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**“In the Name of Progress”: Postwar Urban Renewal and the Razing of Black Spaces
in Windsor, Ontario, 1957-1980**

By

Willow Key

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of History
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2024

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**“In the Name of Progress”: Postwar Urban Renewal and the Razing of Black Spaces
in Windsor, Ontario, 1957-1980**

by

Willow Key

APPROVED BY:

G. Teasdale
Department of History

M. Wright, Advisor
Department of History

April 25, 2024

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1950s, Windsor, Ontario embarked on a comprehensive fifteen-year urban renewal initiative aimed at redeveloping the city's downtown core into a modern, municipal hub and locale for both private and commercial interests and cross-border tourism. The initial focus of this strategy was a neighbourhood situated just east of the commercial district, which had been home to much of the Windsor's Black population for more than a century. Rooted in a complex interplay of social and economic factors, Windsor's renewal efforts, guided by a misguided, paternalistic understanding of physical transformation as a catalyst for positive social change, resulted in the demolition of significant physical and cultural spaces, fundamentally altering the character and landscape of this community. Furthermore, a reliance on external experts coupled with minimal community consultation further alienated and marginalised Windsor's Black population, depriving them of agency in the renewal process. Through a meticulous examination of redevelopment records, community archives, and oral histories, this study explores the transformative consequences of redevelopment on Windsor's Black community. This paper will demonstrate how the loss of the community's physical spaces not only disrupted intricate kinship networks, cultural practices, and economic structures, but also obscured their visibility as one of the city's oldest and most resilient communities.

DEDICATION

To my father, and to knowing our history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Miriam Wright for her unwavering expertise, guidance, and patience throughout my academic journey. Thank you for your dedication to teaching and for generously providing opportunities for me to cultivate my skills as a historian. I am truly thankful for your mentorship.

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Special thanks to Nancy Allen for her work in the collection of oral histories from the McDougall Street Corridor. More importantly, thank you for your guidance and friendship. It has been a pleasure to learn from you and add to the work started by you and your husband, Jim Allen.

Many thanks to Elise Harding-Davis for taking the time to diligently review my research, ensuring this work represents the McDougall Street Corridor community and descendants with dignity, pride, and respect.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance and participation of the following individuals: Anna Walls, Barbara Porter, Carmen Carter, Carol Talbot, Cherie Steele Sexton, Clayton Talbert Jr., Daniel Marcuz, Deb Remekie, Della Bost, Faye Wilson and the Wilson Sisters, Florence Logan, Gale Carter, George Kirk Scott, Jonathan Milsap, Kaitlyn Ellsworth, Karen Thomas Moore, Ken Rock, Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, Kim Elliott, Kimberly Simmons, Lana Talbot, Lois Larkin, Dr. Marium Tolson Murty, Patricia Neely-McCurdy, Dr. Philip Alexander, Shantelle Browning Morgan, Sydnie Moore, Teajai Travis, Tramaine Whited. The sharing of your memories and family histories ensures the spirit of the McDougall Street Corridor will endure for generations to come. Thank you.

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To my parents, Adrian and Leslie, your unwavering faith in me has been a guiding light through the toughest of times. I am eternally grateful. I could not have accomplished this without you. To my family, thank you for your eternal love and support. Without your encouragement, loyalty, and unwavering support my success and the completion of this major paper would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In October of 1961, the office of Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker received a strongly worded letter from Walter L. Perry, a lifelong resident and prominent Black community leader in the city of Windsor, Ontario. Perry's impassioned plea began, "The Coloured people of Windsor, Ontario are seeking the intervention of your high Executive Office to save the 'BRITISH EPISCOPAL METHODIST CHURCH' from being moved from its present location on McDougall Street..."¹ Accompanying this letter was a pamphlet produced by the church in celebration of its 106th anniversary. The cover displayed the beautifully crafted mid-nineteenth century brick building with stained glass windows. Subsequent pages featured images of joyous churchgoers—men, women, and children—as well as the various clubs, committees, and organisations supported by the church.

Perry's purpose for including the pamphlet was to underscore how the demolition of this church represented more than simply the destruction of a physical space; it posed a clear and present threat to the stability and longevity of the community it had faithfully served for more than a century. The intent of Perry's letter was to impress upon the Prime Minister the church's profound significance within Windsor's Black community. Built by self-emancipated slaves as a testament to their freedom, Perry argued the church had "more history connected [to it] than any church in the city of Windsor."² His plea was sent just weeks before the scheduled demolition, a result of the city's urban renewal strategy targeting significant sites and dozens of homes in the heart of the Black

¹ Walter Perry, Letter from Walter L. Perry to John G. Diefenbaker, October 12, 1961, MG 411/VI/751.14, John G. Diefenbaker fonds, University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections.

² Perry to Diefenbaker, October 12, 1961, John G. Diefenbaker fonds.

community. This process would ultimately reshape much of this historic neighbourhood.³ Perry's letter served as a poignant response to the looming threat of urban renewal, emphasizing the broader implications for his community.

In May of 1961, just a few months before the aforementioned letter from Perry, trustees and stewards of Windsor's British Methodist Episcopal Church were notified of the city's plans to expropriate and demolish their building as part of a city-wide urban renewal strategy.⁴ This initiative targeted the streets just east of Windsor's downtown core as its first focal point in combating blight. The congregation was expected to vacate the property by September of that year, although two extensions were later requested and approved. Faced with inadequate compensation and an imminent deadline, church members voted to pursue legal action to preserve their cherished institution, electing a negotiating team to represent their interests.

Seeking guidance from James Watson, city solicitor and church member, the team inquired about their rights under expropriation law. Evidence of ownership, quality of construction, annual maintenance, and relocation costs were all identified as crucial elements to their case for greater financial restitution. Taking these factors into account, their lawyer was convinced the city's offer of fifty thousand dollars was about twenty thousand dollars short.⁵ Understanding that the church was being compelled to relocate against the will of its members, it was decided arbitration was the last option for achieving fair compensation.

³ Bill Prager, "Wrecking Crews Start on Project," *Windsor Star*, October 21, 1959. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500459825>.

⁴ "Report, re: Municipal Expropriation," [ca. 1961], F0136, Box 2, Series 1.2, File 9, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collection.

⁵ "Report, re: Municipal Expropriation," [ca. 1961], Leddy Library Archives and Special Collection.

The struggle to safeguard the British Methodist Episcopal Church from demolition is but one example within a broader narrative that unfolded in Windsor's Black community during the postwar period. By 1959, shop and business owners, church trustees, educators, doctors, and residents across the Black community engaged in similar struggles with uprooting, each hoping to protect their livelihoods and cherished communal spaces so integral to the community's shared identity. Within a few short years, however, the century-old neighbourhood bore scant reminders of the once vibrant community pivotal in its establishment. Perry's letter encapsulated the frustration of a community, and highlighted a shared belief that expropriation and blight strategies were not being fairly applied "in the Coloured section" of the city.⁶

While much scholarly attention has been devoted to documenting the history and enduring legacy of the Underground Railroad and the early settlements of American-descended Black communities in Southwestern Ontario, there remains a significant gap in the history of these communities into the twentieth century. This paper will address this dearth of research by exploring the rich history of Windsor's largest Black neighbourhood and its struggle with displacement and community upheaval following the city's implementation of an urban renewal program in the mid-1950s. By examining the motivations and justifications for urban renewal, as well as the execution of the city's urban renewal policies, this paper demonstrates the transformative consequences of redevelopment on the spatial layout, social dynamics, and cultural identity of this Black community. Windsor's postwar urban renewal strategy, particularly concerning the historic downtown Black community, hereby referred to as the McDougall Street Corridor, profoundly and enduringly altered the community's social and cultural fabric.

⁶ Perry to Diefenbaker, October 12, 1961, John G. Diefenbaker fonds.

Like other notable Black communities subject to urban renewal policies of this era, the erosion of longstanding social and cultural bonds present in Windsor's Black community underscores the inherent limitations of government-imposed social transformation. While the city's renewal strategy aimed to repurpose this ageing neighbourhood for municipal expansion and downtown modernisation, it apathetically inflicted significant hardships on a community that, in the process, lost not only its physical spaces, but also its deeply rooted cultural connections to the land and vital systems of support and socialisation found in neighbours and neighbourhood institutions – a foundation crucial for the success and resilience of a people still grappling with the challenges of racial discrimination. Furthermore, this paper will demonstrate how urban renewal policies enabled the city of Windsor to overlook the underlying causes of the community's social struggles, perpetuating systemic injustices and exacerbating disparities. By centering on the experiences of Black Canadians in the mid-twentieth century, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted narrative of Black Canadians in Southwestern Ontario. It does so by highlighting the challenges this historically overlooked community faced with employment discrimination, racially restrictive housing, and vulnerabilities to state-sponsored social planning.

Methodology

While exploring the ways in which urban renewal facilitated the removal of tangible traces of Windsor's Black population, this paper seeks to counteract this erasure with the use of oral histories. These narratives, collected from current and former residents of the

McDougall Street Corridor, will shed light on the nature of Windsor's urban renewal strategy and the consequences to this community, thereby honouring the voices and memories that have been left out of the historical narrative and further contextualizing Windsor's urban renewal history.

Due to the limited scholarly research pertaining to Windsor's Black community, especially in relation to the urban renewal era and its aftermath, this paper relies heavily on primary sources. An essential source informing our understanding of the McDougall Street Corridor has been the collection of oral histories. Interviews were conducted with current and former residents of the former McDougall Street Corridor neighbourhood between 2021 and 2023 for the "'We Were Here: Recovering the Stories of the McDougall Street Corridor'" digital exhibit, housed by the Centre for Digital Scholarship at the University of Windsor's Leddy Library. Participants were asked approximately forty questions relating to their family's local history, experiences, and memories in the neighbourhood, as well as thoughts of the redevelopment project and its aftermath. The recollections of former residents were used to bolster any surviving documents relating to the expropriation and demolition of the neighbourhood, and archival documents relating to the community's history. It is not possible to explore the community's history and experiences without these voices being elevated. Additionally, the North Star Cultural Community Centre, formerly located on Erie Street East, collected several brief statements from residents in the early 2000s, providing additional perspectives from those members of the community who had passed before the "We Were Here" interviews were collected.

Many of the archival records pertaining to the history of the McDougall Street Corridor community have come from the E. Andrea Moore fonds at the University of Windsor's Leddy Library. Church notes and records from the British Methodist Episcopal Church, originally located on McDougall Street, are particularly telling in relation to the community's response to the expropriation of homes and businesses. The BME church fought tirelessly to remain within the McDougall Street Corridor, and again to receive fair compensation for their land. The church's struggle with the city is well documented in various notices to the congregation, court documents, and correspondences between the church stewards and their attorneys. The collection also includes documents relating to the various social clubs and organisations of the community. These records indicate an elevated level of interconnectedness between organisations, and therefore, close-knit ties amongst community members. The Alvin D. McCurdy fonds at the Archives of Ontario provided additional documentation relating to the Prince Hall Freemasons, Order of the Eastern Star, and other social organisations and their meeting places. Images and ephemera from local churches were also useful in understanding the geography of the neighbourhood, as well as the frequency of events such as picnics, teas, celebration dinners, and other gatherings.

Local newspaper coverage was essential in charting changes within the community over the redevelopment period. The *Windsor Star* was heavily relied upon for redevelopment coverage, particularly from redevelopment correspondent Bill Shields. Shields, a local reporter, followed the redevelopment story for a decade, providing Windsor residents with timely updates and varying perspectives. This local newspaper, as well as the *Detroit Tribune* and *Dawn of Tomorrow* were useful in following updates on

individuals, families, businesses, events, and social organisations related to the Black community. In fact, the *Detroit Tribune*'s "Windsor Spotlight" column was written by members of the Corridor to inform family and relatives across the river of the goings-on in the Windsor community.

Government records reviewed for this paper include reports from federal and municipal urban planning departments and urban renewal reports commissioned by the federal government for research and development of Windsor's redevelopment zones. Specifically, reports from the City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment were used to chart the inception and execution of the plans for expropriation, clearance, and the building of public housing in Redevelopment Area One. These documents were also useful for the detailed demographic data included in the urban renewal study. Statistics Canada's annual *Canada Yearbook*, Windsor's annual *Pride and Progress* report, and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's annual reports were useful in observing Windsor's urban renewal progress and monitoring changes to housing policies from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s.

Other primary source documents include the city directory, census records, voting records, insurance maps, and smaller family archives. Patricia Neely-McCurdy's personal collection of Guardian Club documents was particularly useful in charting the work of this community organisation in proving cases of housing and employment discrimination following the initial urban renewal project. Insurance maps from the Underwriter's Bureau were particularly helpful in accurately mapping the dwellings, institutions, establishments, and businesses within the McDougall Street Corridor. As well, mapping was useful in tracking the movement of members within the community before and after

the redevelopment project. Property records from the Ontario Land Registry were used to track the exchanging of property more accurately between residents to the city of Windsor or the CMHC. Census records, voting records, and the city directory were helpful in establishing settlement trends, demographic and socioeconomic trends, and ascertaining the size of the population within the McDougall Street Corridor throughout the twentieth century.

The upcoming chapter will undertake a critical examination of existing literature concerning Windsor's Black population, the influence of postwar urban renewal in Canadian housing policy and social change, and the role of race in defining and shaping space and visibility of Black Canadian communities. Chapter three will provide a brief history of the McDougall Street Corridor community, tracing its development from inception to the postwar period. Next, chapter four will examine Windsor's urban renewal initiative and the subsequent redevelopment of the downtown Black neighbourhood. Chapter five exposes the profound impact of redevelopment on the community, encompassing its cultural, social, and spatial dimensions. Finally, the concluding chapter will detail this impact through excerpts from oral histories collected from current and former residents of the area.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORIOGRAPHY

At present, notable gaps persist in scholarly research concerning the history of the McDougall Street Corridor and Windsor's Black population. This is unsurprising given the historical neglect of Black history in Canada until recently, particularly beyond the nineteenth century. Additionally, Windsor-Essex has often been overlooked in matters regarding the region's historical significance to the province of Ontario. Consequently, the contributions of local historians and those working to preserve Black history in the region have been essential in documenting the presence of Black Windsorites and their settlement along McDougall Street. Notably, Charlotte Bronte Perry and Irene Moore Davis have been instrumental in illuminating the experiences of Canadians of African descent in the Windsor-Essex region from the city's earliest days to the postwar period.

History of the Black Population in Windsor

Charlotte Bronte Perry's work, *The Long Road: The History of the Coloured Canadian in Windsor, Ontario, 1867-1967*, stands as a cornerstone text on the founding of the McDougall Street Corridor. Perry relied on knowledge from within the community to piece together a century of growth, innovation, and achievement. This seminal work, produced for the community in 1967, details the obscure history of prominent Black citizens, establishes a comprehensive timeline for Black settlement, and highlights the significant contributions of numerous founding families to the area's social and economic development. Though there are discrepancies regarding specific dates, addresses, and names, Perry's work stands among the earliest endeavours focusing on this community of freedom seekers and their descendants. In her second book, Perry detailed the legacy of

her late husband Dr. Roy Perry, a lifelong resident of the McDougall Street Corridor. Published in 1982, *One Man's Journey: The Biography of Alderman Dr. Roy Prince Edward Perry, D.D.S.*, recorded the early life and later accomplishments of Windsor's fourth Black City Councillor. Drawing from her own memories, her husband's personal records, and newspaper sources, this biography explores Perry's role as an alderman during the urban renewal process, offering a perspective from a key figure instrumental in its development.

Expanding upon Perry's foundational work is a more recent source, *Our Own Two Hands: Black Lives in Windsor from the 1700s Forward*, by local Historian and Educator Irene Moore Davis. While Perry's work drew attention to the community's many achievements, Davis explores the challenges and limitations faced by the community in their journey to these triumphs. This text observes the history of Windsor's Black population across three centuries, presenting a more comprehensive picture of the conditions in the region for Black Canadians. Drawing from a vast array of primary sources, including her own family records, Davis meticulously traces Windsor's evolution as an emerging border town, closely examining the presence and movements of Black Canadians along the border and throughout Windsor-Essex. Davis pays close attention to the ways in which Black Windsorites were not only present during Windsor's development as a burgeoning border city, but actively involved in this process. Additionally, Davis brings attention to the existence and practice of slavery in Canada West, underscoring a much older Black presence in the city of Windsor. Davis's exploration of the community's struggles and triumphs in areas such as education, entrepreneurship, and social change are particularly noteworthy, as it contributes

significantly to discussions surrounding the community's social and cultural history into the twentieth century and the shared goal of upward mobility. What distinguishes Davis's contributions to this area of research is her personal connection as a descendant of the McDougall Street Corridor, enabling her to capture the essence of this former neighbourhood in a thoughtful and evocative manner not found in many exploratory sources on the topic. Together, Perry and Davis contribute essential insights into this long-overlooked community, addressing gaps in scholarly discourse on the Black presence in the city. However, these sources are limited by the absence of an in-depth examination of the city's renewal strategy and the long-term effects of redevelopment on the Black population in the latter half of the twentieth century. With the intention of building upon the foundation set by Perry and Davis, this paper will not only examine the history of urban renewal in Windsor's downtown, but the immediate and long-term effects of uprooting on the economic, political, and social stability of this community.

In addition to these works are the memoirs of Carol Talbot and her father, Lyle Talbot. Talbot's 1984 memoir (revised in 2017), *Growing up Black in Canada*, explores the inner workings of this obscure community through rich anecdotes about her upbringing and experiences living in the McDougall Street Corridor during the 1940s to the 1950s. Talbot broaches topics of race and discrimination, the importance of Black religious traditions, Black Canadian foodways, and the many methods in which residents of the Corridor cared for one another, often by providing services denied outside the boundaries of the "Negro district." In discussing "folk geography" and the importance of felt space in her memories of her community, Talbot provides a recollection of "My Black Community" in the form of a map indicating significant spaces such as the homes

of “Black folks” and relatives, “Elder Morton’s Church,” and the “Old Mercer St. School.”⁷ For Talbot, her community and the spaces that defined it encouraged a sense of kinship that “formed a physical link” with the Black community.⁸ Talbot later accompanied her father, Lyle Talbot, in publishing, *Memoir of a Black Canadian Activist*, focusing on Lyle Talbot’s life and legacy as a McDougall Street Corridor resident and Black Canadian civil rights activist. Lyle Talbot’s memoir is particularly useful in mapping the popular physical spaces of the neighbourhood throughout the early decades of the twentieth century and the changes experienced by residents of differing generations in relation to community connections, resources, and experiences with discrimination. Lyle Talbot’s recollections offer a vivid glimpse into the neighbourhood during its peak, spanning from the early twentieth century and illuminating the genesis of the community’s political and civil rights networks, exemplified by the formation of pivotal organisations such as the Central Citizens’ Association and the Windsor Interracial Council. Lyle Talbot’s personal involvement in the Windsor Interracial Council is underscored by his crafting of the report, “How Does Our Town Add Up?” in 1949.⁹ This document meticulously examined the pervasive manifestations of racial discrimination across various facets of life in the city of Windsor, providing data as a first step in tackling employment, housing, and service discrimination.

Exploring additional literature concerning the presence of Black Canadians in the Windsor-Essex Region involves two distinct categories of analysis. The first necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the influx of Black Americans into Canada during the nineteenth century. To grasp the genesis and later expansion of the McDougall Street

⁷ Carol Talbot, *Growing Up Black in Canada* (London: Self Published, 2017), 33-34.

⁸ Talbot, *Growing Up Black in Canada*, 118-119.

⁹ Lyle Talbot, *Memoirs of a Black Canadian Activist* (London: Self Published, 2013), 162-166.

Corridor, it is imperative to delve into the historical context of the Underground Railroad and early Black settlements in Southwestern Ontario.

A foundational step in this preliminary research involved a review of *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*. This collection proved essential for establishing the various modes and justifications for Black settlement along the Detroit River. Notably, Irene Moore Davis's chapter on early Black settlements in the Detroit River region includes a brief focus on Windsor and the establishment of a small Black enclave surrounding the city's abandoned army barracks.¹⁰ Davis explores the seeds of what would become the McDougall Street Corridor community through its early educational and religious institutions. Robin Wink's seminal work, *The Blacks in Canada*, and the Fred Landon collection in, *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage*, further highlight the importance of the Underground Railroad in the presence of Black Canadians in the Detroit River region and the history of Black American aspirations in migration and patterns of settlement in Windsor-Essex throughout the nineteenth century. Landon's writings demonstrate a significant population of freedom seekers and free people of colour had established themselves in Windsor by the 1850s.¹¹

The second category requires an understanding of Windsor's history in the twentieth century, leading to the postwar period. Local historian Patrick Brode explores the development of Windsor to the twentieth century in, *The River and the Land: A*

¹⁰ Irene Moore Davis, "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region," in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, ed. Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 92-93.

¹¹ Fred Landon, *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage: Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1918-1967*, eds. Karolyn Smardz Frost, Bryan Walls, Hilary Bates Neary, and Frederick H. Armstrong (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2009), 125-127, 139, 150.

History of Windsor to 1900, providing details, though limited, on the progress of a “prominent black community” throughout this work.¹² His continued exploration in *Border Cities Powerhouse: The Rise of Windsor, 1900-1945*, offers a thorough examination of industrial and economic changes that shaped the city of Windsor, significantly the nature of employment and economic survival for Black Windsorites during the first half of the twentieth century. Brode notes the limited employment opportunities available for Black men and women throughout the city’s history.¹³ Though this text is limited in its focus on Black Windsorites, Brode does note the evolution of growing race and class divisions, setting up the atmosphere in which Windsor’s urban renewal strategy was formed.

Peggy Bristow’s work in, *Essays in African Canadian Women’s History*, and her article, “A Duty to the Past, A Promise to the Future: Black Organizing in Windsor – The Depression, World War II, and the Post-War Years,” are useful for understanding the presence and participation of Black Canadians during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in terms of social and economic engagement. In her article, Bristow pays close attention to the McDougall Street Corridor, mapping the history of activism, civic duty, and celebration within the community from the Great Depression to the postwar period. Bristow focuses especially on the relationship between the community and its religious institutions and the fostering of several unique social and political organisations. She also explores the role of the Emancipation Day Celebrations in facilitating the fight for racial justice through partnerships between these various

¹² Patrick Brode, *The River and the Land: A History of Windsor to 1900* (Windsor: Biblioasis, 2014), 8, 48-49, 56.

¹³ Patrick Brode, *Border Cities Powerhouse, The Rise of Windsor: 1940-1945* (Windsor: Biblioasis, 2017), 107-108.

organisations as well as the participation of civil rights advocates including Mary McLeod Bethune and Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁴ While the scope of this article encompasses the postwar era, Bristow overlooks the significance of redevelopment in the McDougall Street Corridor. This oversight impedes Bristow's exploration of social and political organisations during the postwar period, particularly regarding the disruption to organising and celebratory efforts caused by redevelopment. An examination of the effects of redevelopment on the community would have revealed the evolving social and political dynamics within the postwar Corridor community, including their heightened focus on addressing employment and housing discrimination amidst community displacement.

Urban Renewal and Black Uprooting in Canada

As a policy, urban renewal, especially in relation to the postwar period, has long been associated with the adverse outcomes for the communities it was purported to improve. While initially there was much anticipation in the postwar period for the suggested benefits of renewal, by the late 1960s, many viewed these policies as ineffective in addressing the complex challenges facing postwar cities, often perceiving these policies as emblematic of paternalistic, heavy handed government intervention. Much scholarly attention on postwar urban renewal in Canada has focused on the former community of Africville, a small, predominantly Black enclave in the Bedford Basin area of Halifax. Africville serves as a salient case study due to the sheer volume of documentation produced by city planners and authorities in Halifax, along with numerous scholarly reports and studies on Africville. This rich history provides a more detailed

¹⁴ Peggy Bristow, "A Duty to the Past, a Promise to the Future: Black Organizing in Windsor – The Depression, World War II, and the Post-War Years," *New Dawn* 2, no. 1 (207): 34-37.

understanding of the experiences of Black Canadians uprooted by urban renewal and offers valuable insights into the consequences of relocation, both to residents and municipalities, in the decades following renewal programs.

Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill meticulously dissect the profound narrative of Africville's demise in their seminal work, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*. This study examines the intricate web of social, political, and economic forces underlying the demolition of Africville, exploring the complexities of Black Haligonians' forced relocation.¹⁵ The authors methodically scrutinize every aspect of postwar urban renewal policy in Halifax, illuminating the multifaceted impacts to Africville's social fabric, economic stability, and communal resilience. Through a nuanced analysis, Clairmont and Magill unravel the divergent motivations that shaped attitudes towards redevelopment, juxtaposing the municipality's interests and subsequent approach with the lived experiences of displaced residents. Central to their narrative is an exploration of the historical context, tracing the genesis of Africville within the Bedford Basin's Black settlement, and exposing the systemic discrimination that entrenched its existence as a segregation enclave. From its inception, Africville grappled with neglect and marginalization, deprived of basic infrastructure such as proper roads, streetlights, and water and sewage facilities – a stark manifestation of municipal abandonment, and inundated by indignities including an open garbage dump and an infectious diseases hospital.¹⁶

With its peripheral position within Halifax, Africville was a community long overlooked until mounting social and economic pressures compelled the city to conceive

¹⁵ Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1999), 247-252, 255-262.

¹⁶ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 1-2, 30.

of a new purpose for the area. The authors explore this transformation, tracing Africville's evolution from a forgotten enclave to a perceived "social problem" that was "ripe for relocation" by the mid 1950.¹⁷ Clairmont and Magill suggest initial plans for relocation were framed as a liberal, humanitarian endeavor, emphasising not only the rehousing of Africville residents but also the facilitation of continued aid through various employment and education programs in an attempt to address longstanding neglect by the municipality. This, however, was underscored by a greater interest in developing the Africville area. As Clairmont and Magill assert, "Relocation plans were not *ad hoc* and haphazard."¹⁸ While it is evident that the impact of relocation for Black Haligonians was far from ideal, municipal officials appeared to be cognisant of Africville's historical roots in housing discrimination and racial segregation perpetuated by the city. City officials and external consultants pursued relocation as a means of rectifying past injustices amidst mounting national and international scrutiny, as reflected in the municipal government's use of Clairmont and Magill's described "Liberal-Welfare Model" of relocation.¹⁹ This model was used to justify a process of redevelopment that would ultimately benefit the city's interest in prioritizing industrial expansion and economic development. The authors' delineation of four distinct relocation models provides a theoretical framework for understanding the varying approaches taken by municipal governments participating in renewal projects. Contrastingly, Windsor's urban renewal program followed primarily a "Development Model" approach, prioritizing structural and aesthetic enhancements, commercial opportunities, and economic growth, over resident welfare.²⁰ Despite

¹⁷ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 89-90.

¹⁸ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 2.

¹⁹ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 7-8.

²⁰ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 5-6.

differing methodologies, both cases underscore the instrumental role of relocation and redevelopment in advancing municipal agendas, often at the expense of marginalized communities.

Clairmont and Magill's analysis extends beyond the theoretical frameworks to empirically assess the impact of relocation on Africville residents, examining shifts in employment opportunities, housing, and overall quality of life. Through meticulous research, they reveal the stark realities of displacement, shedding light on the enduring socio-economic disparities for Black Halifaxians, exacerbated by relocation initiatives. Their findings underscore the importance of critically evaluating urban renewal strategies particularly in their implications for historically marginalized communities.

Additionally, the authors incorporate oral histories collected from former Africville residents to reveal the shortcomings of the Liberal-Welfare model and the realities of relocation. By amplifying the voices of those directly impacted, the authors provide invaluable insights into the human toll of urban renewal policies, often overshadowed, if not completely ignored, by official records. Through these narratives, Clairmont and Magill capture the profound upheaval experienced by displaced residents, who grappled with the loss of life-long networks, informal economic systems, and communal support structures that had previously sustained them and were integral to their identity.²¹ The result of this was a heightened reliance on precarious social aid systems, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and instability.²² Despite the purported aims of urban renewal to uplift communities, the authors demonstrate its inherent limitations. Far from fostering positive transformation, the demolition of Africville and subsequent

²¹ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 225-227.

²² Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 219-221.

relocation led to the collapse of complex social and cultural networks and burdened Black Haligonians with increased housing, employment, and opportunity insecurities.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, urban renewal studies focused on projects that would attract industry and transform downtown centres into bustling modern attractions. Additionally, a paternalistic undertone gradually emerged, rationalising the destruction of neighbourhoods like Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor as a means to provide residents with a better quality of life, including access to better services and the opportunity to reside in "modern" housing. This paternalistic sense of social responsibility, prevalent among postwar governments, is examined in the works of historian Tina Loo. Loo's research on postwar urban renewal in Canada, particularly in Halifax, has been invaluable in scrutinising the role of state intervention in citizens' lives and the government's perceived responsibility in identifying and acting on the needs of citizens, often legitimising drastic or unpopular measures, as necessary. In her work, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," Loo explores the limitations of the liberal welfare state in addressing the holistic needs of residents beyond mere physical necessities. She emphasises the importance of factors such as a sense of belonging, kinship, mobility, and freedom in fostering community and individual well-being and a sense of "the good life."²³ Loo's examination of residents' insecurities as "urban nomads" and the ramifications of being uprooted from traditional support networks and community ties due to forced relocation resonates with the experiences of many McDougall Street Corridor residents, who faced similar losses and disruptions to

²³ Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2 (2010): 44-46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41803299>.

familial and communal connections.²⁴ Furthermore, Loo highlights the support for urban renewal initiatives by both Black and White Haligonians who would later come to realise they possessed “an incomplete understanding of Africville” as relocated residents continued to face difficulties in accessing much needed services. The role of influential figures both within and outside of the community, and their advocacy devoid of genuine consultation with residents is scrutinised by Loo as a means of disempowering the community from advocating for its own interests.²⁵ Loo’s article suggests the implementation of state-sponsored projects that coveted “a particular way of seeing” disregarded the realities and daily experiences of Africville residents, as well as the support systems they had established to address needs beyond the scope of any urban renewal policy.²⁶

Another article from Loo, “The View from Jacob Street: Reframing Urban Renewal in Postwar Halifax,” offers a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of displaced communities and the systemic challenges they encountered, providing a crucial framework for grasping the intricacies of urban renewal initiatives and the impact to marginalised populations. In her analysis, Loo explores the redevelopment of Halifax’s North End in the late 1950s, a period preceding the Africville relocation, and elucidates the policies and practices that distinguished these two redevelopment zones. While discussions of urban renewal in Halifax often prioritise the razing of Africville and the relocation of its residents, Loo contends the North End neighbourhood experienced an equally destructive form of state-sponsored displacement. Through an examination of letters and statements of protest from Black residents and homeowners of the North End,

²⁴ Loo, “Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada,” 24.

²⁵ Loo, “Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada,” 24-25, 29-30.

²⁶ Loo, “Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada,” 44-45.

Loo demonstrates the concerns of residents at the time, especially regarding property rights, the loss of primary financial assets and security, and the erosion of community ties.²⁷ Loo contrasts the treatment of Africville residents, who received a more personal approach to issues of compensation and accommodations, with the more traditional process that was employed in Halifax's North End. This disparity, she argues, stemmed from Africville's status as a segregated, primarily Black enclave, which elicited an extreme response from authorities attempting to rectify the longstanding neglect of the community.²⁸ However, as Loo emphasises, the underlying challenges - including housing and employment discrimination and a lack of accessible services - that facilitated the existence of communities like Africville also affected Black residents across Halifax. Relocation and redevelopment could not address these systemic issues which deeply impacted Black Haligonians.

Throughout her work, Loo amplifies the voices of residents, underscoring a profound concern regarding the dissolution of community bonds and relationships cultivated within predominantly Black locales such as Africville and the North End. While Loo provides a cursory examination of this topic, an exploration of the enduring and transformative repercussions of urban renewal and relocation policies on the social and cultural dynamics within Black communities is needed. An in-depth analysis of the ways in which urban renewal policies have impacted kinship structures, informal employment networks, cultural significant institutions and physical spaces, and community support mechanisms within uprooted Black communities, would serve as a

²⁷ Tina Loo, "The View from Jacob Street: Reframing Urban Renewal in Postwar Halifax," *Acadiensis* 48, no. 2 (2019): 15-16, <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1067766ar>.

²⁸ Loo, "The View from Jacob Street," 37-38.

vital extension of Loo's examination of the state's role in determining the quality of life of its citizens and the ramifications of such policies.

While Africville has been the focus of significant scholarly work on postwar urban renewal in Canada, a handful of scholars have examined the effects of state-imposed urban renewal in other communities and at differing points of the postwar period. Roger M. Picton, an Associate Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at Trent University, offers an insightful analysis of Ottawa's postwar urban redevelopment scheme and its impact on the working-class residents of the LeBreton Flats neighbourhood. In his article, "Rubble and Ruin: Walter Benjamin, Postwar Urban Renewal, and the Residue of Everyday Life on LeBreton Flats, Ottawa, Canada (1944-1970)," Picton delves into the consequences of state-initiated displacement on the inhabitants of LeBreton Flats, including both renters and landowners, starting from the mid-1950s. The juxtaposition of residential and industrial structures challenged high modernist notions of residential and industrial segregation, prompting the federal government to introduce, *Plan for the National Capital*, in 1950. This resulted in the removal of working-class inhabitants along with various foundries, plants, garages, and lumber and scrap metal industries from the area.²⁹ Picton's research proves valuable in the exploration of the ramifications of expropriation and redevelopment, particularly in the "severing of community and family ties" and the overall instability experienced in redeveloped neighbourhoods. Picton highlights the loss of economic stability and power among community members, many of whom were long-term occupants and had passed

²⁹ Roger M. Picton, "Rubble and Ruin: Walter Benjamin, Post-war Urban Renewal and the Residue of Everyday Life on LeBreton Flats, Ottawa, Canada (1944-1970)," *Urban History* 42, no. 1 (2015): 138, 142-143, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26398346>.

down property through generations.³⁰ By applying German philosopher Walter Benjamin's process of collecting "material traces and spaces of the past" Picton examines the traces and remnants of urban life in the LeBreton Flats, demonstrating how the neighbourhood served a community in ways unseen by urban planners and city officials. This methodological approach proves instrumental in exploring the experiences of working-class residents within redeveloped communities and uncovering the conflicting perspectives between government narratives and lived realities.

Another article by Picton, "Selling National Urban Renewal: The National Film Board, the National Capital Commission and Post-war Planning in Ottawa, Canada," explores the history of the National Capital Commission's campaign to increase public support for urban renewal, not just in the LeBreton Flats neighbourhood, but throughout the country. In this article, the author explores the relationship between Canada's National Film Board and the National Capital Commission in creating propaganda films to further convince Canadians of the benefits of urban renewal. The author also explores the influence of European postwar urban planning and propaganda on Canadian planning practices. While National Film Board productions were often well received by viewers, Picton suggests that both the intentions of this institution and the experts commissioned to create these films were closely tied to authoritarian ideology and militaristic rhetoric of the interwar and Cold War periods. The author connects postwar urban renewal to authoritarian slum clearance in France by exploring the recruitment of French architect and urban planner Jacques Gréber and his experience consulting for the Vichy

³⁰ Picton, "Rubble and Ruin," 147.

government.³¹ The author also observes the influence of English filmmaker and founder of the National Film Board, John Grierson. Grierson's experience in "progress films" led to the creation of several pro-urban renewal productions through the *Canada Carries On* series. *Ottawa: Today and Tomorrow* (1951) and *Farewell Oak Street* (1953), characterised neighbourhoods in Ottawa and Toronto as greatly affected by blight, disease, and poor conditions prior to state intervention.³² Picton's analysis of NFB films sheds light on the federal government's vested interest in portraying working-class and racialized communities as blighted and disease-ridden, aiming to mitigate public resistance to expropriation and demolition. These themes are evident in the National Film Board's productions, *Redevelopment in Four Cities* and *Redevelopment in Windsor – The First Step*, where Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor is depicted as a deplorable slum area in dire need of renewal, despite overwhelmingly positive survey results indicating resident satisfaction with the area. Picton's exploration of the government's use of film as a propaganda tool suggests a deliberate effort on the government's behalf to secure public support for federal housing policies and great disregard for any process of consultation with affected residents. Picton positions postwar urban renewal as a top-down, bureaucratic tool to maintain order and control over populations and their physical spaces.

In his article, "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," historian Richard White identifies the prevalent misconceptions regarding Toronto's urban renewal history. White delves into an overlooked aspect of Canadian urban renewal history,

³¹ Roger M. Picton, "Selling National Urban Renewal: The National Film Board, the National Capital Commission and Post-war Planning in Ottawa, Canada," *Urban History* 37, no. 2 (2010): 307-309, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44614277>.

³² Picton, "Selling National Urban Renewal," 304, 312-313.

observing the perspectives and endeavours of pro-renewal advocates, alongside the intricacies of urban planning projects in postwar Toronto. White suggests much of the city's urban renewal history has been marred by over-generalizations that fail to acknowledge the nuanced efforts of city planners. White contends that the contributions of urban renewal advocates have been widely overlooked in Toronto's urban renewal history, prompting some scholars to invoke James C. Scott's concept of the "synoptic view." This perspective suggests that Toronto's renewal plans were perceived as sweeping and destructive and lacking a comprehensive understanding of residents' daily lives. White concludes that Toronto's metropolitan planners, through their extensive surveying and data collection efforts, were more familiar with the target population than has been credited. He further investigates the iterations and shifts in urban renewal policies and practices during Toronto's postwar era, illustrating how government funding and project constraints significantly impacted city planners' capacity to execute intended renewal initiatives. Instead, a considerable portion of the city's urban renewal efforts concentrated on redevelopment and public housing, rather than revitalization as was often advocated. White offers a concise yet comprehensive examination of Canadian urban renewal and its evolution since the early twentieth century. He illustrates a problematic tendency to equate urban renewal solely with total demolition. White research suggests planning records for urban renewal projects in Regent Park South, Moss Park, Alexandra Park, and other smaller areas of the city were remarkably detailed, demonstrating city planners' thorough familiarity with residents and their habits. While these planners often overlooked the complexities of urban living and adopting paternalistic assumptions, planners' close familiarity with residents resulted, in some instances, in housing

opportunities that better catered to the needs of displaced families and residents. However, he does acknowledge the shortcomings of the city's renewal projects, contending that the emphasis on public housing obscured the broader goals of urban renewal advocacy, which extended beyond mere housing provision. White's analysis proves valuable in understanding the changes to both local and federal urban renewal policies during the postwar era and the diverse influences that hindered revitalization efforts and genuine assistance to residents. In the case of the McDougall Street Corridor, observing the interests of proponents of urban renewal adds a layer of nuance to the inception and planning of such projects in Windsor. In contrast to White's analysis of postwar urban renewal in Toronto, the extensive surveys conducted by Windsor's Planning Board on Redevelopment failed to result in responsible consultation or appropriate accommodations for uprooted residents. It is worth noting that, while not explored by White, a similar lack of consultation and accommodation affected residents in Toronto as well. As this paper will investigate, local surveys and the expressed opinions and desires of affected residents had minimal impact on Windsor's redevelopment of the McDougall Street Corridor. The presumption was that city planners and architects knew what was best.

Scholarly research detailing Windsor's Urban Renewal history and the impact on affected neighbourhoods is notably scarce. William R. Gross's master's research, *The Redevelopment Area of Windsor to 1900*, published in 1961, stands out as a significant exploration of the downtown redevelopment zones. Gross's intent was to document the history of the area from its establishment to the early twentieth century, and to provide commentary on the state of the physical area post-expropriation. His research relied

heavily on interviews collected by historian Neil F. Morrison, author of *Garden Gateway to Canada: One Hundred Years of Windsor and Essex County, 1854-1954*, beginning in the 1940s. Gross's work captured sentiments expressed by residents during the expropriation and demolition period, as well as documenting families, businesses, and spaces that had once been at the core of the downtown community. One such interview with Mrs. Timbers, a member of the Black community and former resident of 277 University Avenue, noted she felt "bitterly" about her forced relocation.³³ While Gross does not focus specifically on the Black community or the effects of redevelopment socially or culturally, this source is useful for its interviews with Black residents of the downtown area at the height of redevelopment and the mapping of the area prior to redevelopment.

Race and Space in Canada

The McDougall Street Corridor and its hundreds of Black residents occupied a highly visible space within Windsor, adjacent to the city's central business district and surrounding city hall. Yet, many in Windsor are unaware the area now occupied by City Hall Square, various government buildings, and multiple apartment and public housing units was once a vibrant and thriving community – home to a historic Black enclave. Despite the annual city-wide turnout to Windsor's Emancipation Day Celebrations, which also drew thousands from across Ontario, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and as far away as Louisiana, and featured the highly anticipated main street parade mere steps from the community's domain, in the absence of the community's demarcation through physical spaces, Windsor's downtown Black neighbourhood seems to have been rendered

³³ William R. Gross, "The Redevelopment Area of Windsor to 1900," (master's thesis, University of Windsor, 1961), 202.

invisible. This invisibility extended to historical collections and regional literature. Regardless of the McDougall Street Corridor's stature among the oldest communities in Windsor, few texts prior to the 1960s noted anything of substance about the community, its existence, or its history.

In examining the intersection of race and urban renewal policies in Canada, Katherine McKittrick's notion of the "surprise of Blackness" offers valuable insight to the distinct challenges encountered by Black communities during and after the process of government-led physical erasure. McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, contends that the state's desire to obscure blackness and Black Canadian identities, perceived as incongruent with the curated image of Canada as an ethnically European nation, facilitated the neglect and later demolition of historic Black Canadian communities, like that of Halifax's Africville.³⁴ With this in mind, it could be argued that the demolition of spaces within Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor served as a means to erase visible manifestations of the city's Black presence, history, and participation in society, effectively "landscaping blackness out" of Windsor and perpetuating a belief that Black Windsorites and the spaces they inhabited were inconsequential to the broader Canadian project.³⁵

McKittrick's "surprise of Blackness" is most fitting a concept to describe this invisibility as it suggests there were other forces at work in the lack of interest in Windsor's Black community, as well as the lack of exposure of the community to the rest of the city. The neighbourhood was, however, visible enough to warrant consideration for the city's first federally funded redevelopment project.

³⁴ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 92.

³⁵ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 96.

These forces are explored in Carmen Poole's work on Black erasure in Chatham, Ontario. While it remains uncertain whether the erasure of Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor was a deliberate consideration on the part of city council or redevelopment planners, similar instances of physical Black erasure are evident not far from Windsor. Carmen Poole's Ph.D. dissertation, "Conspicuous Peripheries: Black Identity, Memory, and Community in Chatham, ON, 1860-1980," illuminates the erasure of Chatham's East End community, partly stemming from the prescribed invisibility of Chatham's Black community and its history. Poole's research on the redevelopment of Chatham's East End and the demolition of significant Black historical sites, such as the British Methodist Episcopal Church and John Brown House, underscores the social and cultural "dislocation" experienced by Chatham's Black population.³⁶ Similar to the McDougall Street Corridor, Chatham's East End was often characterised as decedent, rendering it seemingly less deserving of rehabilitation. Although Chatham's Black community did not undergo complete razing, the destruction of historically significant buildings serves as yet another testament to the invisibility of Black Canadians and their contributions to Canada's heritage. It also speaks to how this invisibility can fuel the destruction of vital spaces.³⁷ This pattern of erasure highlights the broader societal disregard for the cultural heritage and significance of Black communities, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and neglect. The work of both McKittrick and Poole suggests the consistent disregard for the cultural significance of Black neighbourhoods, reducing them to mere slums or blighted areas rather than vibrant communities with unique cultural histories worth rehabilitating, certainly contributed to this process of erasure. In an unfortunate cycle, the

³⁶ Carmen Poole, "Conspicuous Peripheries: Black Identity, Memory, and Community in Chatham, ON, 1860-1980" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015), pg. 214-217.

³⁷ Poole, "Conspicuous Peripheries," 180-182, 212.

systemic discrimination in housing, employment, and services was not only a product of this invisibility but further fed into the perceived lack of existence of Chatham's East End or Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor, until these spaces were deemed useful to the municipal government's renewal mission. Consequently, city planners failed to recognize the implications of their actions, viewing the destruction of Black neighbourhoods simply as a matter of modernisation rather than an act of racial or cultural erasure.

CHAPTER 3

WINDSOR'S MCDOUGALL STREET CORRIDOR

When I think of that neighbourhood, it really brings a smile to my face. It just lightens my soul.

Anna Walls, "We Were Here," 2022.

The origins of Windsor's predominately Black district emerged as the result of numerous historical factors. The first was the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. As the British Parliament moved forward with the abolition of slavery across most of the empire, Upper Canada would soon become a beacon of hope for tens of thousands of Africans held in bondage in the slaveholding states of America. In the late eighteenth century, Upper Canada established significant barriers to the importation of enslaved peoples and had enacted policy to gradually phase out particular forms of bondage. But it was the Slavery Abolition Act that confirmed for African Americans the opportunity for freedom in the North.³⁸ Those who were able to escape utilised a system of routes and safehouses leading to free states and further north to various cities and towns along the Canada-US border. Underground Railroad terminals could be found along the Detroit-Windsor border, in towns such as Amherstburg and Sandwich. Windsor was also one of these stops, with freedom seekers crossing the Detroit River and arriving near the foot of Windsor Avenue, between Goyeau Street and McDougall Street.³⁹ This location became an important final stop along the Underground Railroad in the 1850s, with the city's former army barracks, now the location of Windsor's City Hall Square, serving as an

³⁸ Landon, *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage*, 35-37; Irene Moore Davis, *Our Own Two Hands: A History of Black Lives in Windsor* (Author's Copy, 2019), 9-10; John Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex: Environment, Culture, and Economy on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 82.

³⁹ Davis, "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region," 84-86, 94-96.

essential care station providing temporary lodgings and medical treatment to those fleeing bondage.⁴⁰

Through the decade, more freedom seekers would pass through the barracks, before moving further into Essex and Kent counties, to towns and settlements in Amherstburg, Buxton, Chatham, and Maidstone.⁴¹ Fearing the possibility of recapture, few would remain in Windsor. Those who did, settled around the barracks on McDougall Street, Mercer Street, and Windsor Avenue.⁴²

Before the 1850s, the movement of formerly enslaved African Americans into Windsor-Essex had been a relative trickle. There was a notable increase in movement following the end of the War of 1812, and again with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.⁴³ Once free states became subject to the same legal processes as slaveholding states, allowing for the capture and return to enslavement of freedom seekers and free people of colour, Canadian towns and cities soon became places of refuge for both recently freed African Americans and those born free or residing in Northern states.⁴⁴ It was during this rapid influx that Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor emerged. Historian Patrick Brode suggests that by the mid-1860s, Windsor was home to almost six hundred Black Canadians, comprising 22% of the city's total population.⁴⁵ Much of this population resided in what was formerly the city's Second Ward, densely populating McDougall Street and forming an "entire neighbourhood."⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Davis, "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region," 92-93.

⁴¹ Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 82.

⁴² Neil F. Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada: One Hundred Years of Windsor and Essex County, 1854-1954* (Toronto: Ryerson University Press, 1954), 29.

⁴³ Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 81.

⁴⁴ Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada*, 28-29; Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 81.

⁴⁵ Brode, *The River and the Land*, 56, 152.

⁴⁶ Brode, *The River and the Land*, 56.

It is important to note that Essex County had, prior to the establishment of Windsor's McDougall Street Corridor, been home to hundreds of enslaved Black men, women, and children since the early settlement of the region. Enslaved Black people were brought to the region by some early French settlers and certainly in the British era by Loyalists, following their relocation to the area from the United States.⁴⁷ Loyalists were encouraged to bring with them those individuals they owned, as slave labour was essential to the Loyalist resettlement process of clearing and cultivating land in the region.⁴⁸ According to historian Natasha Henry, Essex County was home to more than 90 enslaved people between 1782 and 1817 who had been brought to the region by approximately 27 Loyalist families.⁴⁹ Though the McDougall Street Corridor was predominantly settled by freedom seekers, there was an existing Black presence in Windsor as a result of the region's history with slavery. Freedom seekers settling in Windsor certainly would have encountered enslaved Black Canadians earlier in the nineteenth century.

Situated east of Windsor's commercial district, the earliest iteration of the McDougall Street Corridor community was loosely bound by what is today Windsor Avenue, Wyandotte Street East, Mercer Street, and University Avenue.⁵⁰ While the boundaries of the Black community would change over the course of the next century, the majority of Windsor's Black residents lived within this area, with most residing along

⁴⁷ Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 81; Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 27, 29-30.

⁴⁸ Natasha Henry, "One Too Many: Africans Enslaved in Essex County," October 22, 2020, online presentation for the Amherstburg Freedom Museum, https://youtu.be/YUNTs_taiKw?si=NBQjVDB4TIQFe_tF; Peggy Bristow, "A Duty to the Past, a Promise to the Future," 19.

⁴⁹ Natasha Henry, "One Too Many: Africans Enslaved in Essex County," October 22, 2020.

⁵⁰ George F. Macdonald, Map of the McDougall Street Area, "Windsor Lots 85 and 86," 1885, M193, Museum Windsor, Windsor, Ont.; Gross, "The Redevelopment Area of Windsor to 1900," 174-175; Irene Moore Davis, "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region," 92.

McDougall and Mercer streets.⁵¹ Black homes and businesses had also been established as far north as Pitt Street along McDougall and Mercer. There had long been Black settlement in Sandwich, a formerly independent town on the west side of Windsor. Some of Windsor's oldest Black families settled around Sandwich First Baptist Church, a final stop for the Underground Railroad. Another enclave would emerge later in what is today South Cameron. Referred to as Tin Can City or New Detroit, this small neighbourhood was home to several Black families residing along Longfellow and McKay Avenues.

Though contested, contemporary estimates place the number of African Americans who fled to Canada during the nineteenth century to be as high as 40,000 and as low as 13,000, with most of this migration occurring between the period of the Fugitive Slave Act and the end of the Civil War.⁵² Ontario's Black population would decrease by approximately 20% between 1861 and 1871, as former freedom seekers migrated back to the United States in search of lost family members and greater opportunities.⁵³

Over the next century, Windsor's Black community would expand beyond the initial boundaries of McDougall Street, pushing further south to Erie Street East, west to Goyeau Street East, and east to Howard Avenue. Encroachment from various industries including the McLean Lumber Co., would eventually push the northern boundary of the Corridor further south past University Avenue. Evidence of the Corridor's growth can be observed in relation to the oldest physical spaces associated with the community, its

⁵¹ Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada*, 39.

⁵² E. Andrea Moore, "The Tradition of Social Action in Windsor's British Methodist Episcopal Church," [ca. 1999], F0136, Box 2, Series 1.2, File 11, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; Landon, *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage*, 38, 66-67; Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 83.

⁵³ Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada*, 29-30; Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, 83.

churches. The first of the five main churches built within the boundaries of the Corridor was the British Methodist Episcopal Church (BME) formerly located on McDougall Street near University Avenue. The congregation was originally established as an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in 1852 by freedom seekers, with the original wooden church built two years later. Canadian AME members would eventually decide to break from the American body as concerns grew over the increased dangers of crossing the border for church conferences.⁵⁴ By 1863, the BME congregation laid the cornerstone of their new brick church at 363 McDougall Street. With water from the Detroit River used for the mixing of the mortar, the church was dedicated in 1868.⁵⁵

The congregation for Windsor's First Baptist Church was established in 1853, with members gathering in their homes for prayer meetings before a physical church was built in 1858 on McDougall Street near University Avenue. As membership increased a larger church was erected on Mercer Street in 1915.⁵⁶ Another founding church was the Tanner African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Windsor's AME purchased an existing Baptist church on Mercer Street for their congregation in 1888.⁵⁷ Together, these churches emerged as the nucleus of Windsor's Black community, providing religious guidance and much needed services. Two Pentecostal congregations later emerged in the twentieth century. Mount Zion Church of God in Christ was founded in the early 1920s and Harrison Memorial in 1963. Emerging from the Delta regions of the United States, Pentecostalism was brought to the Detroit border region in the early twentieth century

⁵⁴ Moore, "The Tradition of Social Action in Windsor's British Methodist Episcopal Church," 1999.

⁵⁵ Moore, "The Tradition of Social Action in Windsor's British Methodist Episcopal Church," 1999.

⁵⁶ "Thumb Nail Historical Sketch of the First Baptist Church," First Baptist Church 125th Anniversary Booklet, 1978; Charlotte Bronte Perry, *The Long Road: The History of the Coloured Canadian in Windsor, Ontario, 1867-1967* (Windsor: Sumner Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1967), 120-126.

⁵⁷ Perry, *The Long Road*, 128-131.

and was expanded by the renowned Bishop C. L. Morton Sr., the founder of the Canadian and International Churches of God in Christ. Establishing churches on both sides of the border, Morton was instrumental in erecting five Pentecostal churches in Southwestern Ontario and six in the United States. With a religious core established, businesses, schools, and social organisations emerged expeditiously, facilitating the varied needs of the neighbourhood's residents, and encouraging more settlement within its borders.

Education served as a vital pathway to social mobility for early residents of the neighbourhood. As Windsor's Black community took shape in the mid-nineteenth century, the earliest concerns focused on the founding of institutions that would facilitate the most fundamental aspect of citizenship and freedom, the education of both children and adults. As early as 1851, prominent abolitionist and educator, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, established the first known integrated school in the area, located in the former military barracks on the site of what is now Windsor's Civic Square. Closing after two years as a result of limited funding, her work set in motion a century long pursuit of education equality and education-related activism amongst Windsor's Black residents.⁵⁸ Another prominent abolitionist, Mary E. Bibb opened an integrated private school in the city not long after Cary, where she reportedly taught mostly Black students for approximately a decade.⁵⁹ Institutions emerging from within the community were necessary during this period of settlement as many schools in Ontario were racially segregated, a practice legalised through the Separate Schools Clause, an amendment to the *Common Schools Act* of 1850. The clause supported the legal segregation of children on the basis of race and religion, allowing school boards to deny entry to Black students and for white

⁵⁸ Daniel G. Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Toronto: Book Society of Canada Ltd., 1981), 154-156.

⁵⁹ Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers*, 154-156.

taxpayers to demand that Black students be excluded from white schools. This placed the responsibility of establishing schools for Black children not on the municipality or local school board, but on the Black community itself.

The first officially recognized segregated public school was housed in a small brick building on Assumption (formerly St. George Street), near McDougall Street. Known as the St. George Coloured School, or colloquially as “the coop,” this institution was among the first public schools in the city.⁶⁰ The St. George School opened in 1862 and operated for nearly thirty years, hiring Black educators from within the community to teach in a rented shed until a proper building was erected on the property.⁶¹ The St. George School would eventually close in 1888 at the decision of trustees, citing a shared desire by parents and residents for students to be educated in integrated classes.⁶² This decision came on the heels of the *Dunn v. The Board of Education of the Town of Windsor* case of 1883 in which prominent businessman and later Alderman, James L. Dunn, dissatisfied with the overcrowding of the segregated St. George School, attempted to enrol his daughter into the Public Central School.⁶³ Dunn lost his case, but sparked discussion amongst parents of the Corridor. By the end of the decade, it appears that many other Black residents threatened legal action against the segregation of their

⁶⁰ Brode, *The River and the Land*, 48.

⁶¹ “Meeting Old Acquaintances,” *Windsor Star*, August 13, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500386712>; “R. B. Harrison, the Jehovah of ‘Green Pastures,’ from Windsor,” *Windsor Star*, March 25, 1931, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501014412>; “Mr. McGregor Ill,” *Windsor Star*, December 14, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500489290>.

⁶² Jim Cornett, “Negro History Recalled,” *Windsor Star*, February 4, 1965, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501997845>.

⁶³ *Dunn v. The Board of Education of the Town of Windsor* (1883), 6 The Ontario Reports, 125 (Queen’s Bench and Chancery Division, High Court of Justice for Ontario), <https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/lawreports/10/>.

children, ultimately forcing the city of Windsor to finally admit Black children to the city's common schools by the turn of the century.⁶⁴

Not long after Dunn's court challenge, the city invested in the creation of several new public schools, including one on Mercer Street in the heart of the McDougall Street Corridor. Opening in 1891, the Mercer Street School was attended by many children from the Black community, and in 1902 when the city announced it expected all children of the Third Ward to attend the school on Mercer Street, pushback from non-Black parents as a result of the high concentration of Corridor students, left the school with a predominately Black, Jewish, and recent immigrant population.⁶⁵ It was estimated that around 300 Black students were enrolled in public schools in Windsor by the early twentieth century, with the majority attending Mercer Street.⁶⁶ For the few Black educators hired by the Windsor School Board, including Ada Kelly Whitney, Ann Smith Benson, and Eunice Hyatt Kersey, Mercer Street School provided an opportunity to invest in the future of their community as well as secure long-term employment.⁶⁷

Mercer Street School operated for fifty-five years until the building was partially damaged by arsonists in June of 1946.⁶⁸ Shortly after the fire, it was determined the school would close permanently, sending more than two hundred students and six

⁶⁴ "36 Schools Serve City," *Windsor Star*, August 1, 1942, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501140514>; "A Colored School: The Board of education Cannot Act with a Petition," *Windsor Star*, August 5, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500386406>.

⁶⁵ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 122, Lot 121, 46; "A Colored School," *Windsor Star*, August 5, 1902.

⁶⁶ "A Colored School," *Windsor Star*, August 5, 1902; Talbot, *Memoirs of a Black Canadian Activist*, 28.

⁶⁷ Perry, *The Long Road*, 54, 145, 181; Ontario Department of Education, *Public and Separate Schools and Teachers in the Province of Ontario* (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1916), 38; Ontario Department of Education, *Public and Separate Schools and Teachers in the Province of Ontario* (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1919), 39.

⁶⁸ "Blaze Fought by Firemen for 3 Hours: Officials Have No Doubt of Incendiarism," *Windsor Star*, June 25, 1946, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501141569>.

teachers to other schools across Windsor.⁶⁹ The grounds of Mercer Street School were used as a training site by police and fire services for a time, and later a temporary location for St. Clair College. Today, the Brighton Court apartment complex stands in the place where bright minds of the McDougall Street Corridor were once educated. As will be discussed, Windsor's public schools were not always welcoming to Black children. Institutions such as the Mercer Street School played a crucial role in offering students the opportunity to thrive in an atmosphere that embraced their identity and provided a sense of belonging.

Self-reliance was an essential part of life for McDougall Street Corridor residents. Black Windsorites were often restricted from patronising businesses and services across the city. In response, a network of formal and informal shops and services was established within the community to address the needs of residents and allow them to shop and request services with dignity. Restaurants, barber shops and hairdressers, tailors and dressmakers, carpenters, family grocers, doctor's offices, and other Black owned and operated specialty shops and businesses dotted the Corridor. Lois Larkin, whose family owned and operated the Walk House Hotel, shared:

As you know, the welcome mat has not always been fully extended to "people of colour"— a phrase my father and people of his generation preferred if he had to be described as other than Canadian. That limited welcome mat was not totally a bad thing. It made us as a people aware of our own ability to create and generate our

⁶⁹ "Will Close Old School: Mercer St. Building Past Usefulness," *Windsor Star*, July 18, 1946, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501197894>.

own welcome mats. Our community had its own doctors, ministers, shopkeepers, journalists, musicians, barbers, and hoteliers.⁷⁰

The earliest businesses included the J. L. Dunn Paint and Varnish Co., Hyatt Green Houses, and the Alberts Steam Cleaning and Pressing Plant, all Black-owned by residents of the area. Notable establishments that survived until the redevelopment era included the Walker House Hotel, Landrum Hall, and the Frontier Social Club. The Walker House Hotel was owned and operated by a local Black merchant, Edward Walker, beginning in the mid-1880s. It was later sold to the Smith family, who continued the hotel's operations as the premiere Black-owned hotel in Windsor and served patrons from both sides of the border in a time when most hotels refused to accommodate Black guests.⁷¹ Lois Larkin recalled:

A good meal was available in the dining room, and it was, in general, a social meeting place. Men played checkers and cards in the men's beverage room and in the bar. Ladies met in the ladies' lounge, and if they were escorted, ladies went into the dining room with a gentleman.⁷²

Landrum Hall, a popular social hall on McDougall Street, was built in the 1920s to serve as the home lodge of the city's Prince Hall Freemasons. It was later rented for monthly meetings by social organisations and clubs from the community. Clarence Monroe's Frontier Social Club would eventually move into Landrum Hall in the 1930s, making it

⁷⁰ Lois Larkin, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, October 29, 2021.

⁷¹ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 106, Lots 68, 73-74; "Windsor's Assessment: Ward 3," *Windsor Star*, May 19, 1908, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500213883>; Perry, *The Long Road*, 19, 30.

⁷² Lois Larkin, interview, 2021.

one of Windsor's most popular Black spaces, not only for music and dancing, but as a space for community fundraising and political events.⁷³

Harding Electric was a family-run business operated from the home of the Harding Family. Morris Harding was a master electrician who, alongside his wife Ruth, operated this successful business for more than forty years beginning in 1947.⁷⁴ This family business operated from the Harding's home at 1136 Windsor Avenue and another location in Sandwich West.

Emmanuel C. Parker and his family ran a confectionary store from their home at 840 Mercer Street. It was a popular establishment especially with students from across the street at Mercer Street School.⁷⁵ Emmanuel's son, Alton Parker, owned Parker's Service Station at the corner of Brodhead Street and Howard Avenue where he worked as a mechanic before joining the Windsor Police Service. Alton Parker also owned several small apartment buildings in the community which he routinely rented to Black families, a necessary service in a city with rampant housing discrimination.⁷⁶

The Fellowship of Coloured Churches Credit Union was founded in 1944 to address the banking needs of individuals and families in the Corridor. Credit unions proved invaluable during the twentieth century, given the challenges many Black Canadians faced in securing mortgages or other loans from traditional banks due to

⁷³ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 107, Lots 6, 2-3; Perry, *The Long Road*, 180; "Masons Meet Here: Coloured Lodge Members Rally in Landrum Hall for Annual Parley," *Windsor Star*, August 21, 1928, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500545635>; "Eighteen Speak in Landrum Hall," *Windsor Star*, December 1, 1932, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501126916>; Davis, *Our Own Two Hands*, 104.

⁷⁴ Elise Harding Davis, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, October 11, 2022.

⁷⁵ Perry, *The Long Road*, 19.

⁷⁶ R. M. Harrison, "Now," *Windsor Star*, September 16, 1949, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501078840>; Ken Rock, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, January 12, 2023.

persistent racial stereotypes. Windsor's Coloured Credit Union was dedicated to creating and preserving wealth within the McDougall Street Corridor by aiding families with home loans, loans for businesses, and student bursaries. Initial meetings of the credit union were held at 480 Brodhead Street, the home of civil rights activist Hugh Burnett, until a space was later rented in the North American Masonic Lodge Hall at 900 Mercer Street. By the early 1960s, the credit union had amassed nearly three hundred members and acquired a larger office at the corner of Windsor Avenue and Erie Street. Harding Electric, Parker's Service Station, Parker's Apartments, and the Fellowship of Coloured Churches Credit Union are but a few establishments that emerged because of the community's accessibility issues.⁷⁷ Informal or home-based businesses were commonplace too. Anna Walls recalled:

My grandfather lived right behind me on Windsor Avenue. It was McDougall Street, we were back-to-back, and he had his garden. I had to work in the garden. I had to plant seeds and string the lines, things like that. He took his veggies and things to the market. He had chickens and eggs.⁷⁸

Men and women of the neighbourhood found employment or additional income through providing services to their neighbours. One woman, Catherine Sobrian, operated a vocal studio from her home at 1034 Highland Avenue. Trained in Chicago, Sobrian was noted as being "the only representative of our race" to instruct Black students in this vocation.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ken Rock, interview, 2023; Lana Talbot, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, January 28, 2022.

⁷⁸ Anna Walls, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, August 10, 2022.

⁷⁹ Advertisement for C. Sobrian's Vocal Studio, "Windsor Notes," *Dawn of Tomorrow*, August 16, 1924, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00229_192307/380; *Vernon's City of Windsor Directory for the Year 1924-1925* (Windsor, ON: Henry Vernon & Son Directory Publishers, 1924), 79, SWODA Publications, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/windsor-directories/>.

Another, Sadie Johnson, operated the Blue Tea Room restaurant from her home at 871 McDougall Street. An advertisement for her restaurant was printed in the *Detroit Tribune* and promised fried chicken dinners and Canadian barbeque, along with catering services to both Windsor and Detroit.⁸⁰

Added benefits of living in a border city meant services and employment opportunities not available to Black Windsorites could more easily be found in Detroit. It was common for Black families in the Detroit River region to have relatives on both sides of the border and many residents of the McDougall Street Corridor routinely crossed the river for shopping, employment, social organisations, or to attend services at one of the many sister-churches. These connections, amongst others, made the Detroit-Windsor border a fluid channel of cultural exchange, social networking, and opportunities. The “Windsor Spotlight” column of the African American newspaper, the *Detroit Tribune*, attests to this strong cross border connection. Between 1933 and 1945, the column was produced, at various times, by five Windsor women who wrote of the goings on in the McDougall Street Corridor, noting church events, birthdays, club meetings, and family gatherings on a weekly basis.⁸¹

Advertised meetings included those held monthly by the Coloured Citizens’ Association (later the Central Citizens’ Association). Established in Windsor in 1928 by church leaders and members of the BME and First Baptist Churches, this organisation served the community as its first official civil rights group. Coloured Citizens’ Association (CCA) records cite the immediate need “of organising our people as a civic

⁸⁰ Advertisement for the Blue Tea Room, *Detroit Tribune*, September 8, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/668783630>.

⁸¹ Cecil Craven, Lavina “Tiny” Robbins, Duchess Johnson, Mary Stewart and Arytia Chase, wrote for the “Windsor Spotlight” column in the *Detroit Tribune* at various points between 1933 to 1945.

unit in order to protect and develop our interests” as the motivating factor for the Association's inception. Numerous prominent and civic-minded residents of the Corridor enlisted as members of the Association, with membership steadily climbing to three hundred by 1940. The CCA maintained its position as the “official voice of the coloured people of Windsor in all matters” that affected the community for several decades.⁸² Networking through their monthly meetings, the CCA invited Black leaders and those sympathetic to the plight of Black Windsorites to speak on various topics including civil rights advocacy, fair education, and political representation. Often held at Landrum Hall, guest speakers included the director of the Detroit Urban League, the manager of the Brewster Homes Detroit (the first federally funded housing project for African Americans which was located in the former Black Bottom neighbourhood), and the executive secretary of the YMCA Detroit.⁸³ The YMCA Detroit meeting followed the CCA’s struggle with Windsor’s YMCA and the attempt to establish a separate community centre by some members of the Black community following reports of discrimination against Black youth. The Science, Arts and Crafts Club, a youth auxiliary of the CCA, rejected the proposition of a segregated centre, instead working to fully integrate Windsor’s YMCA.⁸⁴ The CCA also worked to increase Black political representation by placing its own candidates in positions of influence in municipal

⁸² “Minute Book, Advisory-Executive Board, Colored Citizens’ Association of Windsor and District,” [ca. 1929-1938], F0136, Box 10, Series 7, File 1, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; “Central Citizens’ Association,” [ca. 1938], F0136, Box 10, Series 7, File 3, Historical Chronology, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

⁸³ “Speaks Monday,” *Windsor Star*, June 1, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501165337>; “Citizens Association,” *Windsor Star*, April 10, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501132302>; “Citizens’ Group to Hear Talk Tonight,” *Windsor Star*, May 15, 1939, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501107630>.

⁸⁴ “Central Citizens’ Association,” E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; Davis, *Our Own Two Hands*, 120-121.

government. In 1931, the CCA supported member Dr. Henry D. Taylor's election to the Windsor Board of Education, with Taylor succeeding and maintaining his position for more than thirty years.⁸⁵ Another attempt in 1940 to elect William Bush as city alderman for the third ward was unsuccessful.⁸⁶

By 1941, Windsor's Black population numbered approximately 1100, just over a percent of the city's population.⁸⁷ Many members of this close-knit community were related by blood or through marriage, leading to a landscape of extended families. Though Windsor no longer saw any notable Black migration from the United States and the city's Black population did not grow significantly, in the early twentieth century the community periodically experienced influx from the movement of those from rural areas into Windsor for industrial and manufacturing work, particularly in the years of World War II.⁸⁸

This was the Windsor that shaped Black residents like Walter Perry. Perry grew up at 789 Mercer Street, sharing his backyard with Mercer Street School. He had watched his mother operate her own small business from their home, "the Verandah Inn," a popular restaurant for residents often denied services at other establishments.⁸⁹ All around him, men and women of his neighbourhood were participating in community building projects through the establishment of businesses, social organisations, and

⁸⁵ Perry, *The Long Road*, 71; Dr. W. H. Lawson, "Dr. H. D. Taylor, Windsor Physician, Has Fine Career," *Detroit Tribune*, July 20, 1935, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/863639417>.

⁸⁶ "Here Are the Men Who Are Seeking Offices as Windsor Aldermen and School Trustees," *Windsor Star*, November 30, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501262763>.

⁸⁷ Census of Canada, "Population by Racial Origin, Age Groups and Sex, for Cities of 30,000 and over, 1941," Government of Canada Publications, Vol. 3, Table 13, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS98-1941-3.pdf.

⁸⁸ Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada*, 29-30; Bristow, "A Duty to the Past, a Promise to the Future," 20.

⁸⁹ Charlotte Bronte Perry, *One Man's Journey: Roy Prince Edward Perry, 1905-1972* (Windsor: Sumner Press, 1982), 3; "Advises Colored Folk to Open Cafes," *Windsor Star*, September 8, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501159614>.

recreational groups, and the breaking down of barriers in education, employment, and politics. His brother, Dr. Roy Perry, was a dentist and served a combined twenty years as a Windsor City Councillor for his community, Ward Three.⁹⁰ One of Perry's neighbours, Alton Parker, had become the city's first uniformed Black police officer, and later Canada's first Black detective.⁹¹

Perry himself had been responsible for reviving the community's tradition of Emancipation Day, an annual multi-day celebration in August commemorating the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. This event was, as Perry sought to organise it, a celebration of the triumphs of Windsor's Black community and the origin of the McDougall Street neighbourhood.⁹² He began organising the annual event in 1932, establishing a Black beauty pageant known internationally as the Miss Sepia Pageant, and later securing performances from up-and-coming acts in Black entertainment such as Diana Ross and the Supremes, the Temptations, and Stevie Wonder. "Race Leaders" and prominent civil rights advocates were invited to speak to crowds at Jackson Park including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Fred Shuttlesworth, and the widow of American civil rights activist Medgar Evers. Perry would go on to establish the British American Association of Coloured Brothers (BAACB) in 1935, the official organiser of the celebrations, which also produced a yearly Emancipation Day guide, *Progress Magazine*.⁹³

⁹⁰ Perry, *The Long Road*, 78-79; Jim Cornett, "Who, When, and Whatnot," *Windsor Star*, September 18, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/502391294>.

⁹¹ Perry, *The Long Road*, 43.

⁹² Perry, *The Long Road*, 82-83.

⁹³ "Letters Patent Incorporating British-American Association of Coloured Brothers of Ontario," [ca. 1957], F0136, Box 6, Series 2.1, Files 1-2, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

Between the 1920s and 1950s, Windsor's Black population had progressed considerably, amassing significant political power in the city's third ward, and making a name for itself as Windsor's "Little Harlem," a popular destination for tens of thousands of African American and a community of respected doctors, businessmen, educators, and barrier-breakers.⁹⁴ How then, could Windsor's Little Harlem be subject to an almost complete obliteration?

While residents of the McDougall Street Corridor had clearly made the best of what was still a challenging racial landscape, the existence of the neighbourhood was a reminder of the second-class status applied to Black Windsorites. The province of Ontario passed legislation in 1950 prohibiting racially restrictive covenants from being registered in association to land.⁹⁵ However, housing discrimination persisted well into the 1960s, especially in the form of informal restrictive practices which severely limited where in the city Black Windsorites could rent or purchase homes.⁹⁶ These discriminatory practices kept Black families in the McDougall Street Corridor, restricted their movement into other areas, and led to serious overcrowding by the postwar period.

As Windsor's Black population grew into the 1950s, the boundaries of the Corridor remained ever much the same. Overcrowding had become such an issue for the community, as well as the rest of the city, that in 1948 the Windsor Control Board had considered the possibility of utilising the retired Mercer Street School building as a site

⁹⁴ *Vernon's City of Windsor Directory for the Year 1934* (Windsor, ON: Henry Vernon & Son Directory Publishers, 1934), 202, SWODA Publications, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/windsor-directories/>.

⁹⁵ Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 197.

⁹⁶ Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 197; James W. St. G. Walker, "Race," *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1997), 190-192; Clayton James Mosher, *Discrimination and Denial: Systemic Racism in Ontario's Legal and Criminal Justice Systems, 1892-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 96-98; Jonathan V. Plaut, *The Jews of Windsor, 1790-1990: A Historical Chronicle* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007), 184.

for families awaiting housing.⁹⁷ Precedents had already been set for this type of accommodation, with the former Louis Avenue School serving a similar function for four unhoused families, including 16 children.⁹⁸

Opinions on the state of the Corridor were, and still are, varied. Many former residents have described it as a sanctuary, a place where “Each neighbour looked after one another and also each other’s children.”⁹⁹ But reports from the era of redevelopment paint a more dire picture. While the McDougall Street Corridor was referred to rarely in relation to the city’s history, those instances when it was, were often in relation to the city’s issues with blight. This “third-class zone” was described as “decadent” littered with “Small houses, in poor repair, with few services.”¹⁰⁰ To make matters worse, the Corridor did suffer from a severely ageing housing stock. More than a century old, many homes and buildings were in desperate need of repair, and some needed to be built anew.

The language employed to describe the community, particularly in discussions surrounding the necessity for government intervention, often carried negative racial connotations. Terms like ‘cleaning up’ the neighbourhood of perceived problematic elements such as disease and delinquency were pervasive, reflecting underlying biases towards the predominantly Black population and indicative of racialized perceptions of blight and slum conditions. Reports from the Medical Health Officer, utilized by city planners to illustrate “Social Problems” in the downtown core, suggested the area bound

⁹⁷ “Urge Ottawa Keep Curb on Rentals,” *Windsor Star*, October 6, 1948, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500196720>; “School May Have Value: Housing Shortage Solution Studied,” *Windsor Star*, October 6, 1948, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500196720>; Plaut, *The Jews of Windsor, 1790-1990*, 63.

⁹⁸ “School May Have Value,” *Windsor Star*, 1948; Perry, *One Man’s Journey*, Pg. 80.

⁹⁹ Alzora Chase, *McDougall Street Reflections: A Walk Down Memory Lane*, Northstar Cultural Community Centre, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ J. Lewis Robinson, “Windsor, Ontario: A Study in Urban Geography,” (master’s thesis, Syracuse University, 1942), 89, 90, 94, 96.

by Goyeau Street, Marentette Avenue, Wyandotte Street and Riverside Drive, was a hotspot for incidents of infectious disease. Notably these reports singled out the Corridor as having the highest rates of tuberculosis.¹⁰¹ Officials also attributed high rates of juvenile delinquency to poor housing conditions in the Black neighbourhood. Interestingly, early redevelopment reports noted an area outside of the downtown core with new residential developments was experiencing “considerable delinquency” cases, indicating deeper social and economic factors were at play.¹⁰²

Adding to these subtle racial undertones, was a noticeable absence of mentions of Windsor’s Black community in historical records throughout the neighbourhood’s existence. Drawing from Katherine McKittrick’s theory of the Black Surprise, as well as Carmen Poole’s usage of this term in her examination of Chatham’s Black community, this silence could be interpreted as a deliberate effort by the city to suppress or minimize the presence of its Black population, reflecting a broader pattern of marginalization and erasure of Black voices and contributions. This sentiment persisted throughout the twentieth century, manifested in the city’s dealings with organizers of the annual Emancipation Day celebrations. Despite the historical significance of Emancipation, by the 1960s, and particularly in response to racial tensions across the river, the city of Windsor began imposing what many residents believed were unfair restrictions on financial aid and permits for Emancipation Day events. Dr. Kevin Ellsworth recalled:

After the Detroit insurrection there, the riot, they [the city] didn’t want that [Emancipation Celebrations] anymore. They made it completely obvious that they

¹⁰¹ E.G. Faludi and Associates, “Fifteen Year Programme for the Urban Renewal of the City of Windsor and its Metropolitan Area” (SWODA: Windsor & Region Publications 83, 1959), 189.

¹⁰² Faludi, “Fifteen Year Programme,” 189.

weren't going to have it anymore. They shut it down after the Detroit insurrection, they shut it down that year and after that, they basically wouldn't let them back in there. Then they moved them out, I remember when they moved it out to Mic Mac Park.... Back in the sixties and seventies, it was in the middle of nowhere... but at the time no one wanted to go to Mic Mac Park. Jackson Park was right in the middle of Windsor, but they moved them out there to get rid of that situation.¹⁰³

The city's efforts to minimize the presence and social participation of the Black community were further underscored by the establishment of the Freedom Festival in 1959. Scheduled exactly one month before Emancipation Day, the city devoted significant resources to promoting and attracting visitors from Detroit and elsewhere to participate in similar events.¹⁰⁴ This deliberate scheduling tactic served to divert attention and interest away from the annual Emancipation Day celebrations, consequently diminishing the number of participants in the latter. It is plausible to argue that this historical pattern of marginalization influenced the city's minimal concern regarding the adverse effects of urban redevelopment on the Black community. However, as subsequent chapters will explore, the urban redevelopment program garnered support from a high-profile member of the Black community, complicating our understanding of the program's intentions and desired outcomes.

¹⁰³ Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, January 21, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Victoria Campbell, "'The Greatest Freedom Show on Earth': Emancipation Celebrations in Windsor, Ontario, 1957-1968," *Southern Journal of Canadian Studies* 5, no. 1-2 (2012): 73, <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/sjcs/article/view/289/200>; Julie Longo, "Consuming Freedom: The International Freedom Festival as Transnational Tourism Strategy on the Windsor-Detroit Border, 1959-1976," *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 2 (2008): 123-124, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20174288>.

By the time Walter Perry penned his intervening letter to the Prime Minister in 1961, the McDougall Street Corridor appeared as a shell of its former self. Time had withered away much of what had been built by the neighbourhood's founders. And what had not been touched by time, had either been destroyed or demolished by urban renewal planning or other disastrous causes. Landrum Hall and the Frontier Social Club, the Walker House Hotel, numerous businesses, and dozens of homes were expropriated and awaiting demolition for use as parking lots, public housing, or to extend parts of Windsor's City Hall. Perry's letter was a minute to midnight plea to save one of the oldest, most significant remaining physical spaces in his neighbourhood.

CHAPTER 4

WINDSOR'S URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY

Well, you know, there's always going to be some evolution, but I don't think the changes produced by the government were positive for the community. Usually, they're not, especially a minority community, especially a Black community, they're not going to think much of it. When they do these things, they're just going to do it.

Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, "We Were Here," 2022.

Discussions surrounding urban renewal in relation to modernising urban landscapes began during the Second World War, as the Canadian government became acutely concerned with the quality and abundance of housing stock in cities across the country. A transatlantic urban reform movement saw ideas around urban reconstruction travel from war-torn Europe to North America. Relying almost exclusively on scientific processes and expert analysis, a vast array of institutions, agencies, and policies emerged to reconstruct entire neighbourhoods in the name of progress and modernisation.¹⁰⁵ Class and race-based assumptions made by 'experts' often informed urban renewal policy, leading to vulnerable population groups and communities becoming targets of slum clearance. By the early 1950s, municipalities across Canada began taking advantage of the generous funding made available by both provincial and federal governments for housing projects and renewal efforts.

Though renewal and redevelopment are used rather interchangeably, they refer to differing processes. Urban renewal, is a term commonly used to refer to the expropriation and demolition of blighted sections of cities or towns, usually targeting privately owned

¹⁰⁵ Picton, *Selling National Urban Renewal*, 305.

homes and buildings and replacing them with public housing.¹⁰⁶ As detailed in planning reports, Windsor's city planners viewed urban renewal as an umbrella term for three distinct programs: conservation, rehabilitation, and redevelopment.¹⁰⁷ Areas deemed in need of conservation were assigned preventative strategies and maintenance projects to limit the need for rehabilitation or redevelopment of homes, businesses, and public spaces later on. Rehabilitation often targeted neighbourhoods in need of serious improvement, where aging homes and buildings could be spared clearance through serious intervention efforts. Redevelopment was often described as a drastic and expensive step requiring the demolition of specific buildings or entire blocks to facilitate a more productive use of the land.¹⁰⁸ Redevelopment was utilised when blight and slum conditions were deemed too extensive to simply rehabilitate.

Even with redevelopment being "drastic and expensive," cities across Canada leapt at the opportunity to claim federal and provincial funding to put ageing, blighted neighbourhoods to better use. The first of these major redevelopment projects was that of Toronto's Regent Park. In the late 1940s, Canada's first large-scale redevelopment project took place in the Cabbagetown neighbourhood of Toronto. During this period, urban renewal in Canada was viewed as an opportunity to renew or refresh urban areas that had fallen into disrepair.¹⁰⁹ Initially, the popularity of urban renewal policies seemed to be propelled by the allure of increased public housing options and the potential for commercial investment. This factor served as a primary catalyst for the adoption of urban

¹⁰⁶ White, "Urban Renewal Revisited," 5, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Prager, "Vision of the Future: Blight 'Cure' Costly Task," *Windsor Star*, June 3, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501575664>.

¹⁰⁸ "Board Told Plan Scope: Provincial Expert Explains Problems," *Windsor Star*, November 21, 1957, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501696357>; Gross, "The Redevelopment Area of Windsor to 1900," v-vi.

¹⁰⁹ White, "Urban Renewal Revisited," 6.

renewal initiatives in Windsor, especially during a period marked by a severe housing shortage within the city.

Housing had long been a problem in Windsor. With few homes being added to the existing housing stock during the depression years and interwar years, the city found itself in a crisis by the middle of the century. The city implemented the construction of Wartime housing following a request to the federal government for 250 new homes for returning soldiers and their families in 1945.¹¹⁰ Much of this new housing, however, was built in the city's surrounding suburbs. Nancy Allen, resident of McDougall Street, did recall witnessing a handful of wartime houses being built along McDougall Street and Elliot Street East in the late 1940s.¹¹¹ Housing, however, would continue to be in short supply for Windsorites.

By the late 1940s, Windsor was eager to improve public works that had been neglected due to the depression era and WWII.¹¹² Sewers, storm water facilities, wider streets and additional parking were all issues that had been plaguing the desks of the city's planning department for several years. For Windsor, discussions of urban renewal and slum clearance began early in the decade but became more relevant by 1956, following the creation of the Canadian Urban Renewal Board (CURB), a council with the set purpose of emphasising how "run-down neighbourhoods hurt Canada."¹¹³ By early

¹¹⁰ "250 Homes Are Sought: Mayor Returns from Toronto," *Windsor Star*, July 9, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501177345>; "Windsor Planning Commission's Master Plan is Outlined," *Windsor Star*, November 26, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501206260>.

¹¹¹ Nancy Allen, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, November 30, 2021.

¹¹² "Board Authorizes Sewer Survey by Experts: Firm Asked to Ascertain Faults, Costs," *Windsor Star*, August 24, 1949, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500982146>; "Windsor Planning Commission's Master Plan is Outlined," *Windsor Star*, November 26, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501206260>.

¹¹³ "New Council to Combat Slum Spread: C.U.R.B. Will Stress National Scale Plan Against Shabby Areas," *Windsor Star*, July 27, 1956, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501427577>; Bill Prager,

1957, Windsor's Planning began drafting a redevelopment scheme for the mixed-use residential and commercial area east of the commercial core, but concerns over funding halted the project for a number of months.

In the same year, a survey conducted by the Windsor Interracial Council (WIC) recorded approximately 250 Black families residing in the McDougall Street Corridor. It not only documented their presence but also assessed the challenges they would face concerning housing and employment.¹¹⁴ As community organisations worked to alleviate these pressures and further transform Windsor into a more tolerant and progressive city, the municipal government's interests in transformation involved the reshaping of neighbourhoods fit for a rapidly modernising metropolis.

In late 1957, John Brown from the Ontario Department of Planning and Development visited Windsor at the invitation of the city's Planning Board to explore the possibilities of an urban renewal project for the city.¹¹⁵ The initial step for the city involved conducting an urban renewal study, collecting data identifying which neighbourhoods were most in need of revitalization and those which needed to be completely redeveloped. However, there were reservations, including those voiced by the board chairman, who cautioned against the study becoming "just another report gathering dust," without a tangible start to redevelopment.¹¹⁶ Eager to commence its urban renewal plans, the city sought to capitalize on available funding through the National Housing Act

"Wrecking Crews Start on Project: First of Housing Units Expected Ready in Spring," *Windsor Star*, October 21, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/500459825>.

¹¹⁴ Rudolf A. Helling, *The Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians in the Social Structure of Windsor, Ontario* (Windsor: Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1965), 7.

¹¹⁵ "Board Told Plan Scope: Provincial Expert Explains Problems," *Windsor Star*, November 21, 1957, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501696357>; "Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor," [ca. 1958], RG 10 Box, 8, CV, Unit 1, File 1, 1, Records of the Department of Planning and Urban Renewal 1919-1991, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library, Windsor, Ontario.

¹¹⁶ "Board Told Plan Scope," *Windsor Star*, 1957.

and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Under these programs, the federal government pledged to cover 75% of the study's costs and 50% of expenses related to land acquisition and clearance for redevelopment, with an additional 25% contribution from the provincial government.¹¹⁷

Survey data was collected between January and April of 1958 for the 23 blocks within the downtown redevelopment zone. Aspects such as population demographics, living conditions, employment, income, and the opinions of the residents were all collected, with surveyors contacting an estimated 76% of the population in the redevelopment area.¹¹⁸ Three distinct redevelopment areas were identified within the downtown core. The first, known as Redevelopment Area One, was bound by University Avenue to the north, Glengarry to the east, Wyandotte Street East to the south, and McDougall Street to the west. This was the northern portion of Windsor's historic Black neighbourhood and the location of many of the community's treasured physical spaces. Reports determined the future use of this area to be multi-family housing, an old age home, the expansion of the civic centre, and much needed additional parking. The other redevelopment areas included Redevelopment Area Two, bound by Riverside Drive East to the north, Market Lane to the east, Park Street to the south, and Goyeau Street to the west. Much of this area was home to Windsor's Chinese community, which settled in the area by the early twentieth century. The land was expected to be used for apartments, an extension of the civic centre, and the creation of an esplanade. Redevelopment Area Three comprised the area within Riverside Drive to the north, Goyeau Street to the east, Chatham Street to the south, and Ferry Street to the west. This was to be the "nucleus of a

¹¹⁷ "Board Told Plan Scope," *Windsor Star*, 1957.

¹¹⁸ "Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor," [August 1958], 8, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

pedestrian shopping centre.”¹¹⁹ Extending from Windsor Avenue, the district would serve as a competitive economic hub, not only for cross-border shopping with Detroit, but also in competition with Windsor’s emerging suburban shopping centres. Plans for this zone also included a new public library building at the north-west corner of Windsor and University Avenues or the east side of Goyeau Street, near Park Street.¹²⁰

In Redevelopment Area One, surveyors estimated 75% of this specific population had been included in the survey, with 34% of those surveyed identifying as “coloured.” Adults and children made up the majority of the age demographics for the area, and most people resided in homes, with only 3% of those surveyed registering as “roomers.”¹²¹ More importantly, when asked how they felt about living in the area the report noted, “A large percentage of persons surveyed have lived in the area most of their lives and are satisfied... 80% are satisfied, 20% are unsatisfied.”¹²²

Regardless, in February 1958, Mayor Michael J. Patrick travelled to Toronto with the city’s renewal strategy in tow, hoping for approval from Queen’s Park. Less than two weeks before his trip, Windsor City Council passed By-law No. 1776, designating a significant portion of the area surrounding city hall as a redevelopment area and thus part of Redevelopment Area One.¹²³ The proposal, produced by Toronto-based Architect and Planning Consultant, E. G. Faludi, identified a 23-block radius of blight surrounding Windsor’s City Hall and proposed to rebuild the area “with apartment buildings, prestige

¹¹⁹ “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], Summary Sheet, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

¹²⁰ “Seeks Redevelopment Okay: Mayor Going to Toronto,” *Windsor Star*, February 21, 1958, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501530227>.

¹²¹ “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], 9, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

¹²² “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], 11, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

¹²³ “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], 1, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

office buildings and shopping centre.”¹²⁴ Faludi had been working with Windsor’s Planning Commission since the 1940s, producing a Master Plan for the city in 1945.¹²⁵ Faludi, had been instrumental in producing the urban renewal strategies for cities like Hamilton (1959); the Milton and Oakville area (1959); and Sault Ste. Marie (1960).¹²⁶

On August 18, 1958, following the release of the survey report, Windsor City Council passed By-law No. 1872, designating the entire area within Goyeau Street east to Marentette Avenue and Riverside Drive East south to Wyandotte Street East, a major redevelopment zone. This was an extension to the area approved for By-law No. 1776.¹²⁷ The justification for this designation came as a result of an interim report by consultants suggesting most of the homes in the area were considered in poor or very poor condition.¹²⁸ It was argued the redevelopment of much of this zone was necessary for the building of new housing, luxury apartment buildings, an expanded civic centre, and the support of institutional and business interests.¹²⁹

Most of Windsor’s urban renewal plans were laid bare in a fifteen year, twenty-million-dollar programme proposal produced by E. G. Faludi and Associates in 1959. The process of determining which urban renewal path the city would take was decided through the examination of the various “forces and influences” that were expected to have significant impact on the future of the city.¹³⁰ Faludi suggested the city suffered from serious decline in the downtown and commercial core, affecting residential,

¹²⁴ “Seeks Redevelopment Okay,” *Windsor Star*, 1958.

¹²⁵ “Windsor Planning Program Studied by Ontario Director,” *Windsor Star*, July 9, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501177345>.

¹²⁶ Neil Forsyth, Eugenio Giacomo Faludi, Finding Aid No. 1276, Public Archives of Canada Manuscript Division, 1981.

¹²⁷ Faludi, “Fifteen Year Programme,” 86-87.

¹²⁸ Bill Prager, “Vision of the Future: Blight ‘Cure’ Costly Task,” *Windsor Star*, June 3, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501576049>.

¹²⁹ Faludi, “Fifteen Year Programme,” 86.

¹³⁰ Faludi, “Fifteen Year Programme,” 1-3.

commercial, and industrial properties. While numerous locations across the city were identified as needing serious updating, the downtown core was the city's first target for the fifteen year improvement strategy.¹³¹ He noted much of the urban blight found in the city was "due to the functional defects in many parts of the structure of the City."¹³² To add insult to injury, the programme rightly identified stagnant population growth in the city as well as "no special attractions" for industry.¹³³

Windsor was, however, a significant economic bolster, not only for Essex County, but for the entire Southwestern Ontario region. By the mid-1950s, almost 6% of the gross value of manufactured goods for Ontario were produced in Windsor factories.¹³⁴ With the future of the automotive and technological industries looking bright, there was certainly hope for Windsor, both in its manufacturing capabilities, and as a gateway city for American tourism, shopping, and trade. One way to ensure this, as outlined by Faludi, was to transform the city centre into an attractive cross-border destination.

With all this in mind, the City was eager to begin the urban renewal process, starting with the first phase, which would span from 1959 to 1963.¹³⁵ Designated Redevelopment Area One, much of the downtown core, particularly the vicinity around City Hall and the civic centre, was recognized as requiring urgent redevelopment and was promptly earmarked as the inaugural project for the city's urban renewal initiatives.¹³⁶ It was the northern portion of the McDougall Street Corridor which fell into this boundary. Specifically, the programme noted the area south of City Hall to Wyandotte Street,

¹³¹ Bill Prager, "Vision of the Future," 1959.

¹³² Faludi, "Fifteen Year Programme," Pg. 2.

¹³³ Faludi, "Fifteen Year Programme," Pg. 2.

¹³⁴ Faludi, "Fifteen Year Programme," Pg. 2.

¹³⁵ Bill Prager, "Vision of the Future," 1959.

¹³⁶ Faludi, "Fifteen Year Programme," 85.

between Goyeau Street and McDougall Street was to be cleared of all residential structures and used for commercial purposes.¹³⁷ At the time of the report, this area had been zoned Commercial (C3), but had long been occupied by both residential and commercial buildings. Weaved amongst the homes and small businesses included several industrial sites such as Essex Packers Limited; McLean Lumber Company; Burroughs Adding Machine Company; a Coca Cola Plant and the 7UP Bottling Company.¹³⁸ This smattering of residential, commercial, and industrial spaces was seen as adding to the blight of the aging Corridor. Notably, the Board of Health for the city conducted a survey based on exterior inspections which suggested of the 436 buildings within the redevelopment zone, 85% were deemed in good or fair condition. Less than 3% were unfit for human habitation, with another 12% recorded as sub-standard.¹³⁹ The second phase, which was estimated to occur between 1964 and 1969, would target more of the McDougall Street Corridor, with homes along Windsor Avenue, Tuscarora Street, McDougall Street, Elliott Street, Mercer Street, and Niagara Street subject to demolition.

In May of 1959, the first phase was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board and an order to prepare for the process of clearance was issued.¹⁴⁰ City Council previewed the architectural plans produced by the CMHC for the first public housing project associated with the redevelopment scheme.¹⁴¹ A scale model of the proposed Redevelopment Area One had been crafted and was set to be displayed at City Hall, though calls were made for

¹³⁷ Faludi, "Fifteen Year Programme," 86.

¹³⁸ Insurance Plan of the City of Windsor, Ontario, 1952, G3464.W7 1952. U64. Vol. 1.1, Sheets 7, 24, Underwriters' Survey Bureau, Limited, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

¹³⁹ Ted Douglas, "Unsanitary Life Breeds Delinquency," *Windsor Star*, October 22, 1955, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501483201>.

¹⁴⁰ "Formal Order Being Prepared: Cost of Clearing Area Estimated to be \$1,836,000," *Windsor Star*, May 22, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501901882>.

¹⁴¹ "Send Plans to Council: To Give Preview of Redevelopment," *Windsor Star*, May 23, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501902642>.

it to be placed in the window of a downtown department store for easier public viewing.¹⁴² The initial public housing project was to consist of 190 three-bedroom row units and an additional 10 four-bedroom units.¹⁴³ It was reported in the *Windsor Star* that 123 applications were submitted before the project was completed.¹⁴⁴

By autumn, the city initiated the expropriation process, buying up land, and in some cases going into arbitration, to eventually clear the properties.¹⁴⁵ The city hired M. and H. Wrecking Co. Ltd. to begin the process of demolishing residential homes along McDougall and Mercer Streets. Arrow Wrecking would finish the remaining demolitions in the redevelopment zone.¹⁴⁶ In total, 22.2 acres would be redeveloped, with 557 people removed from their homes, and 117 houses, three churches, and over two dozen commercial properties slated for demolition.¹⁴⁷ The estimated total cost of acquisition and clearance was \$1.8 million, with 50% covered by the federal government, 25% by the province, and another 25% by the City.¹⁴⁸ The demolition of homes began in October 1959, with the first being a fifty year old home at 478 McDougall Street. Present for the city's urban renewal groundbreaking ceremony was Michael J. Patrick, city mayor; R. T. Ryan, Windsor manager for the CMHC; and R. D. Harkenson, CMHC official.¹⁴⁹

Records involving Windsor's Black residents during the renewal process are incredibly limited. It does not appear the community was approached for any significant

¹⁴² "Send Plans to Council," 1959.

¹⁴³ "Rental housing project in the City of Windsor, Ontario," [ca. 1958], RG2-B-2, Vol. 2741, File C-20-5, 1, Cabinet Documents 1-25, Privy Council Office fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

¹⁴⁴ Prager, "Wrecking Crews Start on Project," 1959.

¹⁴⁵ "Send Plans to Council," 1959.

¹⁴⁶ Prager, "Wrecking Crews Start on Project," 1959.

¹⁴⁷ Prager, "Wrecking Crews Start on Project," 1959; "Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor," [August 1958], 9-10, Summary Sheet, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

¹⁴⁸ "Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor," [August 1958], Summary Sheet, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

¹⁴⁹ Prager, "Wrecking Crews Start on Project," 1959.

consultation. Though their historic community found itself at the centre of the city's modernisation plans, communications from the city were minimal at best. Oral histories reveal McDougall Street Corridor residents were unaware of the full scope of the redevelopment plans, possibly explaining why documented pushback from the community only appears after the 1960s and primarily involves the BME Church expropriation. One resident of the Corridor, however, was well versed in the renewal plans; he was in fact, its architect.

Dr. Roy Perry had long been inspired by the urban renewal efforts underway in Toronto's Cabbagetown neighbourhood. Upon returning to Windsor in 1940 to establish his dental practice, Perry witnessed what he perceived as the early signs of deterioration in his old neighbourhood. Notably, he observed the conversion of several large homes in the Corridor into apartments to alleviate overcrowding.¹⁵⁰ Following his election to the city council as the representative for the Third Ward in 1948, Perry embarked on an exploration of potential improvements to these conditions. His journey led him to Toronto, where he toured the Regent Park redevelopment site.¹⁵¹ Impressed by its scope and impact, Perry envisioned similar revitalization efforts for the aging area he and his constituents called home. He advocated for residents and fellow council members to watch the National Film Board's, *Farewell Oak Street*, which chronicled Canada's pioneering large-scale public housing redevelopment in Toronto. Part of the *Canada Carries On series*, the National Film Board was instrumental in advocating state policies on urban renewal to the public.¹⁵² Motivated by this experience, Perry embarked on

¹⁵⁰ Perry, *One Man's Journey*, pg. 44-45.

¹⁵¹ Perry, *One Man's Journey*, 45.

¹⁵² Picton, "Selling National Urban Renewal, 303-304.

turning his vision, known as the “Perry Plan,” into a reality.¹⁵³ Under the leadership of Mayor Arthur J. Reaume, Perry secured a special meeting of Council to discuss the possibilities of urban renewal for Windsor.¹⁵⁴ Though receptive, consideration was halted as the cost for land clearance was well beyond the city’s means.¹⁵⁵ After years of advocacy and changes to the federal urban renewal budget, Perry’s “hope for Windsor’s most blighted area” reemerged under Mayor Michael J. Patrick. While Perry served on the Redevelopment for the City of Windsor Committee and as Chairman of the city’s Committee for the Removal of Blight, on numerous occasions Mayor Patrick attempted to shut Perry out of planning discussions, such as his exclusion from a meeting with the federal government on urban renewal at Murray Bay, QC.¹⁵⁶ Similar to Africville, for some Windsor officials urban renewal carried broader implications beyond merely addressing the living conditions in Perry’s ward.¹⁵⁷ The prospect of burgeoning commercial and industrial opportunities presented a city hoping to modernise its downtown core and encourage cross-border tourism, with the economic tools to do so.

Perry’s plan called for improvements to his childhood neighbourhood, hoping to utilise federal and provincial funding to erect more housing and remove all vestiges of blight. It appears the target of Perry’s housing plan was the area within Sandwich (Riverside), Brant, Mercer, and Marentette, later pushing that boundary past McDougall.

¹⁵³ R. M. Harrison, “Now,” *Windsor Star*, February 8, 1958, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501584328>; H. L. MacPherson, “Now,” *Windsor Star*, January 16, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501724980>.

¹⁵⁴ Perry, *One Man’s Journey*, 46.

¹⁵⁵ “Housing Offers More Jobs,” *Windsor Star*, December 30, 1957, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501523812>.

¹⁵⁶ Perry, *One Man’s Journey*, 50-53.

¹⁵⁷ Clairmont and Magill, *Africville*, 192-193.

Of course, the city's plan was equally as ambitious, including an expanded civic centre, a luxury hotel, and a waterfront shopping centre.¹⁵⁸

It remains uncertain whether Perry fully understood the social and cultural repercussions of redevelopment on his community. However, it is evident that *Farewell Oak Street* had a profound influence on his perception of redevelopment outcomes. As suggested by Picton, the intended goal of films like *Farewell Oak Street* was to convince the public the solution to addressing blighted conditions in communities like the McDougall Street Corridor lay in altering physical landscapes.¹⁵⁹ The film's persuasive narrative evidently impressed upon Perry that significant changes to the neighbourhood's infrastructure were imperative for its future prosperity. However, the film itself provides hints of the various problems and limitations associated with this justification for urban renewal.

Farewell Oak Street opens with a series of scenes showcasing the newly constructed public housing in Toronto. With 1300 homes and apartments comprising the Regent Park complex, the film paints a vivid picture of the prior tenement and slum housing, depicting it as a breeding ground for disease, vermin, vice, and social disorder. While the filmmakers compellingly advocate for the demolition of Oak Street by following the lives of several families grappling with the deteriorating physical and social environment, the film overlooks perhaps the most significant question: What was the root cause of all these issues? In essence, the film suggests it was simply the physical environment. It attributes the blight and the slum conditions as the sole reason for a family having to survive in a cramped one-bedroom apartment with a shared bathroom

¹⁵⁸ Perry, *One Man's Journey*, 58-59.

¹⁵⁹ Picton, *Selling National Urban Renewal*, 303-305.

for the building. It was blight that led to a family's teenage son becoming delinquent, disobeying authority, and causing trouble.

The film also overlooks a crucial aspect concerning the fate of families unable to afford new accommodations, particularly those with large families or multiple generations living under one roof. While rents were income-based, this system would have certainly left some residents vulnerable to financial instability, especially for those with seasonal or limited employment opportunities who at least had the safety of owning their property before redevelopment. Additionally, the assumption that all former Oak Street residents were in favour of or supported redevelopment certainly ignored the voices of those who wanted to hold onto their land or were interested in rehabilitation opportunities.

What is clear from the Oak Street retelling, was the noticeable silence redevelopment left in its wake. Throughout the film, efforts were made to portray the newly constructed complex as pristine and orderly. However, what comes through is the transformation of a once vibrant, though depressed, neighbourhood teeming with play in front yards and discussions on porches into a sterile and unwelcoming landscape. While living conditions in public housing was an undoubtable improvement from the “never-ending filth” and “vermin-infested walls” as detailed in the film, elements involving community and connectedness were notable absent from the lives of Regent Park residents.¹⁶⁰

Near the film's conclusion, the narrator remarks that nothing of Oak Street remained but its people, symbolized by the removal of the street sign. “Old possessions,

¹⁶⁰ *Farewell Oak Street*, directed by Grant McLean (1953; Toronto, ON: National Film Board of Canada), https://www.nfb.ca/film/farewell_oak_street/.

old attitudes, not a trace remains.”¹⁶¹ However, it could be argued that these residents were Oak Street, shaping its culture and giving it life. This raises pertinent questions about what else was lost in the demolition. What relationships, community events, and neighbourhood groups vanished along with those residents who found the new complex less accommodating or inaccessible? How would this change the dynamics within the community of Regent Park? How did the redevelopment change the lives of these residents beyond the physical nature of their environment?

These, amongst others, were questions Dr. Roy Perry seemingly neglected to ask. Perry argued the Black community was plagued with poor living conditions, disease, and juvenile delinquency, and that these issues were symptoms of blight. An urban renewal strategy targeting the removal of blighted buildings and providing new and increased housing was, in his view, the only solution.¹⁶² This sentiment was echoed in films like *Farewell Oak Street* and was a widely held belief among urban planners in North America during the postwar period.¹⁶³ Windsor’s renewal architect, E.G. Faludi, highlighted in his “Fifteen Year Programme” cases of tuberculosis, welfare statistics, and reports of juvenile delinquency in the downtown core as evidence of social problems that could be alleviated through renewal efforts.¹⁶⁴ Oral histories, however, reveal that blight, rather than being the progenitor of these issues, was yet another symptom of a more systemic problem.

The overcrowding within the McDougall Street Corridor resulted directly from residents in the area being unable to secure accommodations in other parts of the city.

¹⁶¹ *Farewell Oak Street*, directed by Grant McLean (1953).

¹⁶² Perry, *One Man’s Journey*, 78-81, 90.

¹⁶³ Loo, “The View from Jacob Street,” 22.

¹⁶⁴ Faludi, “Fifteen Year Programme,” 189, 190-191.

Housing discrimination, as will be discussed in the following section, was rampant and had confined Windsor's Black population to only a few locations within the city, all of which suffered from limited space and ageing housing stock. Though suburbanization would have opened more opportunities for securing housing in certain areas of the city, when Black Windsorites attempted to purchase or rent these properties they were reminded of the limitations of being Black in Windsor. Nearly all real estate agencies recognized and accommodated racially restrictive covenants and practiced discriminatory policies when renting or selling properties.¹⁶⁵ Of 26 owners and managers of apartments surveyed in 1963, 80% refused to accommodate Black tenants.¹⁶⁶

Housing was not the only sector of Black life impacted by discrimination. Employment had long been difficult to secure for men and women of Windsor's Black community. As detailed in both the Helling Report (1965) and a report produced by the Windsor Interracial Council (1949), few employers in the city hired Black workers, with most Black men being employed at "a very small number of factories." While at least 10% of the Black working population had the skills necessary to work "better jobs," 97.8% of all employable Black workers were employed in low paying, semi-skilled or unskilled positions, and 14% of which worked for one factory.¹⁶⁷ This concentration was primarily found in the automotive sector. It was suggested that of the fifteen largest industries in the city, only one employed a single Black worker in a "professional" category.¹⁶⁸ An additional 6% of employable Black workers had positions working for

¹⁶⁵ "How Does Our Town Add Up?" [ca. 1949], 05-002, Box 1, File 2, Housing Report, Community Audit Report, The Windsor Interracial Council fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 14-15.

¹⁶⁶ Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 15.

¹⁶⁷ "How Does Our Town Add Up?" Employment Report, The Windsor Interracial Council fonds; Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 8-9, 13.

¹⁶⁸ Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 10.

the city, though 90% of these were common labour positions. Outside of labour, positions for Black men were limited to porters, bell hops, janitors, elevator operators, and “other such menial types of work” with no opportunities for promotions or upgrades.¹⁶⁹

Discrimination was rampant in the process of hiring for any position deemed to be a “good job.” Limited job opportunities, meagre pay, and discriminatory practices left Black workers vulnerable to the whims of prejudice employers, colleagues, and customers. These vulnerabilities and inconsistencies in steady employment opportunities certainly meant repairs and upgrades, both inside and outside the home, at times went unmade. Blight was but a symptom of rampant employment discrimination.

While residents shared fond memories of their time as students, race-based inequalities in Windsor’s public schools were commonplace and detrimental for many students, especially when they were discouraged from reaching their fullest potential academically. Black students, especially young men, were often encouraged to seek training in the trades rather than apply for post-secondary education, even when they were academically capable. When expressing their desires to pursue a particular occupation or field of study, Black students were often met with alternatives from teachers and guidance counsellors. Cherie Steele Sexton recalled:

I know my brother was told “oh you’ll never be more than a janitor” when he was in high school. When someone is telling you that over and over and over again,

¹⁶⁹ “How Does Our Town Add Up?” Employment Report, The Windsor Interracial Council fonds.

and you know he did, he struggled a bit with school, but instead of finding the best way for him to learn, it was just like “no, you’ll never do anything more.”¹⁷⁰

Very few Blacks in the graduating class from grade thirteen, most took the route through grade twelve and definitely were encouraged to do that by guidance counsellors. You know, when I said what I wanted to do, I was encouraged to take a different route... I knew, probably from the time I was four or five, I knew I was going to be a teacher.¹⁷¹

Dr. Philip Alexander, emeritus professor of engineering at the University of Windsor, recalled an experience he had while attending Patterson Collegiate. An exceptional student, Alexander won a math competition which awarded him an interview with a local accounting firm. When he arrived for his interview, he was promptly informed he was not a good fit and was directed to reach out to an African American accounting firm in Detroit.¹⁷² Discouragement such as this led some male teenagers to drop out of school entirely, and with limited opportunities for employment, delinquency became more pronounced.

As will be discussed in the following section, redevelopment did nothing to improve these conditions for Black Windsorites. The realities of housing, employment, and education discrimination persisted after redevelopment, forcing residents of the McDougall Street Corridor to contend with the same barriers while subject to greater vulnerabilities as a result.

¹⁷⁰ Cherie Steele Sexton, interview by Willow Key for the “We Were Here” project, Windsor, ON, September 27, 2022.

¹⁷¹ Cherie Steele Sexton, interview, 2022.

¹⁷² Dr. Philip Alexander, interview by Willow Key for the “We Were Here” project, Windsor, ON, August 10, 2022.

Just as on Oak Street, Black homes along McDougall, Mercer, and Assumption Streets would be cleared, as was the historic Tanner African Methodist Episcopal Church, to make way for the first of Phase One's housing developments. H. L. MacPherson, *Windsor Star* writer noted, "Posterity will be remiss if it fails to give Dr. Perry's name to at least a portion of it."¹⁷³ Perry had been known as the man who begot Windsor's urban renewal and public housing projects, and it would take another decade before MacPherson's sentiments would be shared. In 1976, four years after Perry's passing, an 80-unit apartment building within the original housing project plaza at 395 University Avenue was named in his honour, mere steps from the former site of the AME Church.¹⁷⁴ For his community however, this gesture provided little comfort.

¹⁷³ H. L. MacPherson, "'Perry Plan' of 1955 Is Nearer Realization," *Windsor Star*, November 8, 1965, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/502006533>.

¹⁷⁴ Bev Mackenzie, "Building Dedicated," *Windsor Star*, September 16, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/502388022>; Cornett, "Who, When, and Whatnot," *Windsor Star*, 1976.

CHAPTER 5

WINDSOR'S LOST NEIGHBOURHOOD

There are perhaps two major difficulties arising out of redevelopment proposals for an area occupied by an ethnic minority. The first of these is the fact that these small out-groups have their own characteristic folkways, which are inevitably threatened by redevelopment... Even more disturbing is the fact that the society knows the virtually impossibility of re-establishing the pattern elsewhere... The second difficulty is the fact that these groups have over a period of time provided themselves with cultural facilities such as churches, clubs, and meeting places which are an integral part of their way of life... Windsor which has both Negro and Oriental minority groups... both face problems of this similar kind.

E. A. Levin, Architectural and Planning Division, C.M.H.C., 1959.

E. A. Levin's prophetic words, shared during the 1959 Urban Renewal Seminar in Ottawa, would ring true for the residents of the McDougall Street Corridor a mere three years later. It is crucial to emphasise that Levin's concern was not directed toward the welfare of ethnic minority communities, but rather the logistical challenges the existence of these communities posed to the pursuit of urban renewal endeavours in cities like Windsor.¹⁷⁵ By 1962, the northern stretch of the McDougall Street Corridor had been fully cleared. While officials hailed the swift expropriation and clearance efforts a triumph in the direction of progress, they soon encountered the sobering reality that the monumental task of relocating and reconstructing a neighbourhood proved far more daunting than the comparatively straightforward process of dismantling it.

As detailed in a 1962 *Windsor Star* article on the downtown redevelopment zone, the coordinating committee tasked with overseeing the execution of the massive

¹⁷⁵ "Urban Renewal Seminar: A Report of a Meeting Held in Ottawa, September 1959, Under the Auspices of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation," (Ottawa: Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1959), 2, 4-5, digitised ed., Government of Canada Publications, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/schl-cmhc/NH15-489-1959-eng.pdf.

redevelopment scheme for Windsor's downtown commercial and residential sector required more resources than had previously been afforded. E. Royden Colter, the city manager, candidly acknowledged that "the city tried to save money by having its regular officials do all redevelopment work but... they haven't the time for this complex field along with the press of other duties."¹⁷⁶ This admission underscored the tremendous work that lay ahead for the city to successfully complete the first of what was supposed to be a city-wide, fifteen-year renewal scheme.

This sentiment was not only shared amongst those working in the city's urban planning department, but amongst employees of the CMHC and other urban renewal agencies and partners. In 1970, James David Lowden produced a postmortem of Canada's urban renewal strategy, exploring its foundations, objectives, associated legislation, and shortcomings through an examination of various urban and rural renewal strategies in British Columbia. Included in his paper was an analysis of eight interviews with planners and administrators, including the CMHC's Regional Supervisor for British Columbia and the Branch Architect and Planner. Lowden summarized the various opinions of the eight experts. Not only were they unable to agree on the definition of "blight" their comments indicated the most significant shortcomings of federal renewal policies and programs included, a difficulty in determining appropriate expropriation settlements as neighbourhoods designated as renewal sites experienced "artificially depressed" real estate values; that residents affected by urban renewal deserved more options than just public housing; that social concerns involving residents, their housing needs, and the "sociological mayhem" induced by renewal should have remained the first

¹⁷⁶ "Ask Redevelopment Speedup: New Job Suggested by Group," *Windsor Star*, March 8, 1962, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/506695733>.

priority above commercial interests; and the fact that residents were removed and buildings were razed before private interests had agreed to redevelop sites leading to vacant plots being viewed as a “greater social liability than the previous blighted housing.”¹⁷⁷ Lowden’s interviews revealed the limitations of the CMHC’s one-size-fits-all approach. It also suggests the shortcomings of Windsor’s redevelopment program were not fully unique to the city and its residents but reproduced throughout cities across the country by the end of the 1960s.

Compounding the immense task ahead, Windsor was struggling to address the varied housing needs of those from the former McDougall Street Corridor neighbourhood, as well as other residents of the city desperate for housing. The second phase, the creation of public housing, was a pressing concern and one the city had focused on since 1959 when they first broke ground. While former residents of the McDougall Street Corridor did apply for housing in the new public housing units, some found the accommodations unfit for their particular needs.¹⁷⁸ Compared to the city wide average, families within Redevelopment Area One were 2-4 times larger and the design and layout of the units made it difficult to re-house larger, multigenerational families, especially those of fixed or limited incomes.¹⁷⁹ Data compiled by the Windsor Planning Board in 1958 suggested of those residents surveyed a staggering 40% required three or more bedrooms if they were expected to relocate.¹⁸⁰ While the city did focus on building units with multiple bedrooms and geared towards the “lower income segment” of the

¹⁷⁷ James David Lowden, “Urban Renewal in Canada - A Postmortem,” (master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970), Ch.4, 4-6, 8-15.

¹⁷⁸ Elise Harding Davis, interview, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], 11, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library; Elise Harding Davis, interview, 2022.

¹⁸⁰ “Report of City of Windsor Planning Board on Redevelopment in Windsor,” [August 1958], 11, Municipal Archives, Windsor Public Library.

population, there were not enough units by 1961.¹⁸¹ The stark reality was the public housing and apartments that replaced these multi-generation homes simply could not accommodate the spatial needs of the large, extended families that were common within the Corridor. Consequently, many found themselves with no viable alternatives but to seek housing elsewhere.

Federal urban renewal policies underscored the importance of ensuring those affected by expropriation had access to new public housing within or in close proximity to the redevelopment zone. However, in the autumn of 1959, this commitment was severely tested when Lloyd Watkins, a resident of McDougall Street, encountered barriers in purchasing a home guaranteed under the National Housing Act in the newly developed Assumption subdivision. Allegations brought forth by Watkins, and later corroborated by the Windsor and District Labour Council (WDLC) suggested Watkins had been denied the opportunity to purchase a home by real estate agents solely on the basis of his race.¹⁸² According to the Council, Watkins, a descendant of one of the oldest Black families in the area, had been denied the right to purchase one of the subdivision homes, as explicitly stated by one of the agents, because he was Black.¹⁸³

The WDLC escalated the issue to the Windsor City Council, prompting the latter to refer the matter to the office of the Prime Minister in the hopes greater protections could be established to curb the possible discrimination facing Black applicants to government funded housing projects. Despite the policies established by the CMHC, an

¹⁸¹ City of Windsor, "Windsor Ontario Reports 1960 Pride in Progress," (1960), *SWODA: Windsor & Region Publications*, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/swoda-windsor-region/86>.

¹⁸² Harry Persson, "Brief Presented to the Windsor City Council by Windsor and District Labour Council," November 6, 1959, MG 411, VI/R/046/C397, John G. Diefenbaker fonds, University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁸³ Persson, "Brief Presented to the Windsor City Council," 1959.

official from the Department of Insurance, who investigated the incident during a visit to Windsor, asserted plainly that “there was no provincial law which required a man to do business with another.”¹⁸⁴ With no intervention from the federal government, issues of racial discrimination in accessing newly constructed housing were left to persist. One interviewee noted she was under the impression that one particular apartment building within the Glengarry complex was restricted for white couples and seniors only. Florence Logan recalled:

No Blacks lived in it that I knew of. I used to ask because at one time my daughter lived in part of it, my oldest daughter. She lived in one of them when she first got married. She said, “mom there’s never been no Blacks living in that building.” That was part of the way it was then.¹⁸⁵

However, it is worth noting that Windsor had enacted a pioneering by-law prohibiting racial discrimination in the sale and resale of city-owned property.¹⁸⁶ The WDLC emphasised in communications with City Council that conversations with Black residents had revealed systemic issues in housing discrimination and employment opportunities that persisted throughout the city. The WDLC acknowledged its limited resources in documenting each instance of housing discrimination, noting that most incidents remained unreported as few victims had “...the courage to publicize the humiliation that they feel in their daily lives.” The WDLC took the Watkins’ case as an indication of the difficulties that lay ahead for Black Windsorites looking for housing beyond what had

¹⁸⁴ “Watkins Denies End of Affair,” *Windsor Star*, November 14, 1959, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/499201727/>.

¹⁸⁵ Florence Logan, interview by Willow Key for the “We Were Here” project, Windsor, ON, August 10, 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Persson, “Brief Presented to the Windsor City Council,” 1959.

traditionally been their sanctuary. Indeed, the Council's concerns proved prescient. Consequently, the WDLC proposed drafting a petition to the federal government to include "no discrimination" provisions in all the National Housing Act transactions and CMHC loans.¹⁸⁷

In the 1960s, the federal government began tackling the issue of systemic housing discrimination, noting a need to "plug loopholes" that led to the circumstances of the Watkins case.¹⁸⁸ At the time, Member of Parliament for Essex East, Paul Martin brought the Watkins case before the House of Commons, advocating for robust protections against racial discrimination in properties processed under the National Housing Act.¹⁸⁹ While these efforts marked progress, they hardly addressed the pervasive discrimination embedded in practices like informal restrictive practices and racially restrictive covenants, which would continue to make the redevelopment aftermath especially difficult for Black Windsorites.¹⁹⁰

Throughout the decade, new housing in the redevelopment zone was slow to materialise and housing demands continued to surge citywide. In 1959, the city of Windsor was recorded as having built a total of 723 units. Yet, between 1960 and 1962, the total number of units under construction decreased by approximately 30% while more of the city was razed and greater pressures on available housing grew.¹⁹¹ The 1961 annual "Pride in Progress" report from the city highlighted the commencement of the first phase of the redevelopment scheme, aimed at delivering nearly 60 units of row housing.

¹⁸⁷ Persson, "Brief Presented to the Windsor City Council," 1959.

¹⁸⁸ "Color Bars May Fall: Seeking to Plug Legal Loopholes," *Windsor Star*, March 14, 1960, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501932472>.

¹⁸⁹ "Color Bars May Fall," *Windsor Star*, 1960.

¹⁹⁰ R. M. Harrison, "Now," *Windsor Star*, 1949.

¹⁹¹ Statistics Canada, Canada Year Book 1960, Pg. 735; Statistics Canada, Canada Year Book 1961, Pg. 714; Statistics Canada, Canada Year Book 1962, Pg. 693; Statistics Canada, Canada Year Book 1965, Pg. 705.

Additionally, considerable progress was noted in the construction of the initial Glengarry Court apartment building, nearing completion with approximately 80 units. This came after more than a year had elapsed since the displacement of residents from the redevelopment zone.¹⁹² Many Black residents began exploring neighbourhoods beyond the downtown core for housing solutions. The trend of white flight suburbanization, coupled with the gradual desegregation of other parts of the city, made housing more available outside of the Corridor and brought some Black residents, as well as other minority groups, to areas like East Windsor, South Windsor, and Sandwich West.¹⁹³ Some residents opted for places beyond Windsor entirely, gravitating to historically Black enclaves in Amherstburg, Chatham, and Buxton. Most who left Windsor, however, relocated to larger urban centres like London, Hamilton, and Toronto. Additionally, some individuals chose to cross the border, finding employment and housing opportunities in cities like Detroit.¹⁹⁴

Relocating to other neighbourhoods posed its own set of challenges. Reverend Charles Hurst, a Black resident of Windsor, recounted to the *Windsor Star* an incident where his young daughter was subjected to racial slurs by a neighbour in Forest Glade.¹⁹⁵ Oral histories shed further light on the struggles faced by families and individuals from the Corridor in securing housing before and after redevelopment. Elise Harding-Davis

¹⁹² City of Windsor, "Windsor Ontario Reports 1961 Pride in Progress," (1961), *SWODA: Windsor & Region Publications*, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/swoda-windsor-region/87>.

¹⁹³ Marty Gervais, "Blacks: other 'ethnic' group," *Windsor Star*, February 1, 1978, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/503579473>; Elise Harding Davis, interview, 2022; Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 6-7; Census of Canada, "General Population Characteristics by Census Tracts, Census Metropolitan Area of Windsor, 1961," Government of Canada Publications, Table 1, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS95-531-1961.pdf; Robert Allen Rutherford and Peter Gossage, *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities Across Time and Place* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018), 276.

¹⁹⁴ Gervais, "Blacks: other 'ethnic' group," 1978.

¹⁹⁵ Gervais, "Blacks: other 'ethnic' group," 1978.

recalled the discriminatory practices her family encountered in Sandwich West. When the family attempted to purchase a home, they were informed a racially restrictive covenant in the deed to the home restricted purchase by Black and Jewish residents. Even with the intervention of a white friend who had purchased the home and resold it to her father, the Harding family faced opposition, with more than 200 people signing a petition for their removal from the neighbourhood.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, Carmen Carter reflected on her father's challenges in renting accommodations in Windsor, recounting how "...he would have either his lighter-complexioned Black friends or his white friends rent him the house in his name, and he would give them money."¹⁹⁷ For some, the assistance of non-Black friends or co-workers was the only avenue to attain homeownership or secure accommodations. Ken Rock's family also grappled with discriminatory practices. His father, Dr. Kenneth Rock, was turned away from purchasing a home in South Windsor. This had been true for several Black couples who moved to South Windsor in the 1960s.¹⁹⁸ Years later, Ken Rock and his wife faced rental discrimination when a property was suddenly unavailable after their inquiry, only to become available moments later when a white friend expressed interest to the manager.¹⁹⁹ This particular form of discrimination was unfortunately common, even into the 1980s. Dr. Kevin Ellsworth recalled:

We had just got married after I got out of school. We were at Giles Boulevard and McDougall Street, right there at the edge of your corridor. We went to a place, we

¹⁹⁶ Elise Harding Davis, interview, 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Carmen Carter, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, September 28, 2022.

¹⁹⁸ Howard D. McCurdy, *Black Activist, Scientist, Icon: The Autobiography of Dr. Howard D. McCurdy* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 2023), 84.

¹⁹⁹ Ken Rock, interview, 2023.

called them on the phone, and he said he had a place there, and we went to the place. My wife is light skinned... We go out to the place and the fellow sees my wife, he smiles. I walk up behind, and he sees me, a brown skinned fella and boom, he says “there’s nothing for rent here,” slams the door in our face. When we went back to my grandmother’s house, I wanted to verify, so I called them back and they said, “come on over, the place is for rent.” We had just got there, and the guy slammed the door in our face.²⁰⁰

As early as the 1920s, organisations like the Central Citizens Association and later the Windsor Interracial Council worked tirelessly to bring attention to cases of housing discrimination. By the 1960s, the issue of continued housing discrimination led the community to look for more robust processes to address the issue. At the home of Howard and Patricia McCurdy, the Guardian Club was born. Patricia Neely-McCurdy explained:

We held the meeting in my basement, and we invited as many elite Canadian residents that we knew at that time, who had businesses or were in some sort of organizations that knew where there might be discrimination. We found that there was a wide variety of discrimination in the city, and a lot of people who weren’t in these elite groups couldn’t find jobs, couldn’t find homes, and were having difficulty in schools. This elite group set up the Guardian Club, which was to fight discrimination and to bring about diversity within the city.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, interview, 2022.

²⁰¹ Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview by Willow Key for the “We Were Here” project, Windsor, ON, July 22, 2022.

The club attracted membership from prominent residents of the Corridor including Dr. Philip Alexander, Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Windsor; J. Lyle Browning, businessman and the first Black Canadian to be appointed president of a major auto-parts manufacturer; Eugene Steele, Windsor's first Black firefighter; Frieda Parker Steele, nurse and local activist; Reverend L. O. Jenkins of the AME Church; and Justin Jackson, President of the Windsor West Indian Association. The Watkins, White, Green, Dungy, Olbey, Dennis, and Walls families, among others, provided crucial support and connections within the broader community, amplifying the impact of the Guardian Club's advocacy efforts.²⁰²

At the time, Howard McCurdy was a Professor of Biology at the University of Windsor. After being barred from the Roseland Golf Course on account of the Club not accommodating "Americans," he began communicating with Dr. Daniel Hill and Alan Borovoy of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC).²⁰³ Not long after, the Guardian Club partnered with the OHRC to conduct test cases of housing, employment, and hospitality discrimination in the city of Windsor.²⁰⁴ Interestingly, Borovoy would later organise the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee to tackle the city's communications with residents of Africville, which, with the best of intentions, would ultimately facilitate the process of Africville residents being removed from their properties.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Patricia Neely-McCurdy, "The History of the Guardian Club," undated, Guardian Club Records, Private Collection; Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022.

²⁰³ McCurdy, "The History of the Guardian Club," Private Collection; Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022.

²⁰⁴ McCurdy, "The History of the Guardian Club," Private Collection; Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022.

²⁰⁵ Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2 (2010): 29, 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41803299>.

As detailed by several interviewees, Black testers would inquire about jobs or rental listings after which they would be turned away with answers such as “we are no longer hiring” or “this is no longer available.”²⁰⁶ However, when white testers inquired about the same position or apartment soon after, it was suddenly available. Patricia Neely-McCurdy recalled:

One of the things that we did to find out about the amount of discrimination was to set up a testing program. We had two bodies of testers, some from the New Democratic Party who were working with Howard at that time, and I was within that party at that time, so we were all working together to set up groups of testers. For jobs, if there was a posting, we’d have the Black person go first and get an interview, if they didn’t get the interview we’d send in a white person. The white person usually got the interview, so we knew that there was discrimination. We did the same with housing, restaurants, and beaches, because there was no place for recreation or swimming, or things of that nature.²⁰⁷

These test cases provided the OHRC with unambiguous evidence of racial discrimination against Black Canadians. A significant contribution to this effort was a report titled “The Position of Negroes, Chinese, and Italians in the Social Structure of Windsor, Ontario,” led by Dr. Rudolf A. Helling of the University of Windsor on behalf of the OHRC in 1965. Drawing upon data meticulously collected by members and volunteers of the Guardian Club, the report shed light on the pervasive discrimination and entrenched barriers faced by Black Windsorites in areas such as housing, employment, and

²⁰⁶ McCurdy, “The History of the Guardian Club,” Private Collection; Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022; Shantelle Browning-Morgan, interview by Willow Key for the “We Were Here” project, Windsor, ON, April 22, 2022; Dr. Philip Alexander, interview, 2022.

²⁰⁷ Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022.

services.²⁰⁸ The work of the Guardian Club had revealed to the provincial government that racial discrimination affected every aspect of life for ethnic minority necessitating both legislation and education to root it out.

The Helling Report also revealed that improved conditions for Black Windsorites were marginal. It does not appear as though the city had considered what life would be like in the aftermath of redevelopment for those most affected. City planners had acknowledged the presence and impact to both the Black and Chinese populations, but no other solutions were provided than to erect public housing in the place of demolished homes and businesses. Helling noted economic opportunities had remained very much the same for Black residents, and the informal housing and lodging options that were present in the Corridor had been replaced with public housing and rentals, which for some, were too high.²⁰⁹ This sentiment was shared by participants of the "We Were Here" oral history interviews. Some suggested the urban renewal project destroyed the economic stability of the community and a culture of Black land ownership in the neighbourhood, with homeowners not receiving enough in the expropriation process to purchase properties elsewhere in the city. For more than a century, the importance of homeownership could be found written in the margins of land registry documents as homes and businesses were passed on to children, grandchildren, and close family and friends for "Love and \$1.00."²¹⁰

As Black Windsorites endeavoured to reconstruct their lives in the aftermath of redevelopment, they continued to encounter significant obstacles in accessing

²⁰⁸ Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 13-17.

²⁰⁹ Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 15.

²¹⁰ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 106, Lots 61, 65; OnLand, Historical Books, (LRO12), Plan 106, Lots 67-68, 73-74.

employment opportunities. While this had always been the case in most industries in Windsor, the familiar structures of both formal and informal employment that once thrived within the McDougall Street Corridor had dwindled.²¹¹ This left Black men and women grappling with mounting difficulties in securing equitable employment in the city.

The Guardian Club endeavoured to address the community's employment issues by identifying employers and job opportunities receptive to hiring Black employees. One notable success was the placement of Gale Carter. Through the efforts of Howard McCurdy and the Guardian Club, an interview was secured for Gale, and she subsequently became the first Black typist hired by Hiram Walker in 1965.²¹² However, Gale's case was one of only a handful. Most members of the Black community had to settle for the same labour-intensive, unskilled positions or seasonal and temporary work.

Over the decade, members of Windsor's Black community continued to experience the impact of the urban renewal process on their social and cultural connections. In February of 1978, Journalist and Historian Marty Gervais produced a comprehensive four-part series for the *Windsor Star* on the city's Black community. Focusing on the community's evolution, formal institutions, and political and social dynamics, Gervais captured the sentiments of Black Windsorites, and the feelings of loss related to redevelopment twenty years on. In the first article Gervais claims, "The city's Black community is in disarray and in danger of becoming 'a forgotten ethnic group.'"

²¹¹ "How Does Our Town Add Up?" [ca. 1949], 05-002, Box 1, File 2, Employment Report, Community Audit Report, The Windsor Interracial Council fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; Helling, *The Position of Negroes*, 10-14.

²¹² Gale Carter, interview by Willow Key for the "We Were Here" project, Windsor, ON, October 13, 2022; Patricia Neely-McCurdy, interview, 2022.

Both physically and ideologically its members are dispersed.”²¹³ Gervais provided context to the loss of the physical community once home to Black Windsorites:

They have seen their neighbourhood disappear, relatives migrate to the suburbs and elsewhere, their old haunts expropriated and levelled. They have neither an identifiable physical community nor a widely recognized spokesman to unite them.²¹⁴

By this time, both Walter Perry and Dr. Roy Perry had passed away. Many of the elders of the community had also passed.²¹⁵ Previous institutions that had the power to bring the community together, were simply too fractured to make up for the monumental changes imposed upon this neighbourhood. Institutions like the British Methodist Episcopal Church and Tanner African Methodist Episcopal Church had rebuilt their places of worship, hoping to serve as anchors for community members no longer living and working in the Corridor. But rebuilding these churches proved a harder task than anticipated, and for several years both congregations held smaller services in nearby Masonic lodges.²¹⁶ Both the AME and the BME noted the settlements they had received from the expropriation process barely covered the costs of purchasing new land in the area. The BME Church settled for \$70,000 in arbitration with the city. But after paying court and lawyers’ fees, they were left with \$58,000 to purchase land and rebuild their

²¹³ Gervais, “Blacks: other ‘ethnic’ group,” 1978.

²¹⁴ Gervais, “Blacks: other ‘ethnic’ group,” 1978.

²¹⁵ Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, interview, 2022.

²¹⁶ “Building Fund Committee,” [ca. 1961], F0136, Box 2, Series 1.2, File 9, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections; “The Fifties and the North Star Lodge Period,” [ca. 1956-1999], F0136, Box 2, Series 1.2, File 11, E. Andrea Moore fonds, University of Windsor, Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

church and parsonage.²¹⁷ Land in the Corridor certainly cost more than what most residents of the area had spent when first purchasing their properties, and in the end, the congregation had no choice but to raise almost \$20,000 in additional funds for the construction of their new church at University and Louis Avenues.²¹⁸ Donations and loans from church members, church organisations, and sympathetic contractors made the building of the new BME possible. A cornerstone laying ceremony was held for the new church in August of 1963, almost two years after the demolition.²¹⁹

The African Methodist Episcopal Church suffered a similar fate. The AME had received \$35,000 to cover the costs of the move and rebuild.²²⁰ The new church property was located at 733 McDougall Street, which was at one time the property of the Armstead Athletic Club, a Black athletic association founded by residents of the Corridor. The land had been used by the Club as a tennis court in response to discrimination faced by some Black residents at the court in Jackson Park.²²¹ The “simple in design” church cost \$40,000 to build.²²² Only a month after the church’s dedication in 1964, the congregation launched a fund-raising drive to help cover a mortgage of \$25,000 “which was realized after building a new church and parsonage.”²²³ The church organised

²¹⁷ “Building Fund Committee,” [ca. 1961], Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

²¹⁸ “Building Fund Committee,” [ca. 1961], Leddy Library Archives and Special Collections.

²¹⁹ “Cornerstone To Be Laid,” *Windsor Star*, August 10, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/103717390>.

²²⁰ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 122, Lot 83, 8.

²²¹ Davis, *Our Own Two Hands*, 128; “Tennis,” *Windsor Star*, June 26, 1942, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501078186>.

²²² John Stebila, “Dedication of Tanner AME Church Planned: \$40,000 Structure ‘Simple in Design,’” *Windsor Star*, April 11, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501557109>.

²²³ “Fund Drive Launched,” *Windsor Star*, May 9, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501918887>.

a “Building Fund Drive” for the community to participate in, hoping to conclude in July with a hosted tea.²²⁴

All churches in the Black community had to contend with fewer and fewer congregants. Religious institutions, noted as “the only real viable centre for Blacks,” had undergone a significant breakdown in attendance and relevance within the lives of younger members of the community.²²⁵ It is possible the disruption caused by the redevelopment years is partially to blame, compounding the existing problems created through the renewal process. Lois Larkin suggested:

They [the BME Church] moved further east, and the building is standing today on University Avenue. I think it’s about 685 University Avenue East, in that area. That move, coupled with the ability for people of colour to be able to buy property outside of the McDougall Street Corridor, was the beginning of the disintegration of the Black community. People still had friendships, but it wasn’t the everyday, inter-relationship.²²⁶

In his article, Gervais noted the Stanley Tavern, located on Pitt Street, had become the unofficial meeting space for those who used to frequent the Frontier Social Club and Walker House Hotel.²²⁷ Both establishments were expropriated and demolished in the early 1960s. They were the two main social hubs for residents of the Corridor. Though the Stanley Tavern was owned and operated by a white couple, the community had gravitated towards it as one of the few accommodating spaces in the area. Gervais argued

²²⁴ “July Junket,” *Windsor Star*, June 26, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501579199>; W. L. Clark, “As We See It,” *Windsor Star*, May 1, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/501914111>.

²²⁵ Gervais, “Blacks: other ‘ethnic’ group,” 1978; Dorothy Shadd Shreve, *The AfriCanadian Church: A Stabilizer* (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983), 118.

²²⁶ Lois Larkin, interview, 2021.

²²⁷ Gervais, “Blacks: other ‘ethnic’ group,” 1978.

it was the lack of a physical space that kept the Black community of Windsor divided and detached from one another. Lloyd Wallace, a regular of the Stanley Tavern suggested there was no longer a “real community” of Black people, and that too many young people had left the area permanently.²²⁸

Contributing to this sense of the loss of a community were the number of social organisations and clubs barely hanging on to their already dwindling numbers amid continued city development. The Prince Hall Freemasons, one of the oldest Black fraternal organisations in the city, was fighting to maintain their place within the neighbourhood. The North American Masonic Lodge No. 11 and the North Star Lodge No. 7 had been present in the Corridor since the mid to late nineteenth century.²²⁹ While both lodges were south of the redevelopment zone, by the late 1960s redevelopment had encroached further into the McDougall Street Corridor, affecting more of the community and their historic spaces. The North Star Lodge No. 7’s McDougall Street property was sold to the city for the eventual development of the St. Angela Non-Profit Housing Corporation of Windsor.²³⁰ By the mid-1970s, the North American Masonic Lodge No. 11 and the North Star Lodge No. 7 had merged again due to dwindling numbers, becoming the American Star Lodge No. 4.²³¹

For the North American Masonic Lodge (later the American Star Lodge No. 4), located on Mercer Street, difficulties began in 1978 when the city approved the closure of Niagara Street for the purposes of a 139-unit apartment complex on the north side of

²²⁸ Gervais, “Blacks: other ‘ethnic’ group,” 1978.

²²⁹ Arlie C. Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry in Ontario, 1852-1933* (Toronto: Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons for the Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction, 1980), iv, 52-54.

²³⁰ OnLand Land Registry Office Ontario, Historical Books, Windsor, Ontario (LRO12), Plan 112, Lot 14, 48.

²³¹ Robbins, *Prince Hall Masonry in Ontario*, 116.

Niagara at Mercer. Developers argued for the closure of Niagara to facilitate a buffer between the complex and the lodge. This added space allowed for an addition of twenty-six units to the complex, resulting in the total clearance of twenty-two homes in the Corridor.²³² Both the Lodge and CenterLine (Windsor) Limited pushed back against the City's plans, arguing the closure of the street would hinder access and parking for both properties while also jeopardising the value of the land. The Lodge hired a lawyer to represent their case, fighting for the right to purchase their portion of the street, at a cost of \$9700 and to halt any further encroachment.²³³ However, in August of 1979, the building was partially damaged by arsonists.²³⁴ To make matters worse, the City ordered both the American Star Lodge and the developer of the apartment complex to split the costs of building a cul-de-sac at the end of Niagara. In addition to their need for funding to rebuild their Lodge, the thirty-four members were expected to cover approximately \$30,000 for the road development.²³⁵ The Lodge's lawyer expressed he had never seen a case in which "the city has closed a street at the request of a developer and then ordered a neighbouring property owner to pay half the costs."²³⁶

By the spring of 1980, it was clear the Lodge was unable to cover these costs, with the developers offering to buy the Lodge property at a fair price. The Lodge's junior warden, Karl Matthews, expressed the despair of the remaining Masons, "We would like to stay at that spot because we're one of the few Black groups still in that area of the city,

²³² "Niagara Street Closing Now Final," *Windsor Star*, October 3, 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/503506097>.

²³³ Kevin McIntosh, "\$40,000 Bill for 10 Metres of Land," *Windsor Star*, March 26, 1980, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/504409591>; "American Star Lodge Given an Ultimatum," *Windsor Star*, April 11, 1980, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/504386454>.

²³⁴ Michael Frezell, "Disco Employee Hurt in Beating," *Windsor Star*, August 13, 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/503873261>.

²³⁵ McIntosh, "\$40,000 Bill for 10 Metres of Land," 1980.

²³⁶ McIntosh, "\$40,000 Bill for 10 Metres of Land," 1980.

which is the centre of the Black population. But we can't even afford any more legal costs to try to fight this."²³⁷ With limited options, the Masons had no choice but to give up their property. The land was sold to the city in 1981 for just under \$30,000, the estimated cost of American Star Lodge's share of the road development.

At the time, community members voiced frustration with City Hall, sharing sentiments like "the restaurants, taverns, pool halls and old meeting places are all gone because of city bylaws and actions to clear out the community."²³⁸ Sentiments such as this were shared in recent oral history interviews as well. Nancy Allen shared:

As far as redevelopment, I think the thing that bothered me the most was we never knew what was going on. And it was always done in such a way that they started before nothing ever got out. And city government, they just decided that was an area that they wanted because it was downtown. They were looking at developing downtown.²³⁹

The impact of urban renewal was not simply felt in the erasure of physical spaces, but the effects this erasure had on community socialising, cultural events and practices, and the relationships that had formed over lifetimes. Anna Walls shared:

There's a lot of environmental factors that factor into people moving on. I know that with the downtown development back in the day when they pushed the

²³⁷ McIntosh, "\$40,000 Bill for 10 Metres of Land," 1980.

²³⁸ Gervais, "Blacks: other 'ethnic' group," 1978.

²³⁹ Nancy Allen, interview, 2021.

Blacks away, put up apartments and housing units. That area should have remained as it was. That was a glue.²⁴⁰

Some critiques of the urban renewal process were more nuanced, identifying beneficial outcomes while still acknowledging the disastrous effects on the community. Lois Larkin explained:

I think it was a mixed bag. To be able to relocate, to participate in politics even-people were hired by the city and afforded them the opportunity to relocate, to buy homes, and to educate their children. The negative part would be the cessation of that tight community.²⁴¹

Through oral histories and records from churches and organisations, it is evident that the McDougall Street Corridor community endured significant hardship due to the city's urban renewal initiatives. While more public housing and apartment buildings would emerge in the decades following, and Black residents would gain access to previously restricted areas of the city, significant physical spaces in the heart of the neighbourhood either fell victim to redevelopment or gradually yielded to expanding commercial and municipal interests. As observed by Marty Gervais, the McDougall Street Corridor community and its physical spaces were rendered invisible.

²⁴⁰ Anna Walls, interview, 2022.

²⁴¹ Lois Larkin, interview, 2021.

CHAPTER 6

WINDSOR'S LOST COMMUNITY

Oral histories, collected from both current and former Black residents of the downtown area, serve as invaluable repositories of the neighbourhood's rich history. These narratives not only shed light on the intricacies of life within the community but offer profound insights into the far-reaching impacts of Windsor's urban renewal program as experienced by those directly affected. Selected from a pool of over thirty participants of the "We Were Here: Recovering the Stories of the McDougall Street Corridor" project, a handful of statements have been thoughtfully selected to illustrate the profound sense of loss stemming from urban renewal. These narratives poignantly encapsulate the deep-rooted connections that were central to life in the McDougall Street Corridor, along with the recollections of individuals who vividly remember the neighbourhood as it once thrived, expressed in the community's own words.

Anna Walls

Anna Walls, a native of Windsor, spent her formative years residing on various streets within the McDougall Street Corridor. As she reminisced about her childhood and the cherished memories of growing up in Windsor's historic Black neighbourhood, Anna reflected on the profound sense of loss that she felt:

Our backyard was beautiful. My parents were excellent providers. Like I said, we didn't know that they were struggling. We didn't, they did. Our backyard had swings, teeter totter, merry-go-round. I mean, it was big enough for us to play

baseball. We had English cherry tree, apple tree. The back part of the yard was large because it used to be all farmland to begin with, you know. Windsor Avenue, especially the area that I grew up in between Windsor and Giles, I still go down it sometimes, but I am heartbroken by the way it looks because it was beautiful. Everyone kept their yards clean, you know, kept up.²⁴²

Dr. Kevin Ellsworth

Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, originally from Windsor but raised in Maidstone Township, spent significant time on Windsor Avenue at the home of his grandmother. Fondly recounting his childhood memories, he reminisced about joyful days spent playing at Wigle Park and the impactful presence of key figures such as Alton Parker, Reverend Mack Brown, and Buster Nolan. Reflecting on his impressions of the community and its enduring legacy, Dr. Ellsworth expressed:

Now you don't have the same thing because it's not as concentrated, but at the time it was Black. Right on that street there, by my grandmother's, you have the park, Wigle Park was right there, the entrance was right there. Then the Joneses were there, and they were Black. Next to them was a little church, I think it was Reverend Freeman who had a church there. It was a Pentecostal church because they'd be singing like crazy, and on Sunday there'd be cooking there. It was all Black. I never really thought of it like that. But once you got there, once I got to

²⁴² Anna Walls, interview, 2022.

my grandmother's house in Windsor, it was all Black basically. We were living on an island.²⁴³

Lana Talbot

Lana Talbot, born and raised in Windsor, was surrounded by family members settled throughout the McDougall Street Corridor. Through her efforts at the Sandwich First Baptist Church, Lana actively works to preserve the rich history and legacy of the Underground Railroad in Windsor. Reflecting on the redevelopment and its profound impacts on the landscape of the once-vibrant Black neighbourhood, Lana remarked:

Every house there were people of colour, in every house, there were Black people in every house. Like my aunt, lived on the corner, now they took the house down and they built Hawkwood's Garage and then they took Hawkwood Garage down and now it's a ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program] office. They have, which I feel, is disproportionately taken our people out, our homes out, and they replaced them with buildings... They had taken all of that area, they've taken the churches out, there was the AME Church, the BME Church, they took all those churches out and they replaced them with housing. "So much better for the people," and it wasn't. It was getting rid of Black people; it was dispersing us. When you have people come from the United States... I do bus tours for the

²⁴³ Dr. Kevin Ellsworth, interview, 2022.

Underground Railroad, they'll say "Are there no Black people in this city?" I say, of course there are, but what the city has done, they have dispersed them.²⁴⁴

Carmen Carter

Carmen Carter spent much of her childhood in the McDougall Street Corridor. Sharing her fondest memories of the area, she reminisced about her family's home opposite Mercer Street School and reflected on the challenges her family endured with housing discrimination. Carmen noted the resilience of her parents during those difficult periods. Reflecting on her upbringing in the Corridor, Carmen shared:

Safety. It was safe, everybody was your family, everybody watched out for everybody all the time. I mean if you did something at Wigle Park you might get scolded at least four times, before you got home. And then when you got home, you really got it. Because of the grapevine, the streets were talking. And I used to try to figure out, how did my mother know that I was swearing at Wigle Park? Because the lady that lived across the street from the park, who's kid told her that I said a bad word, called my aunt or my great-aunt, who called my mother's sister, who called my mother, and it was just, you couldn't get away with anything. But we didn't try to get away with anything. But we knew that we wherever we went in that area we were safe, because somebody was watching out for us. And watching over us.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Lana Talbot, interview, 2022.

²⁴⁵ Carmen Carter, interview, 2022.

Nancy Allen

Nancy Allen, originally from Chatham, spent her early years in North Buxton before relocating to Windsor with her family in 1948. She recalled fond memories of her childhood on McDougall Street, including assisting her grandmother in gathering dandelion greens from a nearby field for supper. Nancy's commitment to preserving the heritage of the downtown Black community led to the establishment of the North Star Cultural Community Centre, which hosts an annual McDougall Street Corridor reunion. Reflecting on the significance of the Corridor in her life, Nancy expressed:

You know, we have the McDougall Street reunion once a year, but people are so spread out now. And they're having their own family reunions here, here, and here, when everybody used to come to Jackson Park... we all knew each other. That kind of camaraderie, you can't find in a book, you have to experience it and witness it and understand that it's just, it's a sense of pride. I'm part of the group, but when you see a house torn down... you'll see a vacant lot, and then you'll see another one, it's like pulling teeth. You talk to anybody from McDougall Street, and you read what they're saying, we're all of the same frame of mind, it was our place, it was our special place. The McDougall Street Corridor is unique... I will be forever grateful that I grew up where I did, because of what we had.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Nancy Allen, interview, 2021.

Florence Logan

Florence Logan, born in Windsor in 1923, has spent much of her life in the McDougall Street Corridor, where she still resides. As the sole centenarian recorded in this research, Florence shared her thoughts on redevelopment, public housing, and the changing face of her neighbourhood. Her remarkable recollection of church events, organisations, and community members during the neighbourhood's prime were exceptionally detailed. When asked to share her fondest memories of her time on McDougall Street, she responded:

Well, my fondest memories are raising my children. That's the youngest one there, I have four. Then the neighbourhood, every home had children, and it was how would you say? That ten to twenty years was a fun time. The two, three blocks were systematic, everybody knew everybody. The children were kept in tow, eyes were kept on them that they didn't know were kept on them. They got a good, how would you say, the families on McDougall Street raised their children up as far as I'm concerned, top of the line and made good citizens out of them... it was a life, to me it was a good life. The Depression days were just beginning to lighten up, and then it was gone, and the children survived. They went to regular school and high school. And that was the main goal, getting them an education that was required in all jobs, whatever jobs they got. Other than that, I wouldn't have traded it for another neighbourhood.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Florence Logan, interview, 2022.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In 1964, the National Film Board released the short film, *Redevelopment in Windsor – The First Step*, echoing a focus on urban renewal and low-rental public housing seen in *Farewell Oak Street*. The film depicts Windsor’s city council as being primarily concerned with the development of a public housing complex, Glengarry Court, situated east of McDougall Street. Councillors, including Dr. Roy Perry, were depicted watching the 1953 film with anticipation and excitement. The camera lingered on Perry’s face as he, and others, contemplated the future of the remaining portions of Redevelopment Area One. E. G. Faludi, the city’s redevelopment architect, was shown reviewing the original plans, dividing portions of the downtown core into various redevelopment projects.

One poignant scene in the film highlighted the Andersons, an extended Black family of thirteen, residing in the Glengarry area. The family was depicted as frustrated, longing for space and cleanliness. We do not learn how long the family had resided in the area, or if they were relocatees of McDougall or Mercer Streets. How many times, if any, had the Andersons been forced to move as the city went about beautifying the area block after block?

Towards the film’s conclusion, the narrator makes a curious remark upon a group of friends seated at a dining room table, “No one would have thought of entertaining their friends in the old places...,” but how can this be? The assumption that residents of the “old slum district” had been living dull, isolated lives simply wasn’t true.²⁴⁸ The city was making significant changes in order to meet the “present day needs” of its residents, but

²⁴⁸ *Redevelopment in Windsor - The First Step*, directed by Peter Jones (1964; Windsor, ON: National Film Board of Canada), <https://www.nfb.ca/film/redevelopment-in-windsor-the-first-step-216561/>.

as Tina Loo suggests in her work, expecting the government to comprehend and address the multifaceted needs of residents, both physically and socially, is an unachievable goal and one that will naturally fall short.²⁴⁹ The new, modern Windsor portrayed in the film came at a significant cost to residents.

As the camera panned out, revealing an aerial view of Glengarry Court, we catch a glimpse of large blocks of vacant land. Along McDougall Street, the former properties of the BME Church, the Walker House Hotel, and the homes of families like the Lawsons, Watkins, and Timbers remained unoccupied. As the fervour of redevelopment waned in the late 1960s, some plots along McDougall Street remained untouched or were transformed into parking lots. This was, of course, deemed the best use of the land. Today, the spaces once teeming with the spirit of freedom and the dreams of freedom seekers and their descendants serve as poignant reflections of transformation. Now occupied by row houses, the Chateau Masson retirement home, the Mrs. Cameron H. Montrose Apartments, Glengarry Non-Profit Housing, the Glengarry Ontario Early Years Centre, the Dr. Roy Perry Apartments, and Windsor Water World, there are no discernible traces remaining to indicate the significance of the area to its former inhabitants or to the city's history. However, what did persist, were the same social challenges identified in urban renewal reports of the late 1950s, specifically blight. For Windsor's Black population, redevelopment did little to alleviate discrimination in housing, employment, and education. Instead, urban renewal initiatives left residents more vulnerable to unfair and discriminatory practices.

The well-intentioned destruction of the McDougall Street Corridor is a familiar narrative in Canadian postwar history. Communities throughout the country were purged

²⁴⁹ Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada," 27, 44-45.

of their more “unsightly” or “unproductive” spaces to make way for state-sanctioned improvements. While Canadians may be familiar with lost Black communities like Africville and Hogan’s Alley, the McDougall Street Corridor has received no attention in postwar urban renewal or Black displacement research. This paper demonstrates the cultural and geographic importance of this diasporic community, and the unfortunate impact of redevelopment on their ability to maintain community institutions and social ties as had been the case for more than a century. Windsor’s McDougall Street Corridor serves as yet another example of how detrimental state-led social policy can be to populations, especially those vulnerable to racial discrimination. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that not every displacement unfolded in the same manner as Africville’s, and not all consequences mirrored those of former Africville residents. Windsor’s Black community experienced a swift, somewhat unchallenged redevelopment and one that excluded their consultation. The aftermath of this displacement may not have been as drastic as Africville’s complete destruction, rather the nadir of Windsor’s Black neighbourhood was a slow and disjointed decline. Nonetheless, it was still a devastating blow to a community that derived so much of its identity from the homes, businesses, religious institutions, social organisations, political movements, internationally recognized celebrations, exemplary citizens, and trailblazers it had nurtured, despite all that stood in its way.

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VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Willow Key

PLACE OF BIRTH: Toronto, ON

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1996

EDUCATION: North Toronto Collegiate Institute, Toronto, ON,
2014

University of Windsor, B.A., Windsor, ON, 2021

University of Windsor, M.A., Windsor, ON, 2024