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*To Resurrect a Community:
Reparations for Urban Renewal and Displacement in Lakeland*



Navahoe Street, Lakeland District, College Park, Maryland circa 1978.

Hidden beneath the new buildings and manicured lawns of Navahoe Street in College Park, Maryland, a story lies veiled by time. Once, this street held generational homes owned by Black residents of College Park's Lakeland District – a community which thrived throughout segregation, serving as a hub for Black life in Prince George's County. "It was a very interconnected community," reminisces Maxine Gross, a longtime Lakeland Resident and the Director of the Lakeland Community Heritage Project:

These people who were cooks and housekeepers and ditch-diggers... were able to make home[s] for themselves... You had cultural activities and social clubs... [they] took a building and showed movies, and took another building and made a tavern, and another building and opened up a small store, put in a lunch counter and a jukebox... these are the things that were put together to make a community. (Gross Apr. 2023)

Then, in the 1970's, a federally-funded urban renewal plan took root in Lakeland, intending to solve the district's flooding issues and deteriorating housing. Instead, the project destroyed two-thirds of Lakeland's generational homes and community buildings, displacing its residents and stamping out the tight-knit community's unique cohesiveness and independence ("History of Lakeland"). Several years following renewal, numerous lonely cement steps were left, beckoning nonexistent street goers to once-proud houses now lost to time.

Imagine spending most of your life walking down the street – driving down the street – seeing the homes of your neighbors, and then those homes are demolished, and those steps are left, and over time you watch weeds grow up and time go on and the steps sit there. (Gross Apr. 2023)

Not much is left of the community Lakeland once harbored, except for a hidden mural I stumbled upon under Baltimore Avenue depicting figures and symbols from Lakeland's past, struggling to tell of the area's history.

In recent years, Gross has attempted to preserve the community's history through the Lakeland Community Heritage Project, but, she says, "we're now two generations past the folks that left, and it's getting harder and harder." "My hope would be," elaborates Gross, "to be able to remember what was here, but also to build what remains into something that people can call home."

Scenarios like this are not uncommon in the United States. Throughout US history thousands of towns and cities like College Park have employed urban renewal/revitalization projects – infrastructural redevelopment in impoverished or decaying areas of cities such as gentrification or highway development – to displace minority residents in favor of rich, White gentry. This injustice is not just relegated to the past; inequitable development continues to plague US cities – hundreds of thousands of minority individuals have been displaced in the twenty-first century alone – and the impacts of past projects have left ongoing "physical, economic, and psychological barriers" on millions of affected residents (Archer 1260). In College Park, racial geographic divides shaped by renewal persist today, worsened by housing pressure from the University of Maryland. While the town recently acknowledged its unjust actions in Lakeland – forming a Restorative Justice Commission to spearhead reparations – there currently exist few equity-based restrictions on new developments, leaving residents vulnerable to rampant gentrification backed by two-billion dollars in new investments (Bernard; Farrell).

In this paper, I will argue for viable courses of action College Park can take to address past instances of predatory development/revitalization and prevent such harms in future. The city must work with members of the Lakeland community to increase awareness of the issue, preserve Lakeland's history, and carefully deliberate on the impacts of new development projects. Additionally, in order to restore the Lakeland district to a livable area for new families, College Park should direct some of its investments towards disadvantaged residents, funding low-income housing rather than apartment complexes intended for students. Infusing Lakeland with resources and opportunities would help the community rebuild itself.

I will start by presenting more specific information about what occurred in Lakeland, reviewing several traits of harmful renewal which College Park shares with many towns and cities on a national level. Then I will discuss the underlying causes and effects of the issue, laying the groundwork for building potential solutions. Moving into actionable directives for the present day, I will confirm the importance of preserving Lakeland's history and establish a precedent for what beneficial development could look like – and why it requires strong communication and new systems/restrictions. Finally, I will acknowledge and refute arguments for the benefits of renewal/gentrification.

According to Maxine Gross, Lakeland residents were reluctant to join the municipality of College Park in the early 1900s, harboring concerns that “the municipality would be used as a tool to take Lakelanders’ land;” Lakeland residents lacked the financial and political power to resist such a play (Gross Apr. 2023). Nevertheless, Lakeland became a part of College Park, and continued to thrive throughout most of the century, developing a school for African Americans in Prince George's County, businesses, community buildings, and churches (“History of Lakeland”). However, many of Lakeland's low-income, self-built homes were in poor condition,

especially with frequent flooding in the area. “When you put all of these things together,” explains Gross, “you come up with a rationale for demolition.” Beginning in the 1970s, College Park branded much of Lakeland as dilapidated, erecting signs labeling it the “Lakeland Urban Renewal Area” (Bernard). This follows a common tactic for revitalization projects: by representing low-income minority communities as “slums,” developers justify displacement as “slum clearance” (Archer 1276; Hernandez). For a time, the Federal Housing Administration even used race in determining which residential areas were hazardous “slums” in need of redevelopment, enabling federally-funded displacement (Hernandez). Using eminent domain, College Park seized Lakeland homes, promising resettlement in new single-family homes after renewal (“History of Lakeland”; Gross Apr. 2023). After delays and minimal communication from town officials to Lakeland residents, “single-family homes were ultimately replaced with high-rise apartment buildings and townhomes” intended for new, richer residents and students (Lakeland Community Heritage Project 120). As a result, many Lakeland residents were forced out of the area.

“There’s evidence that the University was still trying to gain access to land to meet their needs,” says Gross – pressure which influenced what was built following renewal. These underlying motives – profit and expansion – are consistent with many revitalization projects in the US, making them incapable of serving low-income inhabitants. A 2020 study on the effects of gentrification and urban renewal in Baltimore, Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia supports this perspective, finding rampant displacement of mainly Black and other minority residents resulted (Robinson et al. 484). Various forms of development have consistently enabled the “destruction and isolation of Black communities,” intentionally removing unwanted minority

residents or failing to acknowledge the harms they face (Archer 1273; Stermon and Lukinbeal; Essoka; Wells).

This kind of renewal-based displacement has various persistent effects on an area: racial geographic divides form through a lack of financial mobility and inadequate housing for displaced minority residents, and formerly cohesive communities are dissolved, their history and traditions faded with time (Archer 1281; Stermon and Lukinbeal; Niel Sept. 2020). In essence, segregation is enforced by the built environment. Lakeland's high-density subsidized (government-controlled) housing became the only option for many Lakelanders resettling after renewal – a tremendous shift for a community which took pride in owning generational family homes (Gross Apr. 2023). By destroying valued buildings (homes, community buildings, businesses, and schools) and creating physical barriers between former neighbors, racist developments cut “the heart and soul out of thriving Black communities” (Archer 1260). On an individual level, renewal projects degrade the self-respect of displaced persons: cities prioritize the interests and opportunities of new, richer gentry over low-income inhabitants, making the original residents feel unwanted and inferior (Wells 823). In other words, renewal imposes a racial hierarchy with White developers and residents at the top (Archer 1297).

In many ways, Lakeland's renewal follows a similar pattern to other renewal projects across the country. Cities justify displacement by labeling minority communities as “slums.” Then, whether intentionally or not, low-income minority residents are almost always displaced in favor of attracting more profitable, White residents. Any culture/connectedness these communities once harbored hardly survives, and housing pressure caused by displacement forces impacted residents into oft-unhealthy areas.

In order to assuage the sense of loss for the community that once thrived here and prevent more harmful developments in future, it is imperative that College Park increase its efforts to preserve and share Lakeland's history. Lakelanders like Maxine Gross view the history the Lakeland Community Heritage Project aims to preserve as an important source of strength and pride. Yet, despite decades of efforts, few in College Park know about this story. Partnerships between the University of Maryland, the city of College Park, and the Lakeland Community Heritage Project have resulted in the creation of a Lakeland digital archive and the mural beneath Baltimore Avenue – installments which, though laudable, must be sought out to be discovered. By funding new, more visible creative projects to convey Lakeland's history – perhaps a larger, above ground mural – more people will learn about the issue. Awareness of past and ongoing injustice is essential, acting to prevent developers from “color-blind renewal” – enabled by strategic forgetting of historically harmful development – and forcing developers to consider the human costs of their work (Triece). The University of Maryland – an educational powerhouse – may be able to further raise awareness, allowing students to propose creative solutions going forward. Notably, Lakelanders have served the university for decades, but the university has failed to benefit the community in return (Gross Mar. 2023).

The pieces of Lakeland history being preserved and shared also give the issue human perspective; rather than seeing hundreds of thousands of displaced minority residents as just a number, people can better empathize with impacted individuals and understand the urgent need for reparations.

That's a big reason that we made [the] decision to do the digital archive. It's easy to talk about – two thirds of the community was demolished... But when you're able to look at a number of photographs: [these are] some of the things that made up the fiber of this

community, these are the faces of some of the people [who] were displaced and this is what their homes looked like. (Gross Apr. 2023)

Perhaps most importantly, new efforts to share Lakeland history restore some pride and self-respect to a community stamped out by the city – a group of people once told they were inferior by federally-funded renewal.

Some Lakelanders remain apprehensive, however, about College Park's attempts at restitution. To them, "any attempt to try and make up for the damage done and the pain caused is futile... No matter what... the community cannot be completely restored to what it was" (Niel Sept. 2020). Others fear a repeat of what happened half a century ago. In the past, however, decisions were made without input from community members; this lack of communication allowed the city to build housing unsuitable for previous residents rather than single-family homes as promised. Going forward, it is essential that communication with Lakeland residents is a top priority for College Park. The recently formed College Park Restorative Justice Commission is currently attempting to amplify input from Lakelanders, which may help steer the city from further damaging the community (Wilson). However, the committee has no control over developers in the city. Potentially harmful high-rise student apartments continue to be built in the Lakeland District without much conversation about their potential impacts on residents. As of yet, the city has failed to conflate the constant development with promises of restorative justice, opening opportunity for further harmful gentrification.

In order to combat this, College Park and Prince George's County should support their reparation goals with restrictions on future developments, requiring careful analysis of impacts on local low-income residents. During deliberation, developers and officials would have to determine who they are building for – new, more lucrative residents or original members of the

community. This does not mean every new project must be intended to benefit low-income residents, but the motivations for each development must be made clear. If a project is aimed at attracting gentry within a vulnerable low-income area, more scrutiny is necessitated. These discussions should also include input from current residents, as each project shapes their home in new ways. Ideally, such civil rights policies are enforced on a federal level. According to Deborah Archer, an Associate Professor of Clinical Law and Co-Faculty Director of the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at New York University, “current laws... are inadequate to ensure that advancing racial equity is the paramount consideration as communities embark on new development projects” (1304). Archer suggests that, prior to approving redevelopment projects, policymakers employ racial equity impact studies – “systematic, comprehensive, and holistic review[s] of how racial and ethnic groups will be impacted by... project[s]” (1321). College Park does not need to wait for nationwide federal change to begin such analyses; the city and its surrounding County have an opportunity to set an example by implementing local policy changes. To start, however, the city must give Lakeland historic designation, increasing restrictions on new developments to promote the preservation of the area, while ensuring housing costs do not increase.

It is worth considering nearby Hyattsville, MD as a case study. In Hyattsville, there are clear racial divides: the Hispanic community, Black community, and White community are each in separate sectors of the city. Notably, much of the White sector contains hallmarks of gentrification: clean streets lined by hip, new (expensive) businesses and colorful apartment complexes, dutifully referred to as the “Arts District.” From a glance it is trivial to determine which part of the city receives the most capital (decidedly not the rows of single-floor brick houses which house Hyattsville’s Hispanic community, or other non-White areas). While the

mechanisms which formed these divides are complex and nuanced, the lack of support for low-income, minority areas is apparent. Similarly to College Park, a lot of money is flowing into Hyattsville, but mainly to the benefit of new, richer residents. There is some merit in areas like this “Arts District:” they bring in business and profit, which are attractive and useful to cities like Hyattsville. However, if a city’s main goal is to support its residents, it cannot achieve this by replacing them. The harms of this type of development could be lessened by local policies encouraging the flow of money into low-income areas rather than an expanding gentrified area.

At the crux of the solution, therefore, is the idea of infusing low-income residents with some of the resources and capital that typically go towards attracting gentry:

Revitalization in debilitated areas should stress upgrading local resources (people and infrastructure) to produce more viable and attractive neighborhoods. (Essoka 311)

This is a difficult task to accomplish when most development projects are profit-driven, and any changes that are made must be made with immense care. However, there is some precedent for governments encouraging equity-based development. The state of Maryland has shown a desire to promote healthy development with the 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act (“Planning Legislation”). The act enabled Smart Growth legislation, which includes policies to protect sensitive areas and, in rural areas, direct growth to the existing population, among other goals (“Planning Legislation”). Federally, as well, several policies have been implemented by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to “address issues that emerge from revitalization efforts [and] alleviate displacement's role in further marginalization of low-income minorities” (Robinson et al. 477). These include identifying Empowerment Zones and Opportunity Zones – “financially neglected” neighborhoods which would benefit from revitalization – where social justice for residents must be adhered to; in these areas, businesses

and developers are incentivized to hire local low-income residents through tax credits (Robinson et al. 477). The current states of College Park and Hyattsville, however, suggest that these policies are not comprehensive or entirely effective.

In order to truly “revitalize” Lakeland, the city which destroyed it must take tangible steps towards rebuilding it. Revitalizing the community – making it the home Maxine Gross and many Lakelanders envision – does not require new apartment buildings. Revitalizing the community requires a focus on supporting low-income residents. As the main parties responsible for the displacement of Lakelanders, College Park/Prince George’s County must put action behind words like “reparations” and “restorative justice.” Lakeland thrived as a prejudiced, hateful world closed in on its borders, and to spite that world they made art, and community, and song; they played baseball; they came together in prayer; they served each other; they served Black Americans throughout Prince George’s County; they resisted hate with love; and they gave themselves a *voice*. For far too long that voice had been silenced, and the voice they now have is not allowed to be loud enough. The Restorative Justice Commission does not have enough authority, when equity considerations *must* be of utmost concern. College Park is a lucrative town, but it is a *broken* town. As a result of renewal, worse-off Lakelanders were put in subsidized housing alongside transient students:

If you take the vast majority of the folks who were known to be struggling and put them in one place, you make a struggling community... [you] remove any prospect of the community being healthy (Gross Apr. 2023)

By funding low-income housing and providing residents the opportunity for home ownership, College Park can bring back some semblance of the community which once existed in Lakeland.

With a rejuvenated voice, Lakeland can employ the same perseverance which they used to avoid destruction for nearly seven decades. It is possible that the community can circumvent the need for renewal by outside parties as it rebuilds. Other communities have displayed this potential:

During the period 1850-1970 the black migrant alley residents of Washington, DC ‘used their primary groups and folk experiences to create strategies which enabled them to survive the often harsh and difficult urban experience.’ (Zucchi 322)

The same occurred in the North End of Boston: the area’s minority residents pulled it from its view as a “slum” in need of revitalization to a healthy and culturally rich sector of the city (Jacobs). In order to begin the process of intra-district renewal, Lakeland still needs policy change and support from the city of College Park.

There may exist opposition to the proposed directives, especially if such practices reach fruition in the town. They would likely be viewed as roadblocks for the city’s progress, drawing ire from investors, developers, and city officials seeking to make College Park the “greatest college town.” Renewal/gentrification does provide several benefits to a city, bringing economic security, increasing safety, and reducing pollution/enabling sustainability efforts (Chen et al.; Webb et al.; “What is Urban Renewal?”; “Urban Renewal and the Community”). While these benefits often occur, “disadvantaged residents who occupied areas prior to redevelopment are seldom the individuals who occupy it after the redevelopment” (Essoka 303). As cities “improve” through renewal projects, they do so at the expense of underrepresented and marginalized individuals:

Gentrification breeds inequity by inhibiting economically disadvantaged peoples from enjoying the benefits of neighborhood upgrading. It denies ethnic minorities and the

economically disadvantaged those redevelopment benefits of better employment opportunities, upgraded housing stock, community safety, an increased tax base for social services, and general neighborhood upgrading. Regardless of the low-wage service industry and retail labor opportunities that may result from residential gentrification, the process is regressive for disenfranchised communities. (Essoka 311)

The benefits of gentrification are outweighed by harms to low-income minority communities – members of society we can no longer reconcile pushing aside. When these renewal processes are implemented without care for prior residents, they are strictly unethical and unjust. Extensive deliberation on new developments may slow down a city’s progress, but it is worth the communities it will save.

Maxine Gross understands why many Lakelanders are skeptical of College Park’s recent attempts at reparation: “if I dare to hope,” she questions, “am I just opening myself again for hurt?” The fight is no easier for her:

There are a lot of days when I have very little hope, but I feel like I have a commitment and a responsibility to try. (Gross Apr. 2023)

College Park’s current attempts at providing reparations for the damage done to Lakeland are promising. However, the city and Prince George’s County continue to eagerly invite the same kinds of developments which displaced Lakelanders half a century ago. College Park has reached an important turning point: the city can continue to perpetuate infrastructural oppression and prolong the pains of Lakeland residents, or it can use this opportunity to become an example for cities across the country, stemming a path towards a more equitable future. By extending and amplifying Lakeland’s voice – spreading awareness and history – and taking tangible steps

towards regulating development and supporting low-income residents in future, College Park can help Lakeland reach its vision of being a stronger, healthier, and more inclusive community. For the moment, any individual can help highlight this injustice within College Park and in the country as a whole. Observe and inquire – consider what has shaped communities, who benefits from urban renewal, who is pushed aside and tread upon, and how infrastructure has placed shackles upon the disadvantaged – then share what is discovered. Spreading awareness and discussing the histories of impacted groups can bring power and pride back to residents who have not yet received justice for the deaths of their communities, as well as prevent further injustice.

Several years following Lakeland’s renewal, Navahoe Street held only ghosts – shadows of formerly bright and boisterous homes. The last remnants of those dead houses – their front steps, their grave markers, portals to nowhere – cried unheard of a forgotten past, cries which reverberated through time, until an opportunity came to restore life to Lakeland. With care, Lakeland will no longer be a sepulchre or a land of ghosts, but a home.

“Our Lovely Town, O Lakeland Town

Of Maples, Elms and Oaks.

A quiet town, a peaceful town,

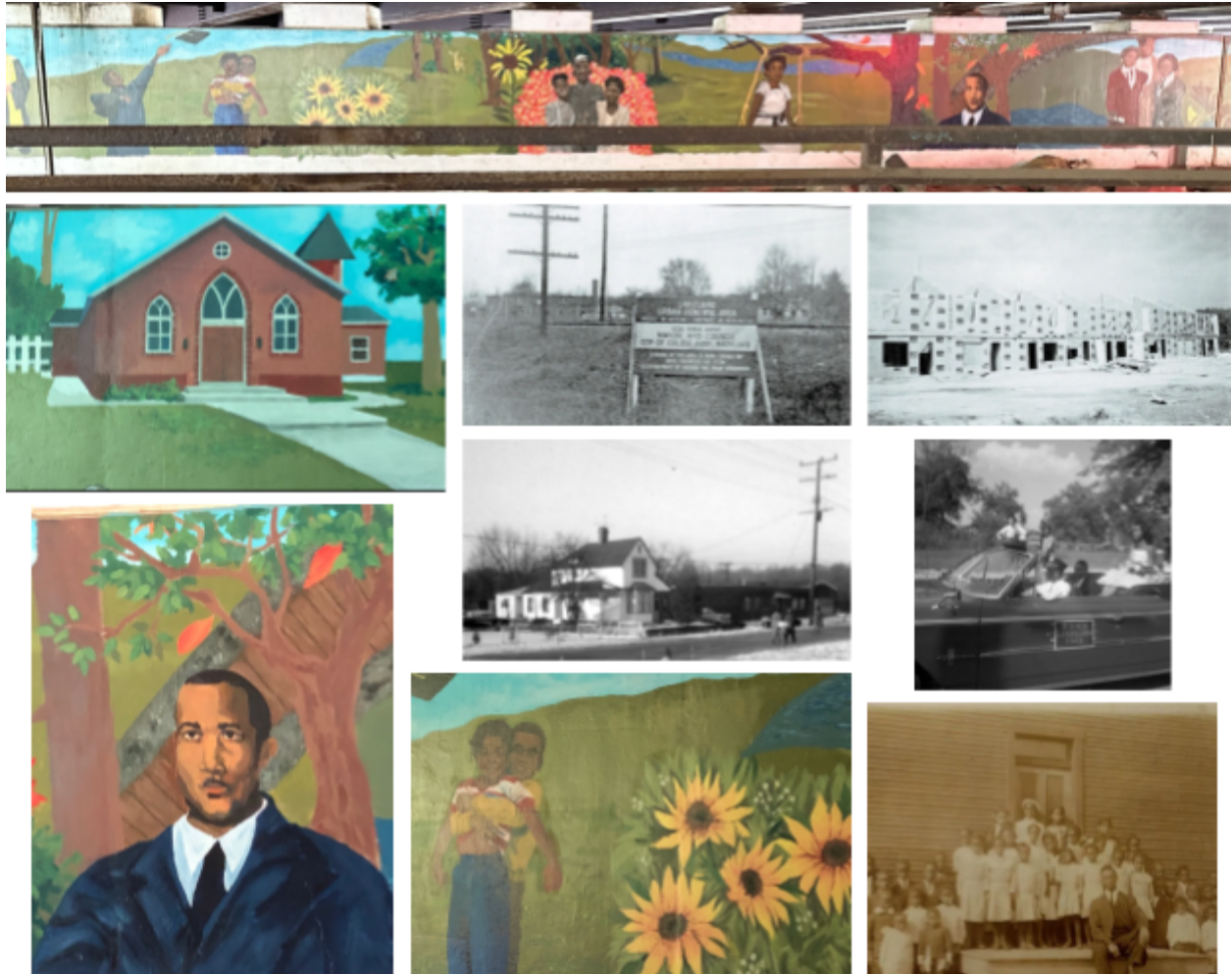
Of Kind and gentle folks.

Our fathers stood with strength

And faith, to make this township stand.

We love this strand of quiet land.”

-Shirley Randall Anderson, Lakelander (“History of Lakeland”)



*A Collection of Photographs from Lakeland, including parts of the mural
 "A Path Forward" (Lakeland Community Heritage Project).*

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