

Twentieth-Century RICHMOND (Silver, 1984)

General Introduction

- Planning in America is a fragmented system rather than centralized (5).
- Cities often turned to planning to secure their position relative to others (11) and to silence Black political voice rather than more egalitarian aims.
- Two themes in Richmond planning: The politics of Metropolitanism and the politics of Race (13).
- Compulsion to safeguard local prerogatives set Richmond “progressives” apart from those in other cities.
- “Urban boosters veiled their preference for a new form of enslavement behind an effort to create an improved, albeit separate, society for blacks and whites” (19).
- During “Progressive” eras, Jim Crow spread and reestablished the color line. Segregation was considered “the most widely endorsed solution to urban housing problem.”

1888 Establishment of the streetcar system and real estate investment boom of \$12M along the corridor of mass transit

1900 Urban south is coming of age with hope for the future, but still clinging to the past.

1900 Census reveals that Richmond’s population density is 16,000 people per square mile.

This is the highest population density of any city in the south at the time.

1900s “Exclusive Windsor Farms and Ginter Park streetcar subdivisions built” (37, 61).

- The image of a new and prospering south was both real and imagined and planning was an attempt to preserve image rather than further social justice (24).
- Richmond segregated housing patterns through both a consolidation of Black areas and extensive controls on further Black expansion.

1897- 1904 Richmond economy excelled in iron and tobacco (also wheat).

1900s Annexation is a point of dispute between conservatives and progressives (60, 61, and 68). Times Dispatch follows the local “Boosters” – always supporting annexation.

1900s Richmond didn’t have the same immigrant influx as NYC, but still deteriorated and caused a housing crisis, out migration of middle-class Whites, existing homes converted into low-income rental and housing becomes more racially segregated.

Early 1900s A city in transition – transportation allows for greater movement of people throughout the region (See **Early 1900s** quote below)

1902 Richmond Traction Co. merged with Richmond Railway and Electric Co. to form Virginia Passenger and Power Co. (45, 46). The company faced strikes and employed strikebreakers and broke the strike (47). The mayor at the time, Mayor Taylor, didn’t back labor and even ended the protests with troops effectively weakening *organized labor* in local politics (47, 59).

1902 Elimination of Black and much of White labor vote (54).

1904 and 1906 State government and court system still loyal to the city (62)

1907 More than 80 passenger trains arrive daily in the city of Richmond (37).

1908 Reformer Benjamin C. Marsh wanted more houses instead of roads (102).

1908 Labor vote helps oust progressive member of the administrative board (77).

1908 – 1940 The city worked on an ad hoc planning system that was very utilitarian (104).

1910 Richmond population decreased to 13,000 people per square mile.

1910 – 1940 Richmond experienced a slowly growing Black population in contrast to rapid population growth in northern cities during the great migrations (120, 121).

1911 (April) City Council extended the scope of zoning through enactment of residential segregation ordinance and in **1912 (March)** The General Assembly passed a statute allowing all cities in the state to do the same. This zoning plan was specific to individual city blocks and didn't preclude Black residence but began to prevent expansion and encourage consolidation.

1913 Labor-Progressive Coalition forms

1913 and 1919 Extreme plans for Jackson Ward destruction and redevelopment are proposed but never realized (124)

1913 – 1930 Planning "cures" during these decades make housing conditions worse (99) consistent with national trends, but leaders in Richmond were much more hesitant than elsewhere. Race relations were blamed for the deterioration of many buildings (101).

1914 Annexation campaign doubled the size of Richmond (73) and "diluted political strength of working-class" (77) by bringing in more middle-class Whites.

1914 – 1924 Real estate values doubled on Grace St. as a result of commercial development (114) and wealthy residents move out of the central city from this location.

(1915) *Hopkins v. City of Richmond* Black/White couple deemed in violation of segregation statute – segregation used to prevent miscegenation.

(1917) *Buchanan v. Warley* The court declared residential segregation unconstitutional. Interestingly, after this ruling the city then began to use a racial purity law to circumvent *Buchanan* and enforce segregation on the level of the home – you can't legally live together because you can't legally have sex with each other (112) (see **1929**).

1918 Reformed City Charter and the administrative board abolished.

1919 Planning Commission is established but never met so planning often went to engineers in the Public Works Department.

1920s-30s Conservative city council (circa **1880s**) puts progressives on defense (58).

1920 City planning in Richmond was more "city practical" than "city beautiful."

1922 Commercial district had grown five-fold (114).

1924 – 1940 Richmond ruled by Mayor J. Fulmer Bright who sought "reform through retrenchment." He pushed public retrenchment and privatism. The size of Richmond was enlarged during this period but not reformed.

Mid-1920s to late 1930s Six separate studies of the housing problems of Blacks were released (125) with no improvements made.

1925 Fifty plans for subdivision totaling 1,350 acres of land and 7.1 miles of new sewers

1927 Two-thirds of the roads in Richmond are still not paved at this time.

1929 Benjamin Beans sued the city when denied access to a house. The practice of using racial purity laws to enforce segregation is subsequently deemed unconstitutional (112).

1929 The Great Depression rekindled progressive impulse but was blocked by Mayor Bright.

1930s and 1940s In these decades, steps were taken to remedy the most pressing of concerns – housing (129).

1930 Housing stock in city (most pre-1910) deteriorating (123) and crowded in low-rent areas (115).

1931 Whites owned 9/10 of Black rental property and blamed conditions on residents themselves (127).

1933 Home Owner's Loan Corporation established – This organization staves off foreclosures, but creates a grading system that considered the presence (or even proximity) of Black residents to be the greatest detriment to a neighborhood's value (143). This policy (called "redlining") deterred investment. They believed that housing in poor (Black) areas was not worthy of private housing investment until "existing housing deterioration" had been removed (142). In fact, the local leaders *wanted* the neighborhood to ruin so that later it could be more easily destroyed (145).

1934 Housing project N. of Jackson Ward failed to gain support (134, 135).

(1935) *United States v. Certain Lands in Louisville, Kentucky* The Federal District Court established that eminent domain could be used for slum clearance and creation of low-rent housing, but that it was a state, not a federal, issue (146).

(1935) *New York City Housing Authority v. Muller* New York Supreme Court declared that slum clearance and construction of public housing served a public purpose (146).

1937 Housing Act practically equated urban redevelopment with slum clearance (210).

1938 Harland Bartholomew (see bio below) released another housing survey (141), but Bright wanted a private business solution to the housing crisis rather than a housing authority (147). Oregon Hill saved from demolition (148, 149).

1939 – 1948 Conservatives limited construction of public housing (210).

1940 Most who lived in city core at this time were just too poor to get out (29).

1940 Establishment of the Richmond Housing Authority with the election of Gordon Ambler (150) – The machine of change had been created and city leadership becomes more "progressive" with this political revolution.

Early 1940s Bartholomew began the first comprehensive approach to planning in the "long-overdue" master plan.

1940s Richmond is made up of about 20 distinct communities at this time (98).

1941 Demolition of "Apostletown" in northern Jackson Ward (soon to be Gilpin Court)

1942 The creation of Gilpin Court housing complex. Most displaced people either couldn't afford the public housing or considered public housing stigmatized (153).

1943 Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance led to a segregation of uses and protection of single-family homes, but underwent a major revision in the 1950s to include Black housing (208).

1946 City planners finish comprehensive, long-range plan (160), but city leaders were hesitant to implement it. Bartholomew sided with the boosters except in his desire to limit city growth. The 1946 Comp. Plan *emphasized central city and a check on sprawl* (164), redevelopment efforts to grow the CBD. Emphasis placed on neighborhoods to ensure "permanency" (171), but did not address racial differences (174) and lacked good criteria for neighborhood assessment. Planners emphasized segregation of uses (Called Euclidian zoning after court case originating in Euclid, Ohio) and removal of housing in CBD area.

Four Pillars of this plan: 1. Civic Center, 2. Strengthened zoning ordinance, 3. Neighborhood redevelopment strategy, and 4. Restructured and enlarged street system (183, 184).

Central business district and cars are seen as most important (185) but these are conflicting desires: One seeks a centralized place for work while the other allows for sprawling residential development.

1947 City charter revision proposed.

1948 Revised City Charter accepted – abolished the 32-member bicameral city council, the ward system, and the City Democratic Committee in favor of a 9-member city council *elected at large*, appointed a city manager and consolidated power (56, 178). Opponents of this system noted that the RIC/PET Turnpike had been blocked by the bicameral system (179). Black residents voted overwhelmingly in favor. Progressives restructured government with the perspective of “Greater Richmond” and used the argument of “efficiency” to justify government involvement (58). There was forty years of built up pressure as the city languished (180) and fear of post-war economic collapse created desire for change (182).

1949, November 25 Richmond's electric trolley service terminated.

1949 Housing Act equated redevelopment with more than just a means to redo deteriorated, inner-city areas (211). But in Richmond the debate focused on whether redevelopment was a public or private duty; also, local or federal.

1950 Federal money allocated for slum clearance and housing survey (mainly used in Jackson Ward).

1950s RIC debated whether renewal should be for housing or commercial expansion (258).

1950s Carver was the only urban renewal project in this decade mostly as a result of a “failure of nerve” on the part of city leadership.

1951 June 13 A public referendum prevented a highway plan (now I-95/I-64) and the battle over the location became a test of political strength in the newly created city council (188).

1952 Gamble Hill revitalization plan (215) thrown out (217) along with many neighborhood and preservation redevelopment projects. The Gamble Hill project would have destroyed 30 housing units and created 600 (219). Redevelopment becomes a tool for commercial/industrial construction as well as housing.

1953, August 24 City Council votes to create the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike Authority. This action shifted the decision to the general assembly where the plan quickly passed (192). This move prevented another referendum and ignored a petition of 400 signatures. Local officials cited expense of purchasing industrial property (utilitarian engineers) compared to cheap residential property. RTD writer realizes that Black residents might begin to move into the suburbs then homes are destroyed (194). Whitcomb Court and Fairfield Court (894 units) created and instantly stigmatized.

1955 The Richmond/Petersburg Turnpike is inevitable now but the primary question is still whether it will help or hurt downtown business (202).

1955, January – August 1957 Jackson Ward and much of the city is crushed by the construction of the Turnpike and 7,000 people (10% of the Black population) are displaced. In the new City Council, the Black citizens had elected a monster and a machine. J. Fulmer Bright was a “fierce opponent” of the highway plan (185, 187).

1959 Beginning of Carver Redevelopment process and the removal of 400 homes and 500 families (219). Also, talks of possible Richmond/Henrico merger begin (230). Mosby Court is created in the East End to satisfy Whites on the Southside (264).

1959, January Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority submits the City Planning Commission a 10-year plan for slum removal and redevelopment (259). The neighborhood of Fulton is put under scrutiny despite a tradition of home ownership and community (259, 260).

1959 Richmond delegation visits Norfolk and learned of the city's tenacious emphasis on redevelopment (265). This competition spurs desire for redevelopment and CBD growth.

1960 Census – There was a net loss in population of 11,000 people (decrease of 30,000 Whites and increase of 19,000 Blacks – see Appendix B).

1960s Richmond initiated four urban redevelopment projects totaling about \$100M.

1960s City/county consolidation failed because there was no crisis or urgency (238). Also, Henrico in the 1960s no longer desires city status, but would rather compete (235). The issue of race was prevalent, but not always addressed. The Richmond First Club had an attitude of “we need to solve the Black problem, but we shouldn’t talk about it” (241). Richmond didn’t wield the threat of annexation quickly as in Miami and Nashville (242). Greater Richmond Committee pushed the movement, but the Merger Opposition Committee gave the opposing argument (245). Blacks rightly feared the loss of political voice and became a more solid voting block (250). City is finally forced to commit to and reconcile with its deteriorating urban core (254).

1960 and 1961 Discussion of merger with Henrico are mostly about taxation and representation (246 - 248)

1961, June 12 City Council approves the 17th Street Project on what was seen as the worst slum in the city (268) – Eventually displaced 1,300 citizens (269). Two thirds of these citizens went to public housing in Mosby Court. Primarily financial factors kept them from purchasing houses after relocation: They were forced to sell in a depressed market; replacement housing was more costly, they were refused credit and they lacked the capital for down-payment expenses (270).

1961, September The city initiates a housing survey of the area in between Broad St. and Hwy 95 (171-2). This section had been left out of a code enforcement program and was greatly deteriorated (275).

1963 Redevelopment plan for downtown redevelopment project discussed without much opposition (204). Step one: Federal building; Step 2: Coliseum (9 city blocks) and slum clearance was considered a perk (205). **May 28, 1963**, RRHA presented City Council with a \$63M plan for Jackson Ward redevelopment funded by federal and local monies (275). The plan later FAILED (278).

1966 Crusade for Voters stressed need for unity in Black voting bloc and CV candidates win 5 of 9 seats on the city council (253). There is a clear separation from Richmond Forward (283). RF had previously been a political powerhouse in mid-60s but dwindled. (285). **Henry Marsh**, a prominent Black lawyer and **Carwile**, a voice of the people are elected in this election (285).

1966 Plans released for the construction of the Downtown Expressway through Oregon Hill, Sydney and Byrd Park (287).

1967, March Fulton Improvement Association (FIA) proposed improvements that would have revitalized the area with some clearance and much conservation (292).

1967, October Plans for developing area of Fulton from three area developers are denied

1968 Department of Planning established.

1968 Brent Hill presented the results of a survey of Fulton residents with limited success (houses not factories) (299).

1969, December 19 Annexation of Chesterfield land secured. Lawyer Curt Holt filed suit under the 1965 Civil Rights Act to question the constitutionality of the deliberate dilution of the Black vote (253). The Supreme Court decision created a ward system instead of at large and led to the majority Black leadership in 1977 (254).

1969- 1974 the city made loans and grants for housing improvements on the Southside (312).

1970 - 1980 Private investment and revitalization of Fan and other areas changes area from working-class to middle-class – individuals not required to compensate for displacement of residents by rising cost of living (313).

1970s Planning is eventually used to protect distinct communities (259).

1970 Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Properties Acquisition Act is passed (311) and results in fair monetary compensation for seized properties (301) and resulted in a \$15,000 relocation housing payment (302). This act covered Fulton, Washington Park, Randolph and George Mason redevelopment projects (302).

1970 Washington Park area not potential area for industrial development so it was rehabilitated but not destroyed (301).

1972 Jefferson Park is the first “conserved” neighborhood (313).

1973 - 1974 Fulton destroyed (306) and completed around **1976**. The plan cost an est. \$20.6 M to destroy the whole area and relocate citizens elsewhere, but the Fulton citizens’ plan for capital improvements would have cost the city an est. \$15 M (301).

1974 The Federal Housing and Community Development Act initiated the Community Development Block Grant program and prevented extended grant periods and made long-range redevelopment projects cost prohibitive (306-7, 311).

1976 Richmond Housing Action Plan assessed neighborhood conditions and presented steps for improvement (307-8).

Mid 1970s Richmond can’t annex any more ... must finally account for itself (308).

1977 Power shifts to Black electorate and leadership but does not result in the huge changes predicted by conservative Whites (316).

1978 City Council approves \$27 M Civic Center plan on previously cleared land (309).

Community Development Block Grant program prevented extended grant periods and made long-range redevelopment projects cost prohibitive (306-7). Called Project One, this plan included a hotel, a convention center and an office building (316) was long debated – race being the most contentious issue (318).

Conclusion

Richmond was generally more cautious than most cities between 1918 and 1869 (321).

The focus was on the “Greater Richmond” mentality rather than the “Good City” (322)

“Richmond’s decidedly conservative brand of progressivism elevated the imperatives of New South boosterism above any quest for higher social justice, and fashioned planning into a vehicle for maintenance of the status quo” (322).

“Thus, in their relationship to the two major threads of social reform in the first half of the twentieth century, Richmond and its planners adhered to the traditional southern protectiveness over local prerogatives and accepted change only so long as it did not jeopardize the status quo” (322).

In theory, Richmond wanted to follow local prerogative, but followed Federal \$ (322)

Planning followed only the rich White ideology for racial segregation (324) and, when successful, was actually detrimental to residents (as seen on paragraph two 323)

Richmond followed southern cities enthusiasm for planning in the 40s (326).

Only Texas cities could annex suburbs among cities in the south (326).

Michael Vasu – “Normative theory of planning” means we need to include all of city’s residents in improvement process (328).

“In the final analysis, the limited effectiveness of planning in twentieth-century Richmond resulted from the absence of a coherent idea of city life that reflected pluralistic values and the means to realize that idea through direct political action. In this sense, planning lacked its own discernible view of the ideal city” (328).

People:

Garnett Esckew –

Arthur Glasgow – Wanted a strong mayor (not the Administrative board) (84).

Saville – Appointed director of Public works **1922**

Harland Bartholomew – **1940** City Planner wanted more investment (both public and private) in the city core (106). **1940s** “The city has for many years been financing its own undoing through the extension of urban facilities at great expense to the entire municipality in order to serve in some new area a population largely being drawn from and abandoning other sections of the community” (108). – Bartholomew

Around **1946**: “In the face of eventual slowing down of urban growth and the modern tendencies toward decentralization and dispersion of urban population, it becomes imperative that the City of Richmond take proper steps by discouraging further dispersion of the present population through the control of new growth beyond the present city” (164).

John J. Corson – “Blacks need to own property” (127). “Today such a plan seems highly visionary. When every city becomes a place in which to live as well as to work, the idea will sound commonplace” (128). This quote was never realized and the idea still sounds “highly visionary” to many people in America.

Samuel P. B. Steward – In response to the proposed housing development north of Jackson Ward: “Colored people inherit a righteous antipathy to anything which smacks of herding them into ‘quarters,’ regardless of how elaborate” (132). “This is what we are trying to do, keep you from making a mistake which will hurt us considerably as the Government, until better informed, will blame us for not renting the houses instead of blaming you for not putting them where our people desire them....COLORED PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE THE SAY AS TO WHICH PLACES ARE MOST DESIRABLE TO THEM” (133).

John Howard – “If a highway is so designed and built that it produces a pattern of land development and population distribution that worsens the livability and efficiency of a metropolitan area rather than bettering it, that highway is a disservice to the community—even if it carries traffic to capacity and all the traffic seems to want to go where it is carried” (197).

Robert J. Herberle – “It seems to me that in some fashion we must encourage the rebuilding of the city, the repair and improvement of buildings, and the full and best use of all vacant or slum property in the city....if we don’t do this, you will find all the energies of the metropolitan area directed to the cutting down of trees and the building of new communities with the total abandonment of everything we now have” (244).

Henry Marsh – “Marsh stressed the failure of the RF to ‘build people, not things.’ While not denying that ‘progressive’ pet projects such as expressway construction and a coliseum would improve certain conditions in the downtown area, Marsh urged that the city first make necessary

improvements in education, housing and services that affect 'all the people, the masses and not just certain classes,' to seek improvements in the 'quality of life and not just the quality of business life'" (285).

Howard Carwile – "urban renewal has never solved the housing problem; it creates and intensifies housing problems" (292).

Mayor J. Fulmer Bright – "I believe that these very Federal housing projects, now being constructed to relieve the ills of which we complain, will in themselves constitute the slums of the next generation, 20 years hence" (147).

Quotes:

Early 1900s "Suburban expansion, a policy of neglect, and a conscious effort to refashion the class and race composition of central Richmond eroded the physical, economic, and social bonds that held together the city's complex community structure in the early 1900s" (98).

Annexation map on page 28