city's gridwork of sub-societies. They were mostly white and either Protestant or Jewish in faith. Some professed to be politically "liberal" and some "conservative"; some were Republicans, some Democrats, and a few were Socialists. But they were all intensely patriotic and were highly motivated toward success in their chosen vocations and avocations. The term "civic community" best describes them as a group.

The limited intellectual preparation of many civic reformers who faced up to this urban challenge of unequal opportunity and the fact that they at least *attributed* their social perspectives to protestant convictions rooted in Judeo-Christian

religion, may have distorted their judgment.

On the one hand, they did not consider carefully enough the well being of the polis as a cohesive social and political system laid on a territorial basis. On the other hand, they had to confront skilled politicians and strive with the financial interests within political and economic structures they did not fully understand. Many of the reformers did not have a clear perception of the causes of the problem they were attacking. They aimed initially at charitable service, rather than structural change, as had their progressive forerunners at the turn of the century. However this time around these civic minded citizens saw governmental charity at the fiscal expense of taxpayers as the solution. They did not clearly foresee that such charity might lay some psychic expense upon the recipient as well.

Given their intellectual presuppositions,
the author does not aim to evaluate their motiva-
tions on the basis of either their ideals or their
actions alone. Rather I shall present here a study
of their words and deeds which suggests their actions
came out of their interaction with the intellectual
and social environment in which they lived. Christo-
pher Lasch has argued that the efforts of a previous
generation of progressives reflected tensions between
their ideals and their culture.[32] This study will
argue that the actions of some latter-day Baltimore
reformers reflected tensions between their goals and
the institutions in which they were enmeshed.

The members of CPHA shared a number of qual-
ities which have been observed in other urban vol-
untary associations devoted to reform; but they
also differed in a number of important ways. "Citi-

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[32] Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in
America (New York, 1965).

zen participation in community affairs is the central pillar sustaining a democratic society; it is an invaluable training school for service at other levels," states the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development.[33] CPHA played a major role in governmental decisions about housing in the 1940's and the organization instituted the nationally famous Baltimore Plan which effectively combined the enforcement of housing law with judicial procedures. Many local and some national leaders in the field of public housing received much of their education and initiation during the 40's and 50's as members of CPHA. Although many of

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[33] The Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, Modernizing Local Government (New York, 1965), chapter I, 8-11, 13-19. The Committee defined "community" as applying to "socio-economic groupings with some sense of common identity, channels of internal communication and a degree of political cohesion." These were applied mainly to segments of geographic areas. While CPHA had these factors in common, it had much more.

the members identified CPHA's work with their own moral commitment, they should not be spoken of merely as "Do Gooders." Edward Banfield has recently argued that ever since the days of Bonifacius by Cotton Mather, our cultural idealists have had principles which can be summarized in two very simple rules: "DON'T JUST SIT THERE. DO SOMETHING: and second, DO GOOD." A history of CPHA shows that far from action for the sake of action, this civic community studied issues thoroughly before acting. It should be described in terms opposite to Banfield's description of many American voluntary groups who believed that any problems could be solved if only men would try hard enough and thus did not hesitate to attempt what they did not have the least idea how to do.[34]

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[34] Edward C. Banfield, "Why Government Cannot Solve the Urban Problem," Daedalus (Fall, 1968), 1239.

Much of CPHA's success came not only from moral activism, study and hard work, but also from the cooperation they received from the press. John Bollens and Henry Schmandt, authors of _The Metropolis_, have observed that much of the impetus for metropolitan government restructuring has come from civic organizations and the central daily newspapers. They add that while a "maverick politician or underemployed young lawyer seeking publicity may spark the revolt...the flame will be short-lived unless the fuel to keep it burning is supplied by the established groups."[35] More than once CPHA had to "keep an issue burning" before officials and the public. Their leaders earned a status grounded on growing respect for their judgment and came thus to represent really and symbolically the role of good citizens' partici-

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[35] John C. Bollens, Henry J. Schmandt, _The Metropolis_ (New York, 1965), 498.

pation in democratic government. Many of them eventually served on "blue ribbon" committees as well as established governmental boards or agencies. CPHA often shared honors at formal city events marking progress.

The work of CPHA stirred much controversy, of course. Banfield and Williams remark that many civic associations have been ineffective because the financing of many of them comes partly from united community fund drives.[36] CPHA received a letter from the Community Chest Fund of Baltimore in 1947 stating that it could not be considered as a recipient because of its "too controversial" nature. Other criticisms leveled

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[36] Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, "Power Structure and Civic Leadership," City Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 243-60. This gives a good review of the roles and status of civic groups in urban affairs.

at organizations of this kind have stated that
their purposes were vague and did not achieve
measurable results, or that they were started by
national reform organizations like the National
Municipal League or the American Council to
Improve Our Neighborhoods (hereafter referred
to as ACTION).[37] Actually, CPHA was careful to
assess its results annually and sometimes more
frequently through special reports. Its accom-
plishments were demonstrated through major changes
or innovations made in the Baltimore area through
its efforts. Rather than the offspring of a
national organization, some members of CPHA played
a prominent part in founding one of these, ACTION,
and James Rouse was an early president of the
national association.

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[37] Ibid.

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James Luther Adams has offered a general
description of the aims of the individual members
of such voluntary associations:

> 1. to help make the general citizenry
> aware of the decisive importance of
> voluntary associations in the articu-
> lation and implementation of public
> opinion, contravening in this way the
> dehumanization brought about by mass
> society;
>
> 2. to give oneself directly to associa-
> tions that aim directly to overcome
> social evils, in this way exerting one-
> self especially for the sake of under-
> privileged groups;
>
> 3. to encourage those forces which work
> against oligarchic tendencies within
> voluntary associations and within politi-
> cal and economic associations;
>
> 4. to promote the free discussion of
> public issues and of fresh possibilities
> of policy and organization.[38]

James S. Coleman in a discussion of the dynamics
of community controversy has noted three trends which

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38   James Luther Adams in D. B. Robertson, ed.,
Voluntary Associations (Richmond, Va., 1966), 371.

CPHA seems to have countered. Often, Coleman

observes, "specific issues give way to general

ones, 'revealing' deep cleavages of values or

interests in the community which require a spark

to set them off." At other times organizations

skip to a new issue without having resolved the

former problem; or they may perceive a change in

the nature of controversy and may develop in the

process a "shift from disagreement to antagonism"

which becomes personal, involving slander, rumor,

and direct hostility. These processes, Coleman

writes, may be said to create "'Gresham's Law of

Conflict': the harmful and dangerous elements

drive out those which would keep the conflict

within bounds."[39] While CPHA activity did expose

deep cleavages in Baltimore society, its leaders

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[39] James S. Coleman, Community Conflict (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), 9-14.

often maneuvered the opposition into publically

committing themselves before the conflict

erupted, and then forced them to deal with the

specific issues under consideration. To get

optimum results CPHA frequently struggled over

the tactics and strategy of dealing with sensitive

issues in order to bring some unity between itself

and more idealistic organizations. CPHA worked

hard to stick to issues and avoided, almost with-

out exception, public attacks on leading public

figures. Adherence to this formula, as we shall

see, caused the first serious breach within its

ranks in the early fifties. Thus CPHA generally

prevented the operation of "Gresham's Law of

Conflict." Its leaders showed the skill to face

emotionally laden issues, research them, debate

them, and arrive at agreements freely and openly.

Its members were thus able to proceed into chaotic

situations with a cohesion and commitment which

enabled them to contribute to their constituent community, the public.

CPHA was inductive in its approach to urban problems at the same time that it stood for principles of morality and patriotism in a more general way. In The Power Elite, C. Wright Mills launched a devastating attack upon leaders active in public life. He claimed that there was "an absence of mind and morality in the public life." The ideological source of leaders was "neither Burke nor Locke but Horatio Alger...work and win, strive and succeed," he wrote. "Postwar liberalism has been organizationally impoverished," Mills continued, "making older leaders dependent upon the federal center and not training new leaders around the country..." resulting in "a moral and intellectual decline of serious proportions."[40]

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[40] C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (New York, 1956), chapters 14, 15.

The purpose of this study is neither so general or pretentious as Mills', however, the following observations pertaining to a representative "liberal community" in the city of Baltimore do not support Mills' contention. In the first place, many of these members, who qualify in every way as "Mills' Elite," were very active in church life as well as CPHA. When I began to look at the association I entertained a thesis that CPHA may have served as a substitute "secular church," providing outlets for its membership which the organized churches blocked. As I studied the subject more thoroughly I was forced by the evidence to surrender the thesis, and to concede that their church relationships continued to play a major role in guiding the moral persuasion and social action of many CPHA members. Some leading clergymen were members of the CPHA Board. While CPHA was "success-oriented," individually and

collectively, its definition of success was not
that of Horatio Alger; for it permeated the
welfare of the entire city. Furthermore, as
has already been mentioned, its strong organiza-
tional techniques and types of programs appealed
to a large number of prominent young attorneys,
professors, and businessmen who in effect received
their training in urban social problems through
this organization. If Mills had studied Balti-
more's recent history, searching for examples of
the "mindlessness of the powerful" and their
"organized irresponsibility," he would not have
found them in Baltimore's public housing advocates;
the latter comprised instead a hard-working com-
passionate elite.

The roles of individuals within CPHA assume
importance especially because of the personal
growth in talent and perception many members experi-
enced through their interaction with one another.

Roy Lubove has noted the difference in orientation between boards of social welfare organizations and paid social workers in early decades of this century. The difference concerns voluntaryism and class as against professionalism and social conscience. Lubove quotes Mary W. Glenn who wrote in 1924, "Many a social worker felt when he sat at his first board meeting that the well-to-do businessman and society women who faced him belonged to a different world from the one in which he planned to function..."[41] The danger was that the "untutored" spirit of the former would lose touch with the "social" sensitivity of the latter. The CPHA members seem to have bridged the gap between the "volunteer" and the "professional," the "elitist" and the "commoner,"

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[41] Roy Lubove, The Professional Altruist, 1880-1930 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 85, 162.

the "pessimist" and the "extrovert," the "emotive"
and the "intellectual" approaches to reform.

However, while CPHA may have been able to
prevent splits among its own members, an examination
of their relationship to the poor whom they hoped
to serve indicates a different and difficult problem.
Rich in income as well as in their inheritance of an
older democratic-progressive tradition, CPHA members
did not serve persons of foreign stock such as those
Herbert Gans has labeled "Urban Villagers." Rather
they chose to work in the midst of native American
migrants to the city, both black and white, who
found Baltimore lacking the opportunities of earlier
decades and who brought within their cultural pat-
terns a rural ethos much less amenable to urban ways.
Many of those whom Gans called "Urban Villagers"
moved to the suburbs where they became "suburban
isolates," and experienced a newly developed set
of acculturated ethnic customs which were not yet

fully American. These often fought CPHA's demon-
stration of the older American democratic tradition.

CPHA was thus caught between a new suburban middle

class which did not understand it and a poor migrant

class it found very hard to know.[42] This explains

the rise of a belief among CPHA members, expressed

by their president, Hans Froelicher, in 1949, and

again in 1951, that, "CPHA has become the conscience

of the city in matters of planning and housing."[43]

The conscience is a bridge between macrocosm

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[42] This approach is suggested from observations
by B. T. Robson, Urban Analysis, A Study of City
Structure with Special Reference to Sunderland
(Cambridge, England, 1969), 240-245; Herbert Gans,
Urban Villagers (Glencoe, Ill., 1962).

[43] Citizens' Planning and Housing Association of
Baltimore, Housing (February, 1949), 1; CPHA Board
Minutes, 1 February, 1951, 2. All citations of MSS
in the footnotes in this dissertation are, unless
otherwise indicated, to the CPHA papers. Those in
italics refer to printed materials; those in quota-
tion marks refer to mimeographed MSS.

and microcosm in the world of action. It is
regarded traditionally as that faculty which
enables man to apply his understanding of
seemingly universal moral principles to specific
situations of personal involvement. Because of
this the following account will necessarily
include not only the thoughts and deeds of Balti-
more citizens but also national thoughts, plans
and actions as they affected the local social
milieu. A dilemma which for many years plagued
Baltimore was that while its "conscience in
matters of planning and housing" was usually
abreast of the most forward thought in the nation,
the city's organization lagged far behind.

CHAPTER I

SLUMS AND CPHA:

DISCOVERY, DEMONSTRATION, ORGANIZATION

Euery man shall haue an especiall and due
care, to keepe his house sewtte and cleane,
as also so much of the strette, as lieth
before his door, and especially he shall
so prouide, and set his bedstead whereon
he lieth, that it may stand three foote at
least from the ground, as he will answere
thr contrarie at a martiall Court.

Sir Thomas Gates
Lieutenant-General
Colony of Jamestown in Virginia
24 May, 1610

I. Discovery and Response

During the early 1930's government officials estimated that one third of the nation's thirty million families lived in substandard houses. A United States Department of Commerce survey of 64 cities in 1934 revealed that 20% of the housing units had serious defects. In addition, many dwelling units were overcrowded and fifteen to twenty percent lacked toilets, bathtubs, or showers. A total of eleven million were considered definitely substandard, six million of them in urban areas and the rest farm houses.[1]

All newspapers quoted are from Baltimore unless otherwise noted.

[1] Edith Elmer Wood, Introduction to Housing Facts and Principles [United States Housing Authority] (Washington, 1940) IX, 3-5, 80-85. The houses I have designated "urban area" were noted as "non farm" by the Census Bureau. This problem is dealt with more extensively in notes 1, 2, 6, of chapter 2. Demographers are not agreed on what density represents overcrowding. However all agree that an average density of over 1.50 persons per room represents overcrowding. Some regard a person per room ratio of 1:1 as the limit.

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Because private enterprise built for those who could afford new homes and because, in 1929, over seventy percent of the nation's families had annual incomes under $2,500, the majority lived in older homes which they bought or rented. The Senate Committee on Education and Labor in June, 1935, estimated a need for over 7 million new houses during the decades ahead, a figure others believed to be less than half the total needed.[2] The older houses, many of them 70 or 80 years old, had stood through several generations of wear, each successive wave of inhabitants, following their original owners, viewing the structures as stopping off places on their way to better accommodations once their economic condition improved.

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[2] Wood, 108, 109; William C. McCloy, <u>Uncle Sam as Landlord: How the Housing Program is Actually Working Out</u> [published by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, P.W. 61719] (Washington, 1936), 5.

Thus regarded as second- or third-hand by their inhabitants, in a land where people were fascinated by that which was new, and regarded primarily as sources of income by their owners, these houses withstood the wear and neglect only because of the soundness of the original construction. In time, foundations and walls cracked and rats invaded, but the city fathers, interested in industry, concerned about sanitation in the new subdivisions, and perceiving progress in terms of more public utilities, buildings, and parks, neglected the housing conditions in older neighborhoods as did everyone else.

The blighted areas of American cities seemed on the way to becoming unfit for human habitation; the slums already had arrived. James Ford wrote that any area of deteriorated housing in which there was "poor upkeep of houses and premises" was a blighted district. The National Municipal League

added that the "consequent decline or stagnation

of development and loss to community prosperity

and taxable values" made each such area a potential

slum.[3]   The slum, a wasting disease of the city,

was regarded as a section where the conditions of

life were of such a "squalid and wretched character,"

because of "dilapidation, obsolescense, overcrowding

...lack of ventilation, light or sanitary facilities"

as to endanger the "health, safety or morals of its

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[3] James Ford, Slums and Housing, 2 vol. (Cambridge,
Mass., 1936), 11; See also Model City Charter of
the National Municipal League, quoted by Mabel L.
Walker in Urban Blight and Slums (Cambridge, Mass.,
1938), 5; The United States Housing Act of 1937
defined slum: "The term 'slum' means any area
where dwellings predominate which, by reason of
dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or
design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation
facilities, or any combination of these factors,
are detrimental to safety, health, or morals." The
United States Housing Act as Amended, Washington,
1938, 2.

inhabitants."[4]

Late in 1933 the Maryland State Advisory Board of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works called together in Baltimore a committee on housing. Many city departments along with several religious groups, utility companies, the Baltimore Criminal Justice Commission and the Sociology Department of Goucher College cooperated to survey the inner city's residential conditions. In a preliminary report to the Public Works Administration Housing Division in Washington, the committee argued strongly that Baltimore

> contains a ring of blighted residential tracts of the most serious importance

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[4] Walker, 3. The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, "Report of the Committee on Blighted Areas and Slums," 1, Housing Officials Yearbook [published by the National Association of Housing Officials] (1936), 243. See Wood, 3.

and size. The center of the city is
almost completely girdled with a belt
of property, which, unless rehabilitated,
will remain an increasingly serious
menace to all properties inside and out-
side of this ring...[5]

From this blighted belt the committee selected six

areas covering between 35 to 60 acres each which

were especially in need of clearance and rebuilding.

The residents were predominantly, though not exclu-

sively, Negroes; one fifth or more of the former

residents had moved out during the preceding decade.

An area designated as Slum Number One,[6] the lower

half of census tract 8-7 (bordering Johns Hopkins

Hospital on the south), had the highest tuberculosis

rate in the city and two thirds of its houses were

rated as bad.[7] The committee, hoping some federal

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[5] Wood, 53, 54.

[6] Morning Sun, 17 June, 1937.

[7] Wood, 55.

funds would be obtained for a slum clearance program, did not reveal the conditions in Slum Number One because, they said, they feared that real estate speculators might take advantage of the situation. Since few cared, the secret was easy to keep.

In October, 1938, Gerald Johnson pointed out Baltimore's persisting apathy. Owners were encouraging the spread of blight by allowing property which surrounded the center of town to decay. Baltimore's "drowsy tranquility," he wrote, was "at increasingly frequent intervals... punctuated by a roar as some house in one of the blighted areas collapsed into a pile of bricks and rubble."[8] While Johnson's hyperbole was extreme, the point of his observation was sound. He charged that the spread of blight was caused

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[8] Evening Sun, 27 Oct., 1938.

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by the politician who would not pass a planning
or zoning law with teeth; by the real estate
owners in Baltimore who pursued the policy of
"rugged individualism"; and by the average Balti-
morean who had adopted an attitude that a house
which falls down in some other part of town meant
nothing to him.[9] Proud of the fact that in Balti-
more most people owned their homes (50.3% according
to the 1930 census, a figure not nearly as excep-
tional as many believed) and still accepting the
popular myth that the city had no real slums, the
citizens were complacent and content.

The preceding March, one Baltimorean had
called for action, but his audience was limited
and his suggestions went unheeded. Earl R. Moses,
Professor of Sociology at Morgan State College,
writing in the College Bulletin, noted that Balti-

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[9] Ibid.