

Belmont University

Belmont Digital Repository

Belmont University Research Symposium
(BURS)

Special Events

Spring 2023

Property Pillagers: Effects of Dirty Urbanism

Chase Wilson

Belmont University, chase.wilson@bruins.belmont.edu

Kayli Clark

Belmont University, Kayli.clark@bruins.belmont.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.belmont.edu/burs>



Part of the [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Infrastructure Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons](#), [Urban Studies Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wilson, Chase and Clark, Kayli, "Property Pillagers: Effects of Dirty Urbanism" (2023). *Belmont University Research Symposium (BURS)*. 518.

<https://repository.belmont.edu/burs/518>

This Oral Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Events at Belmont Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Belmont University Research Symposium (BURS) by an authorized administrator of Belmont Digital Repository. For more information, please contact repository@belmont.edu.

Kayli Clark & Chase Wilson

Podcast Script:

Property Pillagers: Effects of Dirty Urbanism

INTRODUCTION (~0:00-1:30)

Intro Music Plays then-43:25-44 the highway act radio for intro

C- Hi I'm Chase Wilson.

K- And I'm Kayli Clark.

C- And Welcome to Conversations with KC. The college podcast by college students for college students!

K- So that gave us a small introduction for our topic today. You came up with a great term that I think everyone should hear.

C- Yeah! We were going to discuss American Urbanism, but not only that. American Urbanism as broad as it is, and there are many aspects of it that have affected society. Through the lens of social and cultural justice, we might notice that certain urban developments in America have negatively impacted targeted groups like minorities and low-income communities.

K- Right. A few examples of this are gentrification and expropriation. The main idea of gentrification is kicking out the current residents of an area, developing the property, which in turn raises the property values and home prices so current residents are forced to leave to underdeveloped communities.

C- This is where I got that term you were talking about earlier: urban development that targets a specific community with the intention to disrupt their quality of life, I consider to be "Dirty Urbanism." I have a good example of what I mean like Jefferson Street in Nashville, TN. A prominent, culturally rich Black community in North Nashville had economic success as well as a prosperous music industry that was stripped away by the construction of the I-65 interstate right through the street.

K- Situations like North Nashville's have occurred across America and to further understand the concept of "Dirty Urbanism," we're going to focus on developments of highways, like on Jefferson, to discuss the effects of these infrastructures.

STOP

HISTORY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT: ~1:30-6:30

K- First, we should define the motives and find patterns of developments. In the 1950's, '60's, and 70's, interstate construction was booming and 48,000 new miles were paved country-wide. Space for all this development was obviously needed (Stromberg of Vox Media).

C- Here's where whole neighborhoods were demolished or isolated, in order to produce that needed room. But how and who decides what land the interstates crush beneath them, is the next question.

K- It's a combination of things. The local governments are incentivized to house a freeway through them by larger government funding - in generous amounts. In some cases, the federal government was covering as much as 90% of construction costs (Person and Sullivan on "U.S. Freeways Flattened Black Neighborhoods Nationwide.").

C- And that's part of the issue because the people funding the project or associated higher ups are far removed from the situation and community, yet are the ones getting to make the decisions affecting that community.

K- And no one can even argue with them when they're giving so much money.

STOP

C- RIGHT. Also in some cases highway engineers are running the show, which you might think for a second would be a healthier alternative. But they are trained for efficiency only, and are not likely concerned with how they might disrupt urban fabrics. Francesca Ammon in her book, *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* further explains this concept. She writes that states plotted new routes to maximize federal funds and that highway construction moved numerous homes and new housing or assistance was not guaranteed to those who were moved. This led to growing revolts against said construction.

K- This article I read on *Vox* described contributing factors as "a lack of municipal foresight" - just like you were saying, the people with the influence - engineers and federal governments alike - are not close to the situation - and additionally the article noted "outright institutional racism" (Stromberg).

C- Journalist Joseph Stromberg writes, multi-ethnic and a majority black communities were looked at as "urban blight"; people saw it as a positive for their city image to remove such communities. Highways were a racially motivated tool and convenient justification (Stromberg).

K- "Black people have had this really complicated, complex relationship with transportation" (Chang and Chakrabarti WBUR radio). "Using public transportation was a reminder for black people of their legal and social inferiority" (Chang and Chakrabarti). One example I'm sure we all think of is Rosa Parks. **STOOOPPPPPPPPP**

C- In a "limited way", the car on the roads and highways presented somewhat of an escape from the tension with public transportation - but this was an opportunity white people didn't support and had to taint immediately (Chang and Chakrabarti).

K- And with integration on the rise, new highway construction becomes just the tool they were searching for - a loophole for continuing segregation and racist practices.

C- Some highways followed original racial zoning boundary lines or became a deliberate obstruction between white and expanding black neighborhoods - in addition of course to the method of ripping directly through the hearts of black communities.

K- We intentionally refer to the freeways as "tools" because it is disturbing how selective the path choosing really is. I read about this urban historian named Raymond Mohl who did a study on new freeway route locations. He actually found *multiple* occasions where majority black neighborhoods were targeted when they were *not even in the most logical route available*. Not only are we talking about avoiding any harm to white neighborhoods, but ignoring open and unused space! (Person and Sullivan on "U.S. Freeways Flattened Black Neighborhoods Nationwide.")

STOOOOPPPPPP

Explain Dirty Urbanism/Past Examples: (~6:30-12:00)

10:44-11:28 clip to integrate: "one of the examples of key african american commercial streets history destroyed etc....."

C- And those stories are what I consider to be primary examples of "dirty urbanism". Where we have infrastructure that improves city function but at the expense of others. Historically, minority communities have been affected the most by this and have even devastated entire communities. We wanted to focus on highways because there is a discussion to be had about trade-offs as well.

K- One that stuck out to me was Overtown in Miami that I-95 sliced through. Even though it was a thriving music and business hub, it was chosen instead of an abandoned railway not far off.

C- It doesn't matter since it's black prosperity. I know Overtown was similar to Jefferson Street right here in Nashville with its music scene and famous visitors.

K- Absolutely, and speaking of Jefferson Street, the swerve I-40 makes in order to wound that community is insane. You definitely should look at the curvature of I-40 on a map sometime right around the North Nashville area - you'll see for yourself how noticeable it is.

C- The Montgomery, Alabama ordeal where I-85 was routed through the neighborhoods Black Civil Rights leaders were known to live in is a stand out for me, too. The other option was literally *vacant land* and they still chose a black community.

STOOOP

K- On the topic of that, I think it's worth noting this offensive dynamic that repeats itself of whites valuing land and environment over black livelihoods. As you just said, black community damage was preferable over vacant land. There were cases, pre-highway construction, where groups were protesting the build - majority unsuccessful. The few and far between that had success were marketed as fighting for *environmental justice* and *parks* - not the communities...(King)

C- That reminds me of another example that doesn't have to do with highways, but I still classify it as "Dirty Urbanism": Central Park. It's kind of ironic because it's a public park that offers greenspace, but the development is not at all natural landscape and it demolished what was known as Seneca Village. It was home to mainly Black Americans but also Irish and German immigrants - all removed from their homes as they were destroyed to make space.

K- Yeah, it's just wrong how the government so badly wanted to clear the way for the new park to create open greenspace, which they determined would help New York's deteriorating environment, but that somehow mattered more than the lives and families that already lived there - which, by the way, was only five acres out of the *eight-hundred forty-three* acre park.

STOPP

**insert* 47:15-21 stepped aside and let community fail*

Lets take a Deeper dive into the story of jefferson street specifically

C- We hear about what it used to be. Ed kindall from the documentary on jefferson st: Facing North recalls it as "such a vibrant street that had a lot of businesses and homes" "kind of like a

little town within the town". every type of service you needed in one place. "85% of the most skilled people during slavery were slaves" and once freed they were more than skilled and capable enough to start up their own functional community - which is exactly what happened especially as racism continued and blacks weren't welcomed in white places.

K- The documentary mentions how Limited the information recorded on the history of jefferson street and ed kindall wanted to fix that before it was too late. A quote from the movie is "You cant tell the story of nashville to the world without telling that story" except we do and we continue to. Because it is a darker side of things and was done on purpose, with malicious intent. It's the common trend with history too, we are always whitewashing it. it's christopher columbus, it's native americans, it's slavery. Pick and choose to white benefit so it doesn't seem as bad as it actually was. No exception here we continue to do it.

C- Over 300 homes bulldozed and even bombed to clear room for the interstate. Understandably the jefferson st community felt secluded from the rest of nashville. To make matters worse they were hit by the 2020 tornado, too, and didn't receive the same media coverage or support as other areas were. They actually talk in facing north about how hard it was to feel like not only was mainstream nashville against them but mother nature too.

STOP

K- Tornado devastation was a catalyst for gentrification moving into the area. Houses couldn't afford to be fixed and would sit there, lots selling for cheap snatched up quick for new houses and developments, skyrocketing property taxes. The more new and quote unquote better houses pop up the higher the expense of living in the area gets. Another sad part is the new constructions lean toward quickness and temporariness instead of permanence, a permanence that you could feel and see in the few original houses left standing.

C- Right its terrible. New construction begins forcing out some of the original community as they can't afford the sudden increases. Super unfair and there should really be policies in place alongside the architecture to limit this. The issue is the people with the power know what they are causing and simply don't care.

K- Key community building blocks jefferson st now lacked need to be brought back. This is what the correct architecture could do for jefferson st bring back some of what its lost - its front porch culture, its options, its vibrance, its vitality.

STTOPP

Synthesize Previous Sections: (~12:00-14:00)

C- So I think that you can't discuss the history of urban development in America without mentioning "Dirty Urbanism". It's such a key component of America's development that has had a controversial history. It contributed to much of our transportation and cities now, but who has it hurt the most? Even present-day gentrification harms minority Americans. I want to believe there are ways in the future to empower instead of economically and socially devastating entire communities whilst improving our cities.

K- *opinion on the research conducted*

C- *opinion on the research conducted*

Outro: (~14:00-15:00)

Same intro music plays-

K- Collaboration is very important because cities are home to many different groups of people with different backgrounds and having enough respect for people to avoid the issues of "dirty urbanism" should be a priority. No one should be targeted or deemed disposable based on prejudices or acts of discrimination.

C- As an aspiring architect, I believe developing cities and infrastructure should always leave a positive impact on the community around the development and whoever the project is for. There is a middle ground to be reached but it starts by having conversations and understanding people's needs. Also it's in the hands of the government and developers to work together with citizens to ensure that their properties and lives are respected while reaching a goal. The opposite of "dirty urbanism" isn't "clean urbanism", the opposite is "how urbanism should be done".

STOP!!!!

53:00-09 figure out way to build community instead of just building buildings

C- Exactly! For our studio project in the spring our site was at Jefferson Street, so we interviewed people that lived there and heavily researched the history and area to be accurate and produce projects that would benefit the area and people the most.

K- If we can take these steps for a studio project, real-world developers most certainly can be more aware how their work affects others and how to collaborate if they want to build on owned property. That collaboration can lead to more success than without, and certainly less controversy.

C- We're running close on time here so this is a good spot to wrap it up! I'm chase!

K- And I'm Kayli

C- And this was Conversations with KC!

Minute show-off: 10:15-11:47

Works Cited

Ammon, Francesca Russello. *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape*. Yale University Press, 2016.

“Before Central Park: The Story of Seneca Village.” *Central Park Conservancy*,
<https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/seneca-village>.

The story of Seneca Village NY, and Central Park.*

Chang, Jonathan, and Meghna Chakrabarti. “Addressing the Racial Inequities of the Interstate Highway System.” *On Point*, WBUR, 22 June 2021,
<https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2021/06/22/addressing-the-racial-inequities-of-the-interstate-highway-system>.

This article dives deeper into how highway construction was just the vehicle white people wanted in order to continue discrimination - while conveniently avoiding unlawfulness and simultaneously being granted “funds and resources”.

“Facing North: Jefferson Street, Nashville.” *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service,
<https://www.pbs.org/show/facing-north-jefferson-street-nashville/>.

The story of Jefferson St. Nashville and I-40.*

King, Noel. “A Brief History of How Racism Shaped Interstate Highways.” *NPR*, NPR, 7 Apr. 2021,
<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/07/984784455/a-brief-history-of-how-racism-shaped-interstate-highways>.

King includes principal perspectives and details I did not find elsewhere. Highways were not only used as wedges penetrating the hearts of black communities, but as walls dividing black from white communities - as racial zoning was about to be ditched for integral neighborhoods. King also points out there have been areas successful in halting the racially motivated highway process. Most of these successes occurred because the situation was posed as environmental justice for parks (not saving black communities!).

Person, and Andy Sullivan. “U.S. Freeways Flattened Black Neighborhoods Nationwide.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 25 May 2021,
<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-freeways-flattened-black-neighborhoods-nationwide-2021-05-25/>.

This website provides harrowing examples from a study of interstate construction where minority communities were targeted when there were *more logical routes available*.

Stromberg, Joseph. "Highways Guttled American Cities - So Why Did They Build Them?" *Vox*, 14 May 2015,
<https://www.vox.com/2015/5/14/8605917/highways-interstate-cities-history>.

Stromberg answers the question in the title, noting it "involves a mix of" things including "outright institutional racism". Stromberg highlights the excuses higher ups use and proposes the selective destruction could have been prevented by influential people *if* they cared.