

ERASED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: RECLAIMING NORTH NASHVILLE'S LEGACY

INTERSTATE 40 INTERRUPTION
DETERIORATION OF COMMUNITY
POVERTY SETS IN
SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE
GENTRIFICATION

NORTH NASHVILLE

Sue Ballew St. Clair

“Now is the time for steadfastness. Now is the ripe moment for the stalwart warriors and champions to show forth courage and to demonstrate their heroism in the arena of service, until such time as God will exalt His Cause, will remove the distress and anxiety of His friends and trusted servants, and glorify those who were brought low among His creatures, to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make them God's heirs”.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Fire and Light*, p. 36

EARLY COMMUNITY LIFE

THRIVING BLACK COMMUNITY
HOME OWNERSHIP 1880s - 1968
COMMUNITY SUPPORTED SCHOOLS
HBCUS FISK UNIVERSITY & TSU
MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE
MEHARRY HOSPITAL AND DENTISTRY
SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES
ACTIVE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
BAHA'I COMMUNITY OF NASHVILLE



Coralie Cook Letter to Abdu'l-Baha (Excerpt)

“Knowledge of the progress of the colored people during their fifty years of freedom has astounded the world and incited the envy and hatred of those who prophesied their extinction and argued their inability to work for themselves. In the midst of unfriendly surroundings they have accumulated \$7,000,000,000 worth of property and raised a million and a half dollars in the past year alone for educational work; coming out of slavery with 95 percent of their whole number unable to read or write to say that number is reduced to only 30 percent is an advance surpassing that of the whites during the same period...”

Coralie Cook Letter to Abdu'l-Baha, 1914



Interstate 40 Impact

In 1957 An intentional decision for I- 40 system construction with deliberate calculation

“Black neighborhoods more disposable than white enclaves.” A cataclysmic event for North Nashville.

(Nashville Scene magazine)

“None of the plans nor their implications were discussed with local residents, even though the route would virtually disembowel North Nashville”.

(Historian, Benjamin Houston)



A bulldozer is busy cleaning the land of what once were homes in North Nashville-July 16, 1968 for the path of I-40 to come through. The Tennessean (Nashville News)

O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, Arabic #2

Interstate 40 Impact - Poverty

Land in 37208 zipcode was either bought at a fraction of the cost or was condemned and taken. The development led to the demolition of 650 homes, which displaced 1,400 residents. Real estate values for the remaining properties dropped by 30%, compounding the loss of family and communal wealth.

Nashville Scene magazine, 2018

The local and federal government's treatment of North Nashville for at least a century has ranged from neglect to outright racist hostility.

Nashville Scene magazine, 2018

Not surprisingly, today, North Nashville is one of the most economically precarious locations in the metropolitan area with rampant poverty.



Interstate 40 Impact - Poverty

Child poverty in this ZIP code is a stunning 42%, compared to national rate of 14%. At the same time the 37208 zipcode had one of the lowest income rates in Nashville. Brookings Institute, 2018 report

2021 Census estimated that 37208 is 70% Black and has a poverty rate double Nashville's average. The rest of the city is 70% White.

By: [Eli Motycka](#) - April 29, 2021 TENNESSEE LOOKOUT



Baha'i International Community (BIC): Engagement with Sustainable Development Goals

Intractable challenges : Material aspects vs intangible beliefs, values, norms and ethics

Social ills:

- Distortion of relationships and values
- Eradication of poverty of all kinds greatest challenge globally
- Need to transform personal values and qualities of relationship that allow poverty to exist in a world with sufficient resources for all - greatest challenge facing the planet

Environmental Hazards

Indoor triggers of particulate matter (PM), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and mold > Asthma and other respiratory conditions

Location of I-40 in the community enhance air and sound pollution.

Recycled tires, a common replacement for mulch or community playgrounds releases a toxic substance into air.

Developmental exposure to some environmental chemicals increases childhood risk of **mood and behavior problems**. Abrams et al., 2022

Public housing communities have among the highest rates of asthma in all of Davidson County.

[The Promise Podcast Series](#), WPLN 90.3



TN Dept of Environment And Conservation

Effects of Environmental Injustice on Poverty and Violence

WHO definition of violence. “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, **or against a group or community**, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”

The 37208 zipcode ranked high compared to other zip codes for societal problems, including:

1. Families below the poverty level
2. Percentage of youth not enrolled in school
3. And total crime index,

Brookings Institute

Outside factors that researchers say contribute to adverse childhood experiences. (ACEs)

O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words #49

School to Prison Pipeline and violence

Schools became a main school-to-prison pipeline - the process:

1. Teachers used harsh words to students because they dressed differently or wore their hair differently
2. Students were detained for minor code violations. The children would not know why and would get “emotional”.
3. This led to 72 hour hold, putting them under the control of medical doctors who drugged them with meds meant for mental or behavioral conditions..



Lisa Otey Spencer

Lisa continued:

- 4. When taken off the drugs, normal reactions of anger and emotional distress were no longer masked and they acted out.**
- 5. Got transferred to “alternative schools for children and teens who are incorrigible”.**
- 6. If they were incarcerated under 18, they were tested and if they received a score below a certain number they were determined to be mentally deficient and were placed in a group home usually for a 9 month period, but. release was conditional.**

Lisa started and ran a group home for boys to help them get out of this system.

“The School-to-Prison pipeline starts at the cradle, because of inequitable healthcare, lack of resources for mothers in marginalized communities, lack of proper nutrition and untreated trauma starting at birth.”

Kathy Sinback, Executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of TN

Research studies released in June of 2016 stated that black students are nearly four times as likely to be suspended as white students, and nearly twice as likely to be expelled.

Black preschoolers are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions.

“Teachers' implicit bias against black students starts in preschool”, The Guardian 2016

The 37208 neighborhood posts the highest incarceration rate in the nation (14%).

Ranked high compared to other zip codes for societal problems, including:

- 1. total crime index,**
- 2. percentage of youth not enrolled in school**
- 3. and families below the poverty level –**

Brookings Institute 2018

Baha'i International Community

“States’ responsibilities to advance the well-being of their people...must be paramount in the formation of public policy. Decision-making... therefore, needs to be structured in ways that ensure active advancement of the common good over other, more limited concerns. Many spaces in which law and policy are determined today are heavily influenced by other actors motivated at least in part by interests such as the accumulation of financial profit or political power.”

Baha'i International Community(BIC),

Violence and School Intervention

Clinical Therapist and former Director of Family Resource Center at one of the high schools in 37208 for 10 years.:

1. Worked with students and parents
2. Led large outreach to community once a month that included church members, parents, students and others.

“Prisons are built according to the 4th grade failure rate” She stated “because it has been determined that if a child cannot read and do math by then, he will not get through high school and will drop out.”

“The next step will be to connect with what they know in their community, which are gang members. The persons they look up to are the “baddest gang member in the community”.



Violence School Intervention

In Maxcia's work with elementary school children she asked certain questions, as an example, "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

The answer was often "I want to be a gangster like my uncle".

When asked why, the answer was "because he buys my clothes and tennis shoes, brings food for us, takes care of us and makes sure my mom is safe".

The children know who the gangsters are and what they do but they don't see it as something bad like outsiders do.

Maxcia also stated that many high school students will say they want to be plumbers, or electricians but the trades have been removed from the schools, a tragic and heart-wrenching circumstance. Then, she stated, **"I have been to so many funerals"**

Violence and School Intervention

Maxcia created an informal survey to learn how the students are emotionally, mentally and physically dealing with the deaths by violence in the community. Here it is:

1. How many of you have witnessed a murder?
2. How many of you have witnessed a shooting?
3. How many of you have lost a relative to violence?
4. How many of you have witnessed a violent death close-up?
5. When you witnessed this did you ever receive any counseling?

Mostly, it was death by gunshots AND they had to be back at school within 2 days to stay on the school's lunch program or they might not eat anything each day.

***“Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness,
a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a
haven for the distressed, an upholder and
defender of the victim of oppression.”***

Baha'u'llah

School and Community Interventions

Programs started within the school (Maxcia continues):

- 1. STARS (Students Taking A Right Stand) - this program made sure that kids were able to read, to graduate high school and even had a ‘food den’ where kids could go for snacks or a meal since they often came to school hungry.**
- 2.. In-school Family Resource Center that had social workers to identify and work with the kids to the extent that it was possible to do based upon identified needs of the children and their families**
- 3. A pharmacy with very discounted medications.
Kids and their families in need were followed throughout their school year.**
- 4. An Advisory Council was formed with members from the community - parents, teachers, church leaders, students, and a professor from Fisk University. It helped with making decisions on best use of resources.**

GIDEON'S ARMY - A Hope For North Nashville

Described as a “grassroots army for children,” it was founded in 2010 by Rasheedat Fetuga, a former acting executive director of the Nashville chapter of the NAACP.

Fetuga and Gideon's Army have employed a number of strategies to break the cycles that lead to death or incarceration for too many black youth.

The newest prong in the Gideon's Army offensive is a crew of community members called Violence Interrupters. Based on the model used by a Chicago-based organization called “Cure Violence”.

North Nashville Crime Intervention



Violence Interrupters



Rasheedat Fetuga

Violent Impact of Gentrification

After decades of distress and underinvestment, 37208 is changing again. This time, more affluent newcomers are moving in, often with little or no knowledge of the history this place holds.

The current buying up of homes and land as a part of gentrification, pushed people out of their community to areas further and further away from the inner city which is now significantly gentrified. “Recently, as a part of this systematic process, the Ritz Carlton hotel has bought up more land and displaced more families. The government and corporate goal is to take over the whole area.”

Lisa Otey Spencer.

Examples of bland
concrete block homes



Violent Impact of Gentrification

Black places and black people are disappearing again in North Nashville, demolished by development, raptured away by mass incarceration or in many cases, displaced amid gentrification causing a significant decline over the past decade. The black population dropped from 60 percent to 38 percent – the largest drop in Davidson County. The Tennessean

The influx of developers and home-flippers has acted as a new interstate, chewing up the vulnerable and putting immense pressure on everyone else.

Sekou Franklin, Professor MTSU and Community Activist

Mindy Fullilove, a professor of urban policy and health at The New School in New York calls what has been happening in North Nashville historically and currently, **“Root Shock”**.



Violent Impact of Gentrification

Gentrification refers to the urban planning projects that often displace working class families of color in order to open up residential and retail space for younger, wealthier, and whiter residents. These residents being pushed out are often long-term residents of the city living in historically underdeveloped neighborhoods. They face displacement because of rising property taxes and predatory companies which seek to develop these areas of town through aggressive real estate investment.

by Grace Refugee and Immigration editor, NOVEL HAND March 2020

Violent Impact of Gentrification in North Nashville

1. Forced displacement of residents
2. Loss of local livelihoods
3. Displacement of long term residents
4. Cultural Erasure - destruction of community's rich heritage and culture
5. Increased cost of living
6. Racial hostility and discriminatory behavior government and people in power
7. Focus on spaces that exclude low-income individuals and people of color.
8. Gentrification leads to a 62% higher rate of firearm injuries over non-gentrified areas.

The world of man is sick, and that competent Physician knoweth the cure, arising as He doth with teachings, counsels and admonishments that are the remedy for every pain, the healing balm to every wound. It is certain that the wise physician can diagnose his patient's needs at any season, and apply the cure. Wherefore, relate thou the Teachings of [Baha'u'llah] to the urgent needs of this present day, and thou wilt see that they provide an instant remedy for the ailing body of the world. Indeed, they are the elixir that bringeth eternal health. – *Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 59.*

“The experience of the Baha'i community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity. It is a community of some [8] million people [in 2020] drawn from many nations, cultures, classes and creeds, engaged in a wide range of activities serving the spiritual, social and economic needs of the peoples of many lands. It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history....If the Baha'i experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study”.

Universal House of Justice, “The Promise of World Peace”. 1986

The Moral Imperative to Act

Minneapolis Paying a Harbor Fair

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A Rich Tapestry

Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.

Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha p 205