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### The Decline of Buffalo, New York in the Postwar Era: Causes, Effects, and Proposed Solutions

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#### Recommended Citation

Bartolotta, Carmen J., "The Decline of Buffalo, New York in the Postwar Era: Causes, Effects, and Proposed Solutions" (2011). *History Theses*. 4.  
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## INTRODUCTION

The causes of decline for cities such as Buffalo, New York in the northeastern United States, or *rust belt*, have been attributed to many factors over the last half-century. Many lay the blame for economic decline on labor unions and the high cost associated with their members' compensation and inefficient work practices. Some experts cite the high tax burden in New York State, which may stifle economic growth. Many of these experts also denounce the government efforts to provide aid to this region as not only misguided and ineffective, but also an impediment to true entrepreneurial potential.

Population decline in Buffalo is another problem that bears closer scrutiny. Many researchers have concluded that the loss of employment opportunities in the cities led to the population shifting to suburban areas or to other states, but others have countered with the view that poor race relations also contributed to the exodus. This, combined with the predominance of the automobile and the construction of numerous highways, has made living outside of the city a more viable alternative. Inept, shortsighted politicians and business leaders who contributed to the decline of population and prosperity made many of the decisions. Buffalo has increasingly become an area of concentrated poverty, as the more affluent residents depart for the outer suburbs. Without a sizable taxpayer and industrial base, the city cannot afford to provide adequate services to its remaining residents. Dependence on state and federal funding has increased as Buffalo struggles to maintain a working infrastructure. By isolating the historic sources of the out migration, Buffalo can begin to craft workable solutions to slow the decline and make the city more appealing to taxpayers.

This study will focus on these various causes in an attempt to pinpoint the historical reasons for decline, not for the purpose of laying blame, but to set the groundwork for possible solutions that will stem the economic decline. Only with a proper, objective, historical perspective can these problems be identified and solved.

The methodology for this study includes an examination into the roots of the decline of Buffalo and the past attempts to reverse it. Once the causes are identified, along with the reason for the failure of previous solutions, then present and future solutions for stemming decline may be evaluated.

Using census data, state and city transportation reports, federal grant reports, interviews, city budget data, news articles and other primary sources, the study will move from the more broad picture presented by the experts, to a more narrow focus gleaned from the material listed in the primary sources. This thesis suggests that the emphasis placed on the negative effects of federal government block grant funds and organized labor have been over exaggerated, while the affects of poor race relations, inept leadership from local government and business leaders, destruction and elimination of neighborhoods and parkland for highway construction, lack of waterfront development, outdated zoning ordinances, and limitations on immigration have been understated. Exposing these discrepancies may lead to more effective solutions.

This study builds on the work initiated by Dr. Neil Kraus, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, who explored the politics of race in the city of Buffalo in his book, *Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power*. Dr. Kraus highlights for example, the disproportionate number of African Americans who were displaced during the urban

renewal of the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> His work supports the view that white animosity toward African Americans led to unfair treatment, inadequate political representation, and eventually “white flight,” or the mass migration of whites from the city of Buffalo to the suburbs. This study will test the validity of Dr. Kraus’s assertions and attempt to show how race relations aided Buffalo’s economic and population decline through examinations of the Federal Housing Administration’s policies, school desegregation in the city of Buffalo, Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority reports, and census data.

Another source on the subject of urban renewal is Jon C. Teaforde, Professor Emeritus, Department of History at Perdue University. In his book, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985*, Teaforde explored the failures of urban revitalization efforts in the northeastern United States during the 1950s and 1960s. This study will show how these efforts destroyed a viable, racially-mixed neighborhood in Buffalo and forced a large number of African Americans into other areas at an unnatural pace, which led to more out migration of whites.

In addition to these authors is the work of investigative reporter James Heaney, of the *Buffalo News*, whose 2004 work exposed how Buffalo politicians squandered millions of dollars in federal aid from block grants with little investment in brick-and-mortar projects and without a comprehensive plan. This study will provide more examples of this pattern of ineptitude, while contrasting that with examples from other cities that have used federal funds to improve their physical structures through the use of comprehensive planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Kraus, *Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power: Buffalo Politics, 1934-1997* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 98.

Michael R. Fein, assistant professor of history at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, supplied the previous work on the politics of highway construction in New York State. His book, *Paving the Way: New York Road Building and the American State, 1880–1956*, reveals how the New York State Department of Public Works joined with state engineers to make decisions that favored people who commuted to work in automobiles.<sup>2</sup> He pinpoints the period when automobile supremacy begins at the expense of public transportation and pedestrian-friendly areas. This study will continue exploring this trend as it permeates into the local level and affects the distinct, defined borders of Buffalo’s traditional neighborhoods.

Paul A. Tiffany, Assistant Professor of Management, University of Pennsylvania and former consultant to the United States Steel Corporation, the American Iron and Steel Institute, and the Steel Service Center Institute, focuses on management and labor. This study will examine Professor Tiffany’s assertion that the failure of government, steel management, and labor led to the decline of the steel industry.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Thomas Leary and Elizabeth Sholes, partners in an independent public history firm, add their study on the trends in the steel industry (especially poor corporate practices) that led to the decline of Bethlehem Steel. The demise of Buffalo’s steel industry provides a case study to test these theories and expand on the previous findings.

Proposals to revitalize the city of Buffalo include the radical concept of “smart decline,” in which former industrial cities of the northeastern United States would shrink in population, while consolidating their residents in a smaller land area. Rutgers

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<sup>2</sup> Michael R. Fein. *Paving the Way: New York Road Building and the American State, 1880-1956*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 188.

<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Tiffany, *The Decline of American Steel: How Management, Labor, and Government Went Wrong*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.): 291.

University and Princeton University professor Frank J. Popper backs this approach, and adds that outdated zoning ordinances in the city of Buffalo, created in anticipation of population growth, now serve as a restriction to the mixed-use areas that make city life more vibrant.<sup>4</sup> This study will explore how Buffalo's zoning ordinances, which combine industry or residential parcels in distinct areas, create suburban-style islands of shopping and industry that are more suited to automobile travel and inhibit "walkable" areas. Harvard economics professor Edward Glaeser agrees with the idea of Buffalo accepting its smaller population and attempting to improve existing properties, rather than continuing to build more office space and residences.<sup>5</sup> This study will examine declining property values due to an overabundance of structures in an attempt to show that funneling resources toward gentrification can make neighborhoods more attractive and create a stronger taxpayer base.

The reasons for the economic and population decline in the city of Buffalo are still a point of debate today. The value of federal government funding in the form of block grants and highway construction, the predominance of the automobile in city planning, the effects of poor race relations, the actions of labor and management in Buffalo's industrial base, and the ineptitude of local politicians are fodder for historical debate concerning Buffalo's past, but remain as unsolved questions in the present. If Buffalo's leaders can come to a consensus on what its failures were, then city planners can properly evaluate proposed solutions and form a comprehensive plan to stabilize economic and population decline.

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah and Frank Popper. "Smart Decline in Post-Carbon Cities: The Buffalo Commons Meets Buffalo, New York." *The Post Carbon Institute*. Available from: <http://www.postcarbon.org/Reader/PCReader-Popper-Decline.pdf>. Internet; accessed 21 July 2010; 3.

<sup>5</sup> Edward L. Glaeser. "Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?" *City Journal*, October 2007. Available from: [http://www.city-journal.org/html/17\\_4\\_buffalo\\_ny.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/17_4_buffalo_ny.html). Internet; accessed 24 July 2010.

The first four chapters of this study will examine the most significant reasons for economic and population decline in Buffalo, while the last chapter provides an examination of several proposed methods of urban revitalization and how they have fared in other struggling cities. Chapter one outlines the federal government's attempts to rebuild cities like Buffalo by initiating massive renewal programs aimed at replacing structural blight and how that funding was managed by the city government. In addition, chapter one examines how federal funding was used to provide tax breaks in distressed areas in order to spur investment and create jobs. Chapter two outlines the role that race relations played in Buffalo's decline, including forced school integration and its role in the out migration of whites to the suburbs. Chapter three outlines the role of the predominance of the automobile in Western New York and how this led to highway construction that dissected and disrupted several Buffalo neighborhoods, while an opportunity to create effective public transportation for the Western New York region was squandered by local officials. Chapter four outlines the role that management, labor, and government played in the massive decline of manufacturing jobs in Western New York, especially the demise of Bethlehem Steel. Finally, chapter five outlines several proposals to stem economic and population decline, including some initiatives that have had success in cities similar to Buffalo.

## CHAPTER 1

### GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION AND THE REVITALIZATION OF THE AMERICAN CITY: BUFFALO, NY IN THE POSTWAR ERA

“Societies and civilizations in which the cities stagnate don’t develop and flourish further. They deteriorate.”<sup>6</sup> This quote from sociologist Jane Jacobs is a sober reminder that our nation has an obligation to invest in the maintenance and development of its cities. Our cities have traditionally been places of innovation, discovery, and creativity. If we abandon our efforts to restore the American city to its former status as the center of knowledge and culture, our nation will continue to decline.

Federal, state, and local governments have made several attempts to slow or reverse this decline through large-scale urban renewal programs. These efforts have taken various forms throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, with mixed results. Former industrial giants such as Buffalo, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh have attempted to regain their status as thriving urban centers and prevent the outward migration of residents with the help of federal and state urban renewal programs, such as urban renewal, the Model Cities Program, block grants, and Enterprise Zones. These cities have lost the majority of their manufacturing jobs and tax revenue from the companies that moved. Each of the aforementioned programs will be assessed in regard to their success in Buffalo with a comparison to their success in other selected cities.

These programs have sparked a debate over the usefulness of massive aid to cities and over the means of allocating the funds. Some historians, such as Jon C. Teaford, argue that government renewal programs have largely failed and that the few successes

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984), 232.



were not substantial improvements, but merely “hype” fostered by charismatic mayors.<sup>7</sup> He views the loss of the manufacturing base as insurmountable as far as revitalization is concerned. Those jobs helped to create a solid middle class in the Northeast. Some other historians concur with Teaford on the overall failure of government to return cities to their previous lofty status as the center of industry and population, but offer reasons why the failure occurred. Associate professor at the University of Wisconsin Neil Kraus, for example, contends that race relations thwarted Buffalo’s efforts at urban renewal, or “Negro Removal”, as some have called it. He backs this contention with statistics that show the majority of those displaced were African-American.<sup>8</sup> Historian and specialist in housing, community development, and urban affairs Alexander Von Hoffman counters by illustrating both the failure of governmental intervention and the success stories. His account of how the South Bronx community’s faith in the possibility of revitalization, combined with their cooperation with and prodding of government officials, led to a “resurrection.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the government aid was a tool that could be utilized by innovative, aggressive people to improve their neighborhoods and boost the quality of life in the city, while not necessarily turning the local economy around.

The debate leads to the question of whether or not the governmental attempts at revitalization were worth the enormous cost. This chapter will examine the legacy left behind and weigh the successes against the failures in order to reach a conclusion. The evidence validates the belief that governmental assistance to cities can make a positive impact, but assistance alone will not return a poor city to its former economic standing.

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<sup>7</sup> Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 307.

<sup>8</sup> Kraus, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America’s Urban Neighborhoods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 76.

Positive impact is possible when competent, innovative leaders, private interests, and citizen organizations cooperate and use the resources to benefit the entire community. While this is indeed a complex proposition, it is nevertheless achievable. Buffalo's failure to emulate the successes of other northeast cities was a result of inept, fractional leadership that was not challenged by the racially polarized populace.

### Urban Renewal in Buffalo's Ellicott District

After World War II, the U.S. cities were ready for change. Areas of blight were a cause for consternation among city residents and officials. The elimination of slums became a top priority and the booming national economy provided the hope to make it happen. The Housing Act of 1949 paved the way for older, industrial cities like Buffalo to eradicate this blight and replace it with new construction using federal funds.<sup>10</sup> Change had arrived, but the process of renewal was not as simplistic as planners had anticipated.

The purpose of the unprecedented demolition and redevelopment was to eradicate the slums of the inner city.<sup>11</sup> New housing for the poor city residents was also a priority. During the 1920's, an exodus of middle class whites to the first-ring suburbs began to drain the cities of population. This process sped up between 1950 and 1960, as population in Buffalo's suburbs grew by 52 percent and Cleveland's suburbs saw a 115 percent increase.<sup>12</sup> This was made possible through Federal Housing Authority, Fannie Mae and

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred D. Price, "Urban Renewal: The Case of Buffalo, N.Y." *Review of Black Political Economy* 19, no.3 (1991): 125-160. *EBSCOhostResearch* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed October 1, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Teafor, 124.

Veterans Administration low interest home loans for the middle class.<sup>13</sup> Urban renewal was intended to clear slums and make the city more attractive to those who remained, but clearing out the slums also meant clearing out the people who lived in them.<sup>14</sup> Critics charged that poor residents, their neighborhoods, and their businesses were uprooted unfairly. Business owners only received compensation for the value of their property along with a \$1,500 allowance.<sup>15</sup>

Prejudice played a role in this decision, especially in Buffalo, where 80 percent of the relocated residents were African American.<sup>16</sup> This view was substantiated in the 1974 school desegregation case of *Arthur v. Nyquist*. During the trial, it was revealed that the Federal Housing Administration Underwriting Manual contained a passage that commented on preventing the “infiltration of inharmonious racial or national groups” into white neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup> The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), a New Deal program that refinanced home mortgages, rated white, middle class neighborhoods as “A,” (the top rating) while denying their services to black customers.<sup>18</sup> Federal policy, along with local policy, was surely influenced by racism.

This attitude, along with animosity toward the poor, led to the isolation of housing projects from Buffalo’s other residential areas. The Ellicott and Talbert Malls in Buffalo’s Ellicott district were public housing islands in a shrinking city (see Figure 1).

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<sup>13</sup> Paul S. Grogan and Tony Procio, *Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Neighborhood Revival* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 194.

<sup>14</sup> Price.

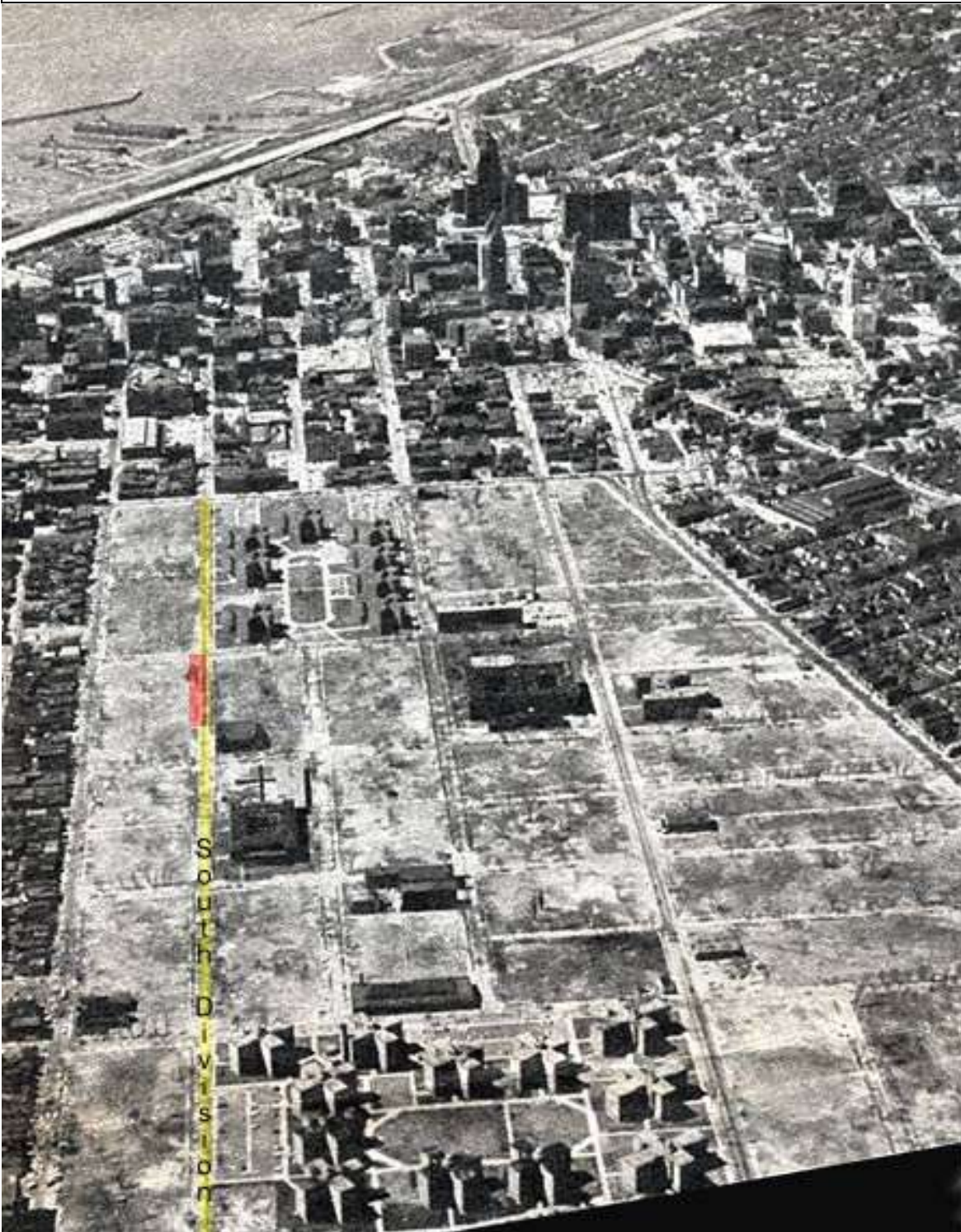
<sup>15</sup> Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Kraus, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Goldman, *City on the Lake: The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, N.Y.* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1990), 137.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 197.

**Figure 1.** *Buffalo's Ellicott District 1961—Ellicott Mall at top, Talbert Mall at bottom (from Western New York Heritage Press, 2005)*



Many African Americans in Buffalo's Ellicott district whose homes were demolished declined to relocate to these public housing projects. They began to migrate to areas that immediately adjoined the Ellicott district, which were predominantly German-American, such as the Fruit Belt and Cold Springs neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup> Many real estate agents took advantage of this situation by first advising existing white homeowners to move out, then inflating the price of the homes and selling them to unwitting African American buyers, a practice known as "blockbusting."<sup>20</sup> White homeowners began to flee to the suburbs, and as a result the East Side became predominately black. Meanwhile, the Municipal Housing Authority of Buffalo continued to steer African Americans into housing projects well into the 1970's.<sup>21</sup>

Another stumbling block to progress in urban renewal was the glacial pace of construction after demolition. In Cleveland, 126,000 homes and apartment buildings were cleared in 1961 and replaced with only 28,000 new residential structures, which included a mix of housing projects and homes.<sup>22</sup> In New Haven, Connecticut thirty thousand residents were displaced from 1956 to 1966.<sup>23</sup> In Buffalo, 2,200 African-American families were displaced for the 1954 Ellicott project and ten years later there were only six single family homes constructed for middle-income families in that district. Part of the delay was the fact that in the late-1950s, the federal government began to skimp on funding while at the same time project costs rose due to issues with developers and

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<sup>19</sup> Kraus, 187.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 286.

<sup>21</sup> Goldman, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Kolson, *Big Plans: The Allure and Folly of Urban Design* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas W. Rae, *City: Urbanism and its End* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 339.

unions.<sup>24</sup> Many cities were left with empty scars that were once neighborhoods filled with people.<sup>25</sup>

While the idea behind urban renewal was a noble one, the results were less than expected.<sup>26</sup> Too much effort was put into demolition of blighted areas without enough consideration of what would replace them and how residents would be affected. In some cases, such as Cleveland's 1959 Erieview project, everything that got in the way of new development was classified as "blight."<sup>27</sup> Developers' needs were placed over those of the residents. This was the case in Buffalo as well. Cities are complex organisms that require careful study and planning, along with citizen participation, before change is enacted. Planners must anticipate how the developed area will interact with the rest of the metropolitan area. The size of these projects was overly ambitious as well. Even with ample federal funds at the city's disposal, reconstruction cannot be completed overnight. A careful, inclusive approach combined with a sufficient amount of time and funding would have provided better results.

### The Model Cities Program

The next federal attempt at city revitalization, the Model Cities Program, employed a "bottom-up" implementation strategy in contrast to the "top down" implementation of

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<sup>24</sup> Teafor, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Grogan and Proscio, 195.

<sup>26</sup> Urban renewal originated with the Housing Act of 1949. The federal government paid for two-thirds of the cost, while local governments covered the remainder.

<sup>27</sup> Kolson, 81

Urban Renewal.<sup>28</sup> Model Cities began in 1966 as a facet of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, which was created to combat poverty and racial injustice. Its creators envisioned it as a more comprehensive program that involved revitalizing the cities through a combination of rebuilding, rehabilitation, and delivery of social services. Education, health, employment, and housing would all be addressed in improving the quality of life in cities. The major difference between Model Cities and Urban Renewal, however, was the participation of citizens in both the planning and implementation, thus the "bottom-up" label. This was an attempt to avoid the heavy-handed, "bulldozer" approach of Urban Renewal, which destroyed whole neighborhoods without any input from residents. Citizens' groups would formulate a comprehensive plan to combat poverty and blight in a particular neighborhood, and the federal government would allocate the funds.

In 1967, Buffalo was chosen to participate as one of the demonstration cities in the Model Cities Program. Local government leaders and the Model Cities director, who was a local sociology professor, immediately had conflicting ideas on how the program would be administered.<sup>29</sup> The city's community development officials attempted to undermine the director and submit their own plan to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, but the director's close connection to the mayor led to the implementation of his original action plan. The conflict stemmed from different ideologies. The director viewed the program as more than a physical makeover, contrary to the previous federal

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<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Lemann "The Myth of Community Development." *New York Times*. 9 January 1994, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed October 1, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Model Cities directors were chosen by each city's mayor.

Urban Renewal program.<sup>30</sup> Rather than merely demolishing dilapidated neighborhoods and building housing projects and homes, the Model Cities Program was designed to also fund social service delivery and community participation. Local community development officials disagreed with the social direction of the program, and together with the local business leadership branded the Model Cities Program as another form of social welfare handouts.<sup>31</sup> They argued that social service delivery was the responsibility of the welfare agencies alone. However, the record of weekly meetings of the citizen participants reveals a different story. The citizens asked for improved transportation, education, employment opportunities, and access to capital in order to better themselves and their neighborhoods. This was no handout.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the lack of cooperation from Buffalo's government and business leaders, the Model Cities Program had some impact on the community. The Langston Hughes Center for the Visual and Performing Arts, the Employment Information Center, the jitney service, the ECCO Supermarket, along with numerous other community programs, were some of those positive initiatives.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most important component of the legacy though, was the proliferation of grassroots organizations, such as community development corporations, that the program helped to spawn. Until the late 1960's, Buffalo's African-American population had virtually no voice in policy decisions. The Model Cities Program changed that within a few years, involving citizens in physical development as well as social service delivery.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Diana Dillaway, *Power Failure: Politics, Patronage and the Economic Future of Buffalo, New York*. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 95-96.

<sup>31</sup> These community development officials worked for the mayor's office and had the backing of some Common Council members as well.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>33</sup> *Model City, Buffalo, N.Y.*, produced by Doug Ruffin Enterprises, 2005, DVD.

<sup>34</sup> Goldman, 67.



While the Model Cities Program had its share of successes, it could not fulfill the lofty goals set by its creators. Originally designed as a small-scale program that would target specific areas in a handful of cities, the program eventually expanded to over 150 cities. The funding was therefore diluted, and in addition, city institutions did not always comply with the program directors.<sup>35</sup> The cities that were the most successful were the ones that had a “parity” system in which neither government nor residents dominated the planning and implementation stages.<sup>36</sup> Another hindrance was the lack of coordination at the federal level, which led to a delay in the allocation of funds until 1969.<sup>37</sup> The incoming Richard Nixon administration further weakened the program by slashing the funding level from \$38 million annually to 17.5 million in 1972. President Nixon seemed content to let the program die in order to roll the funds into a new program that in 1974 provided local leaders less federal regulation and more choice in where to target the aid.<sup>38</sup>

### The Community Development Block Grant Program

That new program emerged from the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The law combined the existing categorical grants, including Model Cities, into block form. The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) was promoted

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<sup>35</sup> Von Hoffman, 12.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Development, Evaluation Division, *The Model Cities Program: A Comparative Analysis of City Response Patterns and Their Relation to Future Urban Policy*. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Urban Development, 1973), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Monroe W. Karmin, “What’s the Status of Urban Uplift?” *Wall Street Journal*, 30 January 1969, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed October 1, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Emmett George, “Model Cities Time is Up-But Funds Keep Rolling In.” *Chicago Tribune*, 30 January 1975, W4, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed October 1, 2006.

as a more democratic approach to governmental aid in that localities would decide for themselves where to target the funding. The only provisions were that the expenditures had to be used for low-to-moderate income people, urgent community needs, or elimination of blight.<sup>39</sup>

Buffalo seemed to exemplify the democratic spirit of the CDBG Program. A 1974 Buffalo Common Council hearing set the stage for citizens to make their concerns and demands known. Some of the major issues discussed were: the desire for new houses rather than projects, neighborhood as opposed to downtown development, quality of social services, absentee landlord laws, blight, and programs that were city-wide rather than local.<sup>40</sup> In 1977, Mayor Makowski appointed community directors to head twelve separate city districts and created several community development corporations with ample staff and funding. This move was unprecedented, as it excluded Buffalo's Democratic "machine." Power in the city was moving away from the party and back to the citizens through grassroots organizations.<sup>41</sup>

In 1977, the populist tide swept in James Griffin as Buffalo's new mayor. He promptly replaced the old patronage system with one of his own. His populism, however, did not extend to Buffalo's African-American community. One of his first actions as mayor was to terminate Makowski's community coordinators.<sup>42</sup> This set the stage for a power struggle between Griffin, Buffalo's grassroots organizations, and the Common

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<sup>39</sup> "CDBG: A 25-Year History." *Journal of Housing and Community Development*, 56, no.4 (1999): 20-26. *EBSCOhostResearch* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed October 1,2006.

<sup>40</sup> City of Buffalo. Common Council. *Special Committee on Community Development: Public Hearings*. (Buffalo, N.Y.: Common Council, 1974), 8. From the George Arthur Papers at Buffalo State College Special Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Dillaway, 137.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, *Citizen Participation in Community Development: A Catalog of Local Approaches*. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Urban Development, 1978), 31.

Council. Griffin and the developers favored downtown projects, grassroots organizations preferred neighborhood development and services, while the Common Council members fought for individual projects to satisfy voters.

Griffin won the power struggle by creating his own community development corporations in order to control the flow of CDBG funds.<sup>43</sup> Except for the occasional concession to the African-American community or a small victory by a Common Council member, Griffin was free to use the federal funds as he pleased. This occurred while the amount of federal funding was still rising during the Jimmy Carter Presidency. In 1981 CDBG funds reached their peak at \$54.5 million, while total federal assistance for the city reached \$83.5 million. During the Makowski tenure, critics claimed that the city allocated too much money to neighborhood services, but this soon changed.<sup>44</sup>

Mayor Griffin and Buffalo's dominant economic institutions; such as M&T Bank, National Fuel, and Blue Cross, who controlled the boards of the regional development agencies, viewed neighborhood investment as wasted funds that would not generate further growth. The city began to funnel more and more money into downtown projects like office buildings, parking ramps, and bank buildings in a spending spree that lasted until the 1990's. During the period from 1985 to 1987, only 2.7 percent of CDBG funds were allocated to neighborhood revitalization.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the neglect of city neighborhoods, incompetence and inaction was rampant. There was no comprehensive strategy for revitalization as the Common Council members fought for one small project at a time. Without federal oversight, money was

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<sup>43</sup> Dillaway, 179.

<sup>44</sup> City of Buffalo. Comptroller's Office. *151st Annual Report of the Comptroller/City of Buffalo, N.Y. Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1983*. (Buffalo, N.Y.: Comptroller's Office, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Dillaway, 183.

spread all over the city through agencies that were not monitored or evaluated properly. Several of the downtown projects folded and the loans went into default. The city was now using CDBG funds to pay off bad loans.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the city squandered over \$100 million over the life of the program (1974-2004) to pay salaries and benefits of city hall employees.<sup>47</sup> This recently prompted one city activist to label city officials as “poverty pimps,” implying that government was diverting funds meant for improving the distressed areas into their own payroll.<sup>48</sup> What had started off with promise had degenerated into frustration and despair as population was migrating to the suburbs and business was following.

### Block Grant Success Stories

This was not the case for all of the Northeastern cities, however. Several cities took different approaches and achieved tangible results. Philadelphia, for example, employed a more comprehensive approach to urban revitalization, which included a housing counseling program to aid first time homebuyers in both purchasing and inspection. In 1997, the city used \$18 million in CDBG funds to construct 296 houses in a dilapidated area of North Philadelphia, which resulted in a complete turnaround.<sup>49</sup> Historically certified row houses were rehabilitated and sold as subsidized units. While some have criticized the cost of subsidized housing in the U.S., it pales in comparison to the annual

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<sup>46</sup> Dillaway, 171.

<sup>47</sup> James Heaney, “The Half -Billion-Dollar Bust,” *Buffalo News*, November 14, 2004, A1.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Watson, “Group Critical of Budget for Block Grants,” *Buffalo News*, March 16, 2004, B3.

<sup>49</sup> John Kromer, *Neighborhood Recovery: Reinvestment Policy for the New Hometown* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 103.

cost of the mortgage interest deduction (it lowered tax revenue by \$86 billion in 2009), which costs more than three times the amount spent on public housing.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the city required developers to hire within the zip code of the neighborhood in which it developed.<sup>51</sup> Rental developments were also part of the strategy, as all units supported with CDBG funds were required to reserve twenty percent of the space for disabled or special needs residents.<sup>52</sup> This comprehensive, consumer-oriented strategy served to increase sales, raise property values, and kept the neighborhood fairly integrated.<sup>53</sup> This is an example of competent leaders who used an inclusive, well-planned approach to maximize the benefits of federal assistance.<sup>54</sup>

Another success story occurred in Baltimore, where emphasis on neighborhoods and quality of life led to substantial improvements. In the 1970's, the First Annual Baltimore City Fair, which showcased neighborhoods and their rehabilitation, was a success, drawing 1.3 million people by the second year.<sup>55</sup> By the end of the decade, community development corporations and citizens' organizations were experienced and productive. In fact, many American cities boasted grassroots organizations that no longer focused on confrontation with government officials, but instead strived to develop their communities in cooperation with those officials.<sup>56</sup>

An example of fruitful cooperation occurred in the midwestern city of Indianapolis, where city government and community organizations joined forces to improve previously slighted neighborhoods in the 1990's. Prior to the 1990's, city government in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>55</sup> Teafor, 241.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 284.

Indianapolis, in alliance with downtown business elites, focused primarily on downtown development in order to stimulate business investment. Mayor Stephen Goldsmith changed this approach by allocating CDBG funds to seven depressed neighborhoods through one comprehensive neighborhood organization that assumed responsibility for the funds. The group had a board of directors, a set of by-laws, and received full-time organizational assistance and training from the city government. Instead of competing with citizens' groups or abandoning them, the Indianapolis city government harnessed their energy and knowledge in order to implement CDBG funds wisely and productively. In 1994 alone, the \$525, 000 annual allocation of funds to the neighborhoods was supplemented by an additional \$712,000 of private money from local and national foundations who favored community involvement. Accomplishments included newly built affordable housing, the expansion of a Kroger supermarket, clean up of an environmentally contaminated site, and rehabilitation of existing homes.<sup>57</sup>

### Urban Development Action Grants

Although there were some success stories regarding the CDBG Program, some critics voiced concerns that the funds were not reaching the target areas of low and moderate-income people as originally intended. This prompted the Carter administration to introduce Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG) in 1977. As part of an amendment to the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, the UDAG Program

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen J. McGovern, "Ideology, Consciousness, and Inner-City Development: The Case of Stephen Goldsmith's Indianapolis." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 25, no. 1 (2003): 1-25. *EBSCOhostResearch* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed November 11, 2006.

was created with more stringent guidelines. Funds had to be combined with other federal grants, eligibility had to be met before applying, and contracts with private interests were enforced.<sup>58</sup>

Buffalo took advantage of this program by using a four million dollar grant for a downtown Hilton hotel and subsequently cobbling together a partnership between business leaders, developers, local banks that issued bonds for the project, and the local Iron Workers' Union, which contributed pension funds in exchange for a promise of union jobs. Loan payments were then recycled and used to build new East Side homes.<sup>59</sup> Finally, Buffalo was able to use ingenuity and cooperation among different interests to create something worthwhile using federal assistance. This progress was offset, however, by the use of UDAG funds for construction of the \$500 million rapid transit line that proved to be a failure, due to its limited span, ridership that has not increased, and lack of expansion.<sup>60</sup> In fact, all of the millions of dollars in UDAG funds sent to Buffalo were used exclusively for downtown projects. The Griffin administration again neglected the poor neighborhoods while the white majority remained silent.<sup>61</sup>

In 1980, the election of Ronald Reagan ushered in a conservative ideology that led to change and ultimately termination of the UDAG Program. Conservatives objected to the focus of UDAG on neighborhood rehabilitation and public housing projects. Job creation and economic stimulus became the new focus of the program. By 1988, the appropriation budget had dwindled to zero. The UDAG Program by its very nature as a government

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Steven Kujawa, "The Urban Development Action Grant Program (UDAG)," in *Encyclopedia of Urban America: The Cities and Suburbs*, ed. N.L. Shumsky (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Goldman, 247.

<sup>60</sup> Dillaway, 160.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 182.

assistance venture did not stand a chance in the free-market atmosphere of the Reagan administration. Nevertheless, the program promoted cooperation, coordination, and commitment from both public and private interests. The fact that this occurred in a fractionalized city like Buffalo proved that the program could indeed produce positive results.<sup>62</sup>

### Enterprise Zones

After the demise of the UDAG Program, the Reagan administration turned to a different idea that coincided with their free-market ideological stance. That idea was to create enterprise zones, which were originally used in Great Britain in the 1970's under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The basic premise behind the enterprise zone concept was the reduction of taxes and land-use regulation in a depressed area in order to attract new businesses and retain the existing ones. Although U.S. Representatives Jack Kemp and Robert Garcia vigorously championed this concept in the 1980's, the Democratic-controlled Congress refused to endorse the idea.<sup>63</sup>

This concept gained new life, however, when several states adopted their own versions of the enterprise zone plan. By 1995, thirty-four states had a total of 2,840

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<sup>62</sup> Kujawa.

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin M. Hawkins, "The Impact of the Enterprise Zone on Urban Areas," *Growth and Change*, 15, no. 1 (1984): 35-40, 1.



zones.<sup>64</sup> Programs differed among the states, but the basic idea was the same — a designated area would be made more conducive to business than its surrounding areas through lower taxes. In exchange for the tax breaks, the businesses would have to hire a minimum number of employees from the immediate area. Proponents envisioned clusters of businesses developing and forming a critical mass of economic activity in the zones. Employment figures would then rise as the oppressive tax burden was lightened.<sup>65</sup> The implementation of the zones produced a series of mixed results.

Louisville, Kentucky experimented with an enterprise zone in the mid-1980s and provided some interesting insights. Of the four firms that set up in the zone, not one listed tax incentives as a primary reason for relocating. The firms cited transportation access, labor pool, and appropriate buildings as reasons why they moved. Later, Louisville expanded the zone area and the number of firms increased to fifty-four. This was combined with \$21 million in private investment. The net result was 1,042 jobs created or retained.<sup>66</sup> Business owners who participated in the Louisville program commented that available venture capital and inexpensive land were more important to starting and expanding than tax cuts. Improvements in the immediate area, such as police protection and infrastructure development were also concerns. Some recommended that other programs, such as community development block grants, be combined with enterprise zones to provide money in the start-up phase. U.S. Representative John LaFalce of Buffalo seconded this opinion and called enterprise zones “a small piece of an effective

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<sup>64</sup> Peter S. Fisher and Alan H. Peters, *State Enterprise Zone Programs: Have They Worked?* (Kalamazoo: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2002), 22.

<sup>65</sup> Benjamin Hawkins, 1.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, *State-Designated Enterprise Zones-Ten Case Studies*. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Urban Development, 1987).

overall urban policy”, but not “a substitute for other forms of aid.” Once again, a comprehensive approach with the commitment of city officials in a specific area is the key to producing positive results.<sup>67</sup>

Some areas did not fare as well with enterprise zones for various reasons. States that increased the maximum number of zones allowed defeated the purpose by lessening the advantage of a low-tax area. If there is a surplus of enterprise zones in an area, it does not pay to relocate or start up in an undesirable neighborhood.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, some states tied incentives to the number of jobs created, which did not encourage businesses to create high-paying jobs. Instead, businesses created more low-paying jobs in order to secure the maximum assistance from the state governments.<sup>69</sup>

The City of Buffalo, with its history of mismanaging assistance programs, made no exception regarding enterprise zones. Mayor James Griffin went along with the state program, but opposed local tax relief preferring instead the elimination of capital gains taxes and issuance of investment tax credits. The top priority of the Griffin administration was maintaining power in the executive branch of city government.<sup>70</sup>

Leaders at the city and state level share the blame for the botched implementation of the enterprise zone program in Buffalo. The state government committed the cardinal sin of designating too many zones across its territory in order to please every municipality,

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<sup>67</sup> Douglas Turner, “Economic Wind Shifts, Reagan Tack Doesn’t,” *Buffalo Courier Express*, February, 8, 1982.

<sup>68</sup> Peters and Fisher, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>70</sup> “15 Named to Draft Plan on City Enterprise Zone,” *Buffalo Courier Express*, March 28, 1982.

thereby negating any significant benefit that would compel a business to start or relocate in a distressed area such as the inner city of Buffalo.<sup>71</sup>

Another mistake was city government's use of the program as a tax credit giveaway to existing businesses as a means of repaying friends and supporters. Among the recipients were large companies who trimmed overhead and maximized profit with a combination of zone tax break and layoffs.<sup>72</sup> Buffalo in effect was bringing the zones, and the benefits that accompany them, to the businesses. This is contrary to the original purpose of bringing business, and the economic opportunity that accompanies it, to the distressed areas. In addition to these gaffes was the tendency of city officials, this time the Common Council, to push for zones in their territories that benefited small retail operations. While this seems practical on the surface, it also runs contrary to the original intention of the program. Cities need businesses that export goods and services in order to draw more money from outside the area, not ones that simply shift existing money around. Manufacturing operations are the key to this growth, not the law firms, banks, restaurants, and commercial landlords that currently benefit from the program. The battle for power in Buffalo, and statewide, turned what was a promising economic development program into a patronage trough.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> James Heaney, "Failed Empire New York's Most Potent Economic Development Program was Designed to Rejuvenate Distressed Areas, Empire Zones have Instead Enabled Law Firms, Fast-Food Restaurants and Corporations to Cash in on Big Tax Breaks," *Buffalo News*, June 8, 2003, A1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Marc Bendick Jr. and David W. Rasmussen, "Enterprise Zones and Inner-City Economic Revitalization," in *Reagan and the Cities*, ed. George E. Peterson and Carol W. Lewis. (Washington: The Urban Institute Press, 1986), 111.

### Local Enterprise Zone Success Stories

There are some success stories to be found in Buffalo however. Sonic Blinds, Inc., located in Amherst (a northeast suburb of Buffalo), took advantage of an enterprise zone opportunity in 1995 to start a manufacturing operation in downtown Buffalo. The 80,000 square foot plant employed neighborhood residents and planned to expand its workforce.<sup>74</sup> As of 2011, the company continued to thrive. While this is a small company, it is the ideal example of what the enterprise zone idea was meant to promote—local businesses that start up in the city because of tax breaks, hire zone residents, export products in order to draw money from outside the area, and continue to expand. This type of economic development requires time, patience, and the realization that a proliferation of small businesses can have the same economic impact as one mammoth industry.

In addition to Sonic Blinds, Cobey Inc., a supplier to the petrochemical and compressor industries, moved into the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park (at the southeastern edge of the city) in 2007, joining Sonwil Distribution Center and CertainTeed Corp. in the park. The company employed seventy-one people and would have moved out of state without the tax breaks afforded by the enterprise zone and the help of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency.<sup>75</sup> By 2010, the company

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<sup>74</sup> James Heaney, “Failed Empire New York’s Most Potent Economic Development Program Was Designed to Rejuvenate Distressed Areas: Empire Zones Have Instead Enabled Law Firms, Fast-Food Restaurants and Corporations to Cash In On Big Tax Breaks,” *Buffalo News*, June 8, 2003, A1.

<sup>75</sup> “Cobey Settles Into New City Site.” *Business First*, March 26, 2007, <http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/stories/2007/03/26/daily13.html> (accessed January 14, 2011).

increased to 110 employees and was still thriving.<sup>76</sup> The former brownfield has become a thriving industrial park, as local officials use the enterprise zone program in the manner that its creators intended it.<sup>77</sup>

### Conclusions on Government Intervention

The aforementioned examples are just some of several encouraging developments for Buffalo in recent years. The mistakes made during the Urban Renewal Program have been addressed through the construction of over three hundred new subsidized homes in the Ellicott District (see Figure 1), the refurbishing of the Frederick Douglass Towers (formerly Talbert Mall) and Ellicott Mall (renamed Ellicott Town Center) housing projects, and the conversion of the Lakeview housing projects into single-family subsidized homes. In addition, allocation of CDBG funds will now be allocated to human services agencies based on performance instead of political connections. After a half-century of failure in the use of government aid to revitalize Buffalo, city officials are beginning to show measurable progress in improving distressed areas, promoting city strengths, and responding to residents' concerns.<sup>78</sup>

This approach is one that other, more successful cities have used over the same period. From Baltimore with its promotion of diverse neighborhoods, to Boston with its rehabilitation of historic Quincy Market and Faneuil Hall, to Seattle with its restoration of

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<sup>76</sup> "Is the Partnership Working," *Buffalo News*, August 21, 2010, <http://www.buffalonews.com/incoming/article6664.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Sonwil and CertainTeed were still active in the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park as of 2011.

<sup>78</sup> "A Change for the Better: City is Right to Link Agency Performance to Block Grant Awards," editorial, *Buffalo News*, January 31, 2004, B4.

Pike Place Market, cities have used government aid to both improve the physical appearance and the quality of life in their respective areas. Cities such as Louisville stimulated business startup and relocation through comprehensive planning and cooperation among local officials. In all of these examples, leaders took advantage of the opportunities offered by government programs to revitalize their cities rather than retain their power base.<sup>79</sup>

The process of revitalizing the American city is an ongoing one. Different government programs are initiated and terminated, but the goal remains the same—to preserve the city as a center of knowledge and culture while maintaining an adequate quality of life for its residents. The success stories illustrate the view that cities can prosper despite the allure of the “clean” suburban alternative. Cities have unique assets and architecture, rich history, and a sense of vitality and energy that the suburbs lack. City officials and activists who realize this and work together have benefited from the assistance of state and federal government. Those who have not cooperated, but rather concentrated on retaining power through patronage, have contributed to the decline of their cities.

Buffalo has traveled the latter course for most of the modern era, but progress is beginning to occur. Government funds are being used to preserve and promote its unique assets such as the Darwin Martin House, which was designed by world-renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Historical sites such as the Erie Canal Commercial Slip, the J. Edward Nash House, and the Michigan Street Baptist Church have also employed

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<sup>79</sup> Frieden and Sagalyn, 157; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, *State-Designated Enterprise Zones-Ten Case Studies*. (Washington, D.C.: Housing and Urban Development, 1987).

public funding.<sup>80</sup> Development of housing and homes in and adjacent to the downtown area has sparked hope for a revitalized city center.<sup>81</sup> New businesses have started, while some existing businesses have expanded. While progress has been slow, the cooperation between citizen activists, private developers, and city officials is encouraging. If these individual interests are able to put aside their personal agendas in order to work together and contribute to the city as a whole, everyone benefits. A look back at the last fifty years proves that anything less would be futile.

These mistakes in the name of urban renewal often came at the expense of Buffalo's African-American community. They did not have the political clout to prevent local government from bulldozing their neighborhoods and displacing them. The racial tensions that resulted and the problems that it caused are examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>80</sup> "Scrambling to get Michigan Avenue project in gear," *Buffalo News*, September 27, 2010, <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/communities/buffalo/article202224.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> "Housing Planned for Hengerer's Warehouse," *Buffalo News*, October 16, 2010, <http://www.buffalonews.com/business/local-business/article221511.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

## CHAPTER 2

### RACE RELATIONS IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

In the year 1950, Buffalo was a bustling city with thriving neighborhoods and a vibrant downtown business district. The population had peaked at 580,132 and the area was dense with residents.<sup>82</sup> Manufacturing jobs were in abundance, especially in the steel industry. What was unforeseen, however, were signs that the path that Buffalo was on would eventually begin to reverse. The growth in population had begun to slow since 1900, and by the 1960's it began to decline. Manufacturing jobs were lost as dozens of companies closed, leaving Buffalo with high unemployment and a bleak outlook.<sup>83</sup>

While some of the factors that contributed to Buffalo's decline could not be avoided, such as the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which ended Buffalo's tenure as a transportation hub, there were other factors that could have been prevented. The purposeful residential segregation of the urban area initiated a concentration of poverty that has grown worse and left Buffalo with a reputation as a poor, high crime city with an undereducated workforce. This pattern of segregation was a result of changing racial geography in America that influenced government decisions such as the Federal Housing Administration loans and the GI Bill, which employed discriminatory practices to exclude African Americans from obtaining mortgages.<sup>84</sup> Certain areas became "redlined," or deemed high-risk areas for mortgage lending. African Americans were unable to build equity and wealth, while whites moved upward. Today, whites and African Americans have a huge gap in income and accumulated wealth. Since homes are

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<sup>82</sup> Margaret M. Sullivan, "Buffalo." *World Book Advanced*.  
<http://worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar081380&st=buffalo>: accessed March 1, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2005), 163.



one of the main sources of wealth, African Americans are at a disadvantage due to the discriminatory actions of whites that sought to keep them residentially segregated. David M.P. Freund, Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Maryland, adds that at the time, public officials touted the merits of the program aimed at whites only as part of the “free market” forces that would revitalize America.<sup>85</sup> They would not be held responsible for the segregation fostered by the actual lending institutions.

The issue of the discrimination by the banks supported by the GI Bill and its affect on mortgages is powerfully presented by Columbia University Professor of Political Science and History, Ira Katznelson. He mentions the disparity in net worth between whites and African Americans, while also pointing out that the opportunities provided by the civil rights movement could not be taken advantage of.<sup>86</sup> African Americans became left out of the growing middle class due to discrimination. Yale Rabin concurs with this view, as he notes that the Federal Housing Administration’s mortgage practices, combined with the disparity of federal highway funds as opposed to public transit, served to situate African Americans in what he terms a “web of isolating influences.”<sup>87</sup> Buffalo is a case study for this type of exclusion, and the inner city has suffered as a result. Katznelson sees public policy in general as divisive and a contributor to residential and economic segregation.

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<sup>85</sup> David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 139.

<sup>86</sup> Katznelson, 164.

<sup>87</sup> Yale Rabin, “The Persistence of Racial Isolation: The Role of Government Action and Inaction,” in *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*, eds. June M. Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 96.



**Figure 2. *Buffalo Neighborhoods Map* (from University at Buffalo Map Collection, 2008)**

Douglass S. Massey, Professor of Sociology at Princeton, and Nancy A. Denton, Demography Professor at the State University of New York at Albany, add to the discussion with their coining of the term “hypersegregation” to describe how Buffalo’s African American population became centralized around the central city core, clustered together with minimal or no contact with whites, and isolated.<sup>88</sup> Even when public housing was introduced to offer affordable options for low-income families, African Americans found themselves excluded from white housing developments and herded into segregated projects.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, urban renewal was another avoidable factor in the decline of the city. During the 1950’s, African Americans saw their perfectly viable neighborhoods leveled. These neighborhoods were labeled as blighted areas that had to be eliminated and replaced. One area in particular, the Ellicott District (south of William Street and labeled *ES* in Figure 2), was a diverse and vibrant neighborhood that saw its residents displaced while public housing developments appeared after a long delay. The poor were warehoused in projects built in the renewal district, while the other displaced African Americans were concentrated in areas such as the Masten District (labeled *M* in Figure 2). Segregation was in full swing. Jon Teaforde points out that the white middle class residents refused to return to the renewal area, furthering segregation in terms of race and economics.<sup>89</sup> The city received millions in federal aid to destroy, rather than rehabilitate neighborhoods.

In addition to the factor of residential segregation, school segregation has also contributed to the plight of African Americans and of Buffalo in general. After an initial

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<sup>88</sup> Douglass S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>89</sup> Teaforde, 162.

and successful attempt to desegregate the schools and impart a certain level of equitable distribution of educational resources, Western New York has begun to resegregate due to the phenomenon labeled “white flight.” The cycle of poverty is perpetuated when African Americans attend low-performing, segregated schools and leave unprepared for higher education or for employment.

The process of desegregating Buffalo schools was a relatively smooth one, as Steven J.L. Taylor asserts. In what seems like an uncharacteristically wise move by local leaders, Buffalo incorporated the views of its citizens in the slow, deliberate process, thereby diffusing any serious, organized objection. This transition followed a divisive and racially charged mayoral campaign in 1969 by Buffalo Common Council member Alfreda Slominski, who tapped into white fear of forced busing into black neighborhoods. Taylor uses dramatically improved standardized test scores to support his contention that desegregation was a positive for Buffalo.<sup>90</sup> Taylor demonstrates continuing racial tension, however, by mentioning the opposition to new busing in 1994. Many white, middle class parents did not approve of their children being bused to predominantly African-American neighborhoods.<sup>91</sup> He adds that federal government aid to fund the special magnet programs has dried up, adding to white flight. The funding alternative is to raise middle class taxes, which also encourages white flight. Taylor’s view is countered by Professor Emerita at The University at Buffalo Law School Judy Trent-Scales, who contends that although test scores and school pride improved, the dropout, suspension, and special education placement rates increased disproportionately for

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<sup>90</sup> Steven J. L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The Influence of Local Leaders* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 164.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 219.

African-American students.<sup>92</sup> Not everything was as perfect as local officials claimed. Buffalo city schools are currently centers of poverty.<sup>93</sup> Research Associates at The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Erica Frankenberg, and Chungmei Lee, pick up on the study years later, showing that white students in Buffalo are now concentrated in a few schools. They claim the result is lower test scores for the Buffalo district, as schools have resegregated due to white flight.<sup>94</sup>

White flight in turn, is perpetuated by the decision to use federal funds to construct major highways that make it easier for whites to travel from their federally subsidized suburban homes to their place of employment in the city (see Chapter 3). The interests of the African Americans were ignored and neighborhoods were damaged in the frenzy to reduce the commuting time of those who travel from suburb to city. At the same time, government failed to provide urban residents access to the suburban areas with public transportation. Those without automobile access found it difficult to travel to employment opportunity in the outlying areas.

Neil Kraus, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, published a study in 2000 about race relations in Buffalo and the effect on African Americans. His conclusion was that local political decisions affected the development of low-income, segregated neighborhoods in the city of Buffalo. Dr. Kraus argues that the Kensington Expressway, which took eight years to complete, isolated the African-American neighborhoods further by allowing commuters to bypass them completely. The below-

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<sup>92</sup> Judy Trent-Scales, "School Desegregation in Buffalo: The Hold of History," *The Harvard Blackletter Journal*, 7 (1990): 116. *EBSCOhost Research*. Database on-line. Buffalo State College, E.H. Butler Library Research; accessed April 1, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>94</sup> Erica Frankenberg and Chungmei Lee, "Race in American Public Schools: Rapidly Resegregating School Districts," *The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University* (August, 2002), 16. Internet; accessed 2 May 2010.

grade construction obstructs the view of the neighborhood and contributes to the “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” attitude of many suburban commuters. Dr. Kraus adds that African Americans did not enjoy the same mobility as whites and could not just move out of the neighborhood as easily as whites could. Their options were limited in terms of renting or owning homes in other neighborhoods compared to those of whites.<sup>95</sup>

The option of where to live was not the only limitation for African Americans however. The new neoliberal policies of economic competitiveness superseding the old Keynesian model has forced many off of government assistance while poverty rates have increased. Meghan Cope, Department of Geography Chair at the University of Vermont, and Frank Latham, Research Associate at Berkeley, pursue this angle, asserting that the new policies stress “personal responsibility” over social change.<sup>96</sup> They dig further into the reasons for the overall loss in population, blaming the corrupt leadership and racist housing policies along with the traditional scapegoats of industrial loss and globalization. Other authors have alluded to this, but Cope and Latham dig deeper and find that there are people migrating into Buffalo, but they are not the coveted middle class whites and therefore are not welcomed as a positive trend.<sup>97</sup> They also run contrary to the prevailing opinion that Buffalo is losing its young population by noting that white youth is dropping, while African-American and Latino youth is rising.<sup>98</sup> This view is beginning to gain prominence among those who study Rust Belt population trends. It may help in

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<sup>95</sup> Kraus, 123-125.

<sup>96</sup> Meghan Cope and Frank Latham, “Narratives of Decline: Race, Poverty, and Youth in the Context of Postindustrial Urban Angst,” *The Professional Geographer*, 61 (2009): 152. *EBSCOhost Research Database* on-line. Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research; accessed March 6, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

reversing the old ideas in city revitalization that begin with “silver bullet” projects rather than improving schools, public transportation, and housing opportunities.

This argument of the causes of decline regarding Buffalo is one that will continue, not to assign blame on any specific group, but rather to learn from the mistakes of the past in order to reshape the future. There is no ignoring the changing makeup of the population of Buffalo. Rather than bemoan the change, we must embrace it and be prepared to invest in human capital. The focus on more funding to large downtown projects and law enforcement, while cutting education, social services, tourism promotion, cultural sites, and amenities such as libraries and community centers, serves to drain human capital and keep Buffalo on the path of decline.

### Early Segregation in Buffalo

This study of Buffalo’s racial relations begins with an examination of the growing African-American population of Buffalo in the 1920s. There were only 4,511 African Americans of the 508,776 total population. Of the 4,511, 3,401 lived in wards 6 and 7.<sup>99</sup> Shawn Lay of the University of Georgia notes that racism played a role in restricting physical and socioeconomic movement of these new arrivals, as was the case with many newcomers. He cites a study conducted by University of Buffalo sociologist Niles Carpenter in 1927, which stated that many employers referred to African-American

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<sup>99</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: Composition of the Characteristics of the Population for Wards of Cities of 50,00 or More*; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/4108456no554ch5.pdf>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

workers as “slow thinkers” who required supervision from whites.<sup>100</sup> As a result, African Americans remained as “last hired-first fired” in a slew of lower-level jobs, while many whites were able to gradually improve their economic, and later political status. Despite these limitations, African Americans initiated many businesses and self-help groups, including the *Negro Businessmen's League*, the *Colored Musicians' Union of Buffalo*, and a chapter of Marcus Garvey's *United Negro Improvement Association*.<sup>101</sup> If no one else would fight for them, they would have to defend and support each other.

The 1940s ushered in a significant demographic change for the United States. Many African Americans moved to the North during the *First* and *Second Great Migrations* and by 1940, Buffalo had 17, 694 out of 575,901 total.<sup>102</sup> The inequity and segregation continued however, in the form of housing in particular. The 1940 Census shows that of 151, 937 occupied dwellings, non-whites occupied only 4,844.

Most of these inhabitants were clustered in tract #14, bordered by Main Street, Eagle Street, Jefferson Avenue, and Broadway (see Figure 3). This area had the dubious distinction of possessing the lowest rate of owner-occupied dwellings and the highest amount needing major repairs. Most were constructed before 1899, making this the area with the oldest houses as well.<sup>103</sup> Not only were African Americans clustered in one area, but that area was substandard and ruled by absentee landlords as well, a trend that continues through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>100</sup> Shawn Lay, *Hooded Knights on the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York*, (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 16.

<sup>101</sup> The Circle Association, *African American History of Western New York State: 1900-1935*; available from <http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/0history/1900-1935.html>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

<sup>102</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: Characteristics of the Population for New York*; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33973538v2p5ch2.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> United States Census Bureau, *1940 Census Tracts*; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.



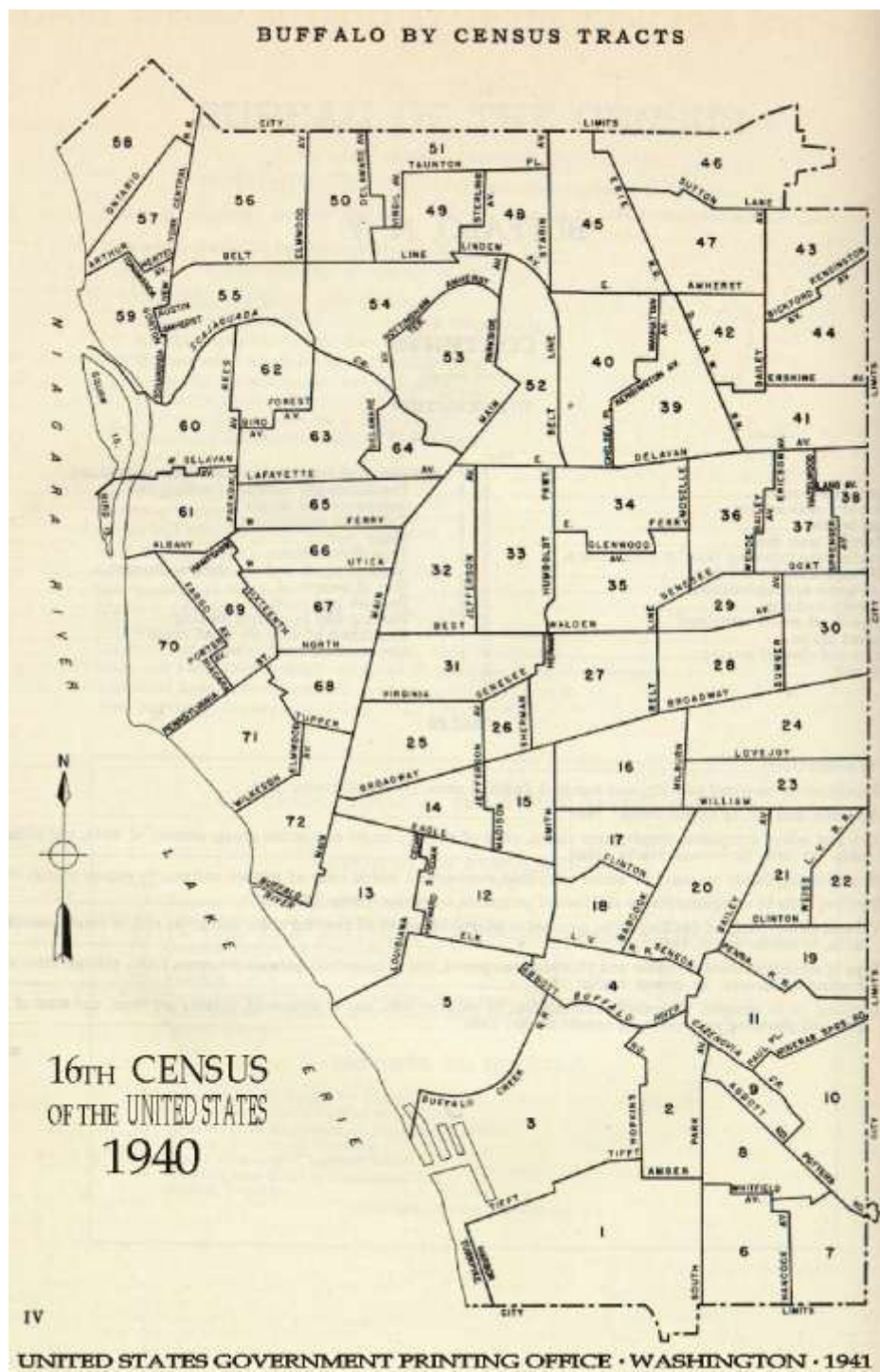


Figure 3. Buffalo Census Tracts (from the 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. Census, 1940)

To make matters worse, rents were higher than in other wards, meaning African Americans were paying more money for less quality.

### Barriers To Home Ownership

The only escape from this cycle of isolation and poverty seemed to be encompassed in the new wave of home ownership ushered in by New Deal legislation. The *Federal Housing Act* of 1934 created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which revived the home construction and financing industries that had been devastated by the Great Depression. After World War II, the FHA boosted the exodus to the suburbs through the reduction of minimum down payments and absorption of mortgage risk for banks.<sup>104</sup> They did not lend money directly, but rather insured the lenders against loss. In 1935, the FHA landed a blow to the hopes of prospective African American homeowners by defining what determined residential quality in its *Underwriting Handbook*. The publication stressed “protection from adverse influences” which included “the infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups.”<sup>105</sup> Neighborhoods were desirable only if they could be homogeneous. The FHA was influenced, as Kevin Fox Gotham, Professor of Sociology at Tulane University contends, by real estate interests during the congressional hearings on the *Federal Housing Act* of 1934. These special interests shape public policy, which in turn helps to shape public perception and eventually affect

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<sup>104</sup> Kevin Fox Gotham<sup>104</sup>, “Racialization and the State: The Housing Act of 1934 and the Creation of the Federal Housing Administration,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 43, no.2 (2000): 292. *EBSCOhost Research*. Database on-line. Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research; accessed March 6, 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Federal Housing Administration, *1935 Underwriting Manual*. Washington, D.C., 1935.

reality.<sup>106</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, Professor of History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, confirms this “infiltration theory” by noting that the *National Association of Real Estate Boards* compiled a code of ethics in the 1920s that discouraged the placement of African Americans in white neighborhoods. He continues by stating that the *National Association of Home Builders* also contributed to this stance by refusing to build homes for African Americans in white neighborhoods.<sup>107</sup> These interests viewed African-American as “adverse influences” that would eventually cause “blight” if allowed to enter white neighborhoods and were also seen as poor candidates for mortgages.

African-American banker Robert R. Taylor dispelled this myth by loaning millions to African Americans during the period from 1934 to 1948 without recording a single foreclosure.<sup>108</sup> Taylor proved that with proper qualifications, African Americans could be responsible homeowners. The myth of African Americans neglecting property could be attributed to absentee landlords who did little more than collect rent. The 1950 census however shows African Americans still concentrated in tract #14 (see Figure 3), but beginning to spread to adjacent tracts in the Fruit Belt (tract #31 in Figure 3) and toward the Central Terminal (tract #16 in Figure 3) as their population increased to 36,645 of a total 580,132. These tracts again showed the highest amounts of dilapidated homes, some with no running water.<sup>109</sup> Nonwhite owner-occupied homes totaled only 1,901 (2.6%) of 72,721 total homes.<sup>110</sup> African Americans were for the most part left out of the housing

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<sup>106</sup> Gotham, 296.

<sup>107</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “The Second Ghetto and the ‘Infiltration Theory’ in Urban Real Estate,” in *Urban Planning and the African-American Community*, eds. June M. Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf (London, Sage Publications, 1997), 64.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>109</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Seventeenth Census of the United States: Characteristics of the Population for New York*; available from <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41557421v3p1ch4.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

market and neatly contained. This was an unfortunate occurrence, because a year earlier, the journal *The Mortgage Banker* reported on the African American community as “a large, untapped market.”<sup>111</sup> It’s entirely possible that Buffalo could have avoided much of the physical decay to its housing stock if more African Americans had been allowed to purchase properties rather than relying on absentee landlords to manage the upkeep. In addition, the emerging African American middle class in Buffalo would have had more options and an opportunity to expand geographically.

Similar to the FHA, the Veterans Administration (VA) merely guaranteed loans that were administered to veterans through lending institutions. Katznelson notes that many African American veterans faced stiff requirements for loans, including a good credit rating, adequate capital, and residence in a “desirable” neighborhood.<sup>112</sup> Unabashed racism prohibited these people who served their country from receiving the same privileges as whites. Of the 67,000 mortgages supported by the VA in New York State, less than 100 went to African Americans.<sup>113</sup> During this time, Buffalo had reached the pinnacle of the population roller coaster and began its rapid decline. The inequities of the loan process presided over by the FHA and the VA contributed to the suburban increase in population and geographical expansion.

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<sup>111</sup> Mohl, 68.

<sup>112</sup> Katznelson, 140.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 140.

### Segregation and Discrimination in Public Housing

In addition to the barriers faced by prospective African-American homeowners, many low-income residents faced the dilemma of having to pay high rent prices. The Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA), established in 1934, aimed to alleviate the housing problem for the poor. The first public housing project built in Buffalo was the Kenfield Apartments. The Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal agency, built the project along with many others around the nation. Another *Housing Act* in 1937 gave the PWA's power to the U.S. Housing Administration, which in turn transferred the power to build and manage future housing projects to the BMHA.<sup>114</sup> The local authorities used this increased power to begin a string of public housing projects in the Buffalo area, which led to opposition in some neighborhoods that did not want low-income African Americans relocated in their territory. Saul Pleeter, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Economics at American University, disputes the perception of a relation between a decrease in property values in proximity to low-income housing (which real estate boards have historically promoted) in his study that found public housing to have no significant effect on surrounding property values. While projects do not recoup the initial taxpayer investment through tax revenue, they do not lower adjacent values either.<sup>115</sup> Fear of housing projects was unfounded and perpetuated by those who would benefit from that fear. Kenfield was constructed on the northeastern edge of the city in a sparsely populated area (tract #44 in Figure 3), which meant that this would become a new

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<sup>114</sup> Kraus, 68.

<sup>115</sup> Saul Pleeter, "The Effects of Public Housing on Neighboring Property Values and Rents in Buffalo, N.Y." Ph D. diss., University of Buffalo, 1971.

neighborhood, and African Americans would not be allowed to settle there.<sup>116</sup> To address the problem of housing the excluded low-income African Americans, the BMHA constructed the Willert Park Courts in 1939. Not surprisingly, the BMHA selected the predominately African-American neighborhood that was part of census tract #14 (see Figure 3) in the Willert Park area south of Broadway after caving in to opposition from residents, who resisted public housing in North Buffalo, South Buffalo, and Cheektowaga.<sup>117</sup> The National Urban League found that in the Cheektowaga area (the BMHA's jurisdiction extended to Cheektowaga and Tonawanda briefly) had a Polish priest as the head of the local housing authority.<sup>118</sup> These were former immigrants who left the East Side of Buffalo as African Americans moved in and competed with them for jobs. Race issues dominated the decisions on public housing and African Americans who were paying high rents for substandard housing were not welcome in white housing projects. A 1944 publication touting the new project from the BMHA made no attempt to hide its intent as it stated: "Here is the center of life and activity for Buffalo's Negro population."<sup>119</sup> Residents and leaders alike were determined to keep Buffalo's African-American population contained. Willert Park Courts (later A.D. Price Courts) remained an all-black project throughout its existence.

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<sup>116</sup> United States Census Bureau, *1940 Census Tracts*.

<sup>117</sup> Cheektowaga and Tonawanda are an inner ring suburbs of Buffalo.

<sup>118</sup> National Urban League. *Race, Fear and Housing in a Typical American Community*, 1946: 31; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>119</sup> Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. *Ten Years of Progress (1934-1944)*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1944; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

### Expansion of the Ghetto

While the attempt at segregation succeeded, Buffalo's African-American population began to expand in the 1950s and the ghetto expanded geographically as well. The population began to spill into the areas north of Broadway, eventually overtaking the Ellicott and Masten districts (see census tracts 25, 31, and 32 in Figure 3).<sup>120</sup> While African Americans eventually spread to other neighborhoods, the East Side (labeled as *ES* in Figure 2) became predominately black as many whites left for suburban homes that were unavailable to African Americans. The expanding ghetto was a cause for concern, as many in Buffalo saw this area as what would come to be termed "blighted." A 1952 BMHA report entitled *Redevelopment in Buffalo* identified blighted areas as those with deteriorated housing, low-economic status, and a high incidence of poor social and health conditions.<sup>121</sup> No mention was made of the fact that these areas had a high level of absentee landlords who neglected properties, many of which had incomplete plumbing facilities. The report went on to recommend the complete demolition of these blighted areas. In 1957, Chester Kowal campaigned for mayor on the promise to "...place the full weight of the entire city government behind the redevelopment program..."<sup>122</sup> What followed was a process that ignored the views of the residents and left an entire neighborhood obliterated (see urban renewal in Chapter 1).

By 1950, the Ellicott District held more than 75% of the city's African-American population (the rest was comprised of Jews and Italians) and became home to "blighted"

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<sup>120</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Seventeenth Census of the United States: Characteristics of the Population for New York*

<sup>121</sup> Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. *Redevelopment in Buffalo*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1952; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>122</sup> "Western Roundup Setting Flavors Kowal Campaign." *Buffalo News*, 17 October 1957.

areas as defined by local and federal officials. These areas were subject to demolition under the *National Housing Act* of 1949, which provided federal assistance to clear blighted areas and then sell them back to developers. This was the fate of a huge swath of land in the district, as 2,200 African American families were removed for the demolition project beginning in 1954.<sup>123</sup> These families faced the dilemma of not being able to rent or purchase homes in other areas of Buffalo or the suburbs, while they waited almost ten years for the Ellicott project to reach completion. Many had to relocate to the Dante Place (southwest of downtown) housing project or to the nearby Fruit Belt neighborhood (labeled *FB* in Figure 2), which led to more “white flight” of existing residents with German ancestry. By 1964, there were few homes for middle-income families in the area and two high-rise housing projects that sat as bookends on a desolate parcel of land (see Figure 1) that had once been a mixed, vibrant neighborhood of African Americans, Jews, and Italians. Rather than use spot demolition or rehabilitation, local officials (backed with federal funds) opted for what Neil Kraus characterized as “Negro removal.”<sup>124</sup> Clearly, the aim was to isolate poor African Americans in order to clear more land for the type of developments preferred in the suburban setting. Exacerbating this process was the lack of African Americans on the Urban Renewal Board until the mid-1960s.

Ironically, a pilot project in Buffalo’s Fruit Belt neighborhood conducted in 1960 actually led to an increase in property values through a program of inspection and repair of building code violations. The owners of the 1,461 total structures were given a reasonable amount of time to make the repairs; some were done voluntarily (exterior painting, landscaping). The Buffalo Board of Redevelopment did advocate spot

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<sup>123</sup> Teaford, 156.

<sup>124</sup> Kraus, 86.



demolition in extreme cases, but stressed rehabilitation and stringent inspections.<sup>125</sup> Here is an example of reuse and rehabilitation rather than the turmoil and displacement that tends to accompany wholesale demolition of neighborhoods.

Reaction to this force-fed demolition and relocation, combined with discrimination in housing surfaced in Buffalo's African-American community. The *Buffalo Criterion* newspaper reported in 1958 that a committee of property owners in the Ellicott District was dissatisfied with the reimbursements being offered for their relocation cost.<sup>126</sup> They had previously lost the battle to use rehabilitation over demolition and would later face difficulties in finding housing in areas that did not want to accept them. The *Criterion* also reported on the failure of the African-American community as a whole to mobilize against the demolition. They quoted Dr. Lawrence Murphy of the Ellicott District who stated: "Had the leaders in the Masten community given us a real hand, they would not be facing this serious problem today."<sup>127</sup> The white leadership, opportunistic developers, apathetic and/or racist residents and the federal government combined to isolate and marginalize African-American communities whose power base was too fragmented to mount a serious counterattack. The Masten District Council member Cora P. Mahoney complained after the fact by observing that housing restrictions led to *de facto* school segregation and went further to note: "We like nice neighborhoods too. We have a certain pride, but we don't have anything to build on it."<sup>128</sup> Discrimination was rampant, but the victims were blamed for their own misfortune.

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<sup>125</sup> Buffalo Board of Redevelopment. *Neighborhood Conservation: Buffalo's Pilot Project*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1960; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>126</sup> "Property Owners Protest: Ellicott District Property Owners Not Pleased With Prices Offered." *Buffalo Criterion*, 13 September 1958.

<sup>127</sup> "Murphy Hits Masten Plan." *Buffalo Criterion*, 8 May 1959.

<sup>128</sup> "Fight Urged to Prohibit Housing Discrimination." *Buffalo Courier Express*, 26 January 1959.

Anti-discrimination bills were still opposed by realtors, even though 20% of housing in Buffalo still allowed discrimination (in two-family structures occupied by owner).<sup>129</sup> African American families had the money, but could not rent in white areas. By 1963, 40% of African Americans were still living in substandard housing.<sup>130</sup> Realtors vigorously resisted any strengthening of the Metcalf-Baker Law, which would counter housing discrimination. The old argument resurfaced, as Thomas Barone, President of the *Greater Buffalo Board of Realtors* stated in 1963: “This would hasten the exodus of middle-income families from the cities, further eroding the tax base and leading to the destruction of those very institutions which have made our cities great.”<sup>131</sup> Here is an example of self-fulfilling prophecy; incite racial tension and people will become frightened and flee. That same year, the *National Association of Real Estate Boards* stated that: “Realtors may properly oppose any attempt by force of law to withdraw from property owners the right freely to determine with whom they will deal with in respect to their property...”<sup>132</sup> The realtors seemed more interested in preserving homogenous neighborhoods to maximize negative racial perceptions and drive up prices to discourage diversity.

Countering these views was the *Committee Against Discrimination in Housing*, who in 1963 commented on segregation in housing projects. Board chairman Algernon D. Black predicted: “You’re going to have racial trouble, increasing sickness, riots and fighting in the streets, racial tension; and you’re going to pay the price...”<sup>133</sup> This was a harbinger of things to come in Buffalo. Another view came from Rev. James A. Healy,

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<sup>129</sup> “New Anti-Bias Bill is Filed.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 8 February 1962.

<sup>130</sup> “Drastic Change Foreseen in Area Housing Setup.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 2 July 1963.

<sup>131</sup> “Realtor Hits NAACP Backs Bill.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 25 March 1963.

<sup>132</sup> “Realtors Say Owner May Select Buyers.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 1963.

<sup>133</sup> “Ellicott Project Warning Sounded.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 18 October 1963

chairman of the Buffalo Board of Community Relations, who three years earlier compared the East Side of Buffalo to the Jewish ghettos in Europe.<sup>134</sup> By the standard definition of a ghetto, he was correct. Blacks were being separated from the rest of society, and not by choice.

### Isolation of Hamlin Park

The next blow to Buffalo's African-American community fell on the Masten District, when Frederick Law Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway was obliterated to make room for an expressway. By the late 1950s, the area near Humboldt Parkway had become a viable, middle to upper class neighborhood. Hamlin Park (labeled *HP* in Figure 2), in particular, resembled a quiet suburban neighborhood that boasted a collection of doctors, lawyers, ministers, politicians and teachers among its residents. The beautiful, tree-lined parkway supplemented the tight-knit, sociable neighborhood, but proved to be irresistible for city planners who desired to alleviate heavy traffic using empty parkland. Some local activists, such as Dr. Lydia T. Wright, who became the first African-American on the Buffalo Board of Education, and architect/activist Robert T. Coles tried to mobilize neighbors, but the area lacked a cohesive African-American group to fight local officials. Their overtures to state officials went unheeded as well. The Kensington Expressway left a hole in the neighborhood, both literally and figuratively. Businesses and family life were disrupted for a period of ten years and properties disappeared from the city tax

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<sup>134</sup> "County Board is Urged to Back Anti-Bias Bill." *Buffalo Courier Express*, 23 January 1960.

rolls.<sup>135</sup> This new highway made travel to downtown faster, but also created a conduit for commuters from the suburbs who reduced their travel time. These advantages are slanted toward automobile owners, however. Most residents in the Humboldt Parkway area (40% to 60%) did not own a car and were now even more isolated.<sup>136</sup> Travelers can now completely bypass the East Side on their journey to downtown on the below-grade Kensington Expressway.

### DeFacto School Segregation

The isolating influence of the Kensington Expressway and the rampant housing segregation created another racial dilemma: segregated schools. The racially divided neighborhoods led to *de facto* segregation of the neighborhood schools. A push for school desegregation began in the late 1960s, aided in part by the coalition activist group *BUILD* (Build, Unity, Independence, Liberty and Dignity). *BUILD's Black Paper Number One* reported the deplorable inequities in Buffalo's public schools. High faculty turnover and absentee rates, lack of African-American administrators and teachers, lower spending per pupil as compared to other areas of New York State, and discouraging African-American students from entering skilled trade crafts were some of the complaints outlined in the report.<sup>137</sup> There was no doubt that segregation led to African-American students being

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<sup>135</sup> *The Fruit Belt: A Story of Family, Resilience, and Hope*. DVD. Produced and directed by Sharon Benz, Jessica Incorvaia, Amanda Walser and Katie Bartolotta. 31 minutes. 2006; Buffalo, NY: Daemen College, 2006.

<sup>136</sup> Model Cities Agency. *Model City Program*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1969.

<sup>137</sup> BUILD Incorporated. "Black Paper Number One." *Papers and Records 1967-1976*. From the Buffalo State College Special Archives.

shortchanged. The *Center for Urban Education* (of New York City) introduced a report, which found that African-American schools fell below the national and the Buffalo average in reading.<sup>138</sup> White schools were far ahead and the perception was that the white schools were better quality. Another report from the *Buffalo Board of Education* called *A Study of Cross Busing* revealed that by 1970, 72% of the schools were heavily segregated.<sup>139</sup> African-American students were trapped in low-performing schools in slum areas and the only alternative seemed to be the integration of public schools to level the resources and raise achievement.

### Integration of Buffalo Schools

This proposed integration was the focus of the 1969 mayoral campaign. Buffalo Common Council and former Board of Education member Alfreda Slominski made forced busing a focal point of her racially charged mayoral campaign. She predicted that whites would flee the city if forced to send their children to schools in African-American neighborhoods.<sup>140</sup> Here is another self-fulfilling prophecy from an opponent of integration. Slominski's campaign was marred by the actions of some of her supporters as well. The *Good Government Club* used ethnic slurs and tore down incumbent mayor

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<sup>138</sup> Center for Urban Education. *A Plan for Accelerating Quality Integrated Education in the Buffalo Public Schools*, New York, N.Y.: 1966, 19; available from [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/33/44/ad.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/33/44/ad.pdf)

<sup>139</sup> Buffalo Board of Education. "A Study of Cross Bussing." *Papers and Records 1967-1976*. From the Buffalo State College Special Archives.

<sup>140</sup> "Housing Bill Defeated." *Buffalo Courier Express*, 10 July 1968.

Frank Sedita's campaign signs before Slominski cut ties with the group.<sup>141</sup> These groups were not alone in their zeal as Mrs. Slominski herself was accused by the activist group *CAUSE* of encouraging harassment of members of the Buffalo Board of Education, voting against the *Model Cities* program, and encouraging an illegal boycott of the public schools.<sup>142</sup> Although Slominski was adamantly against mandatory busing, her opposition diminished after her mayoral defeat and later victory as Erie County Comptroller. In fact, no serious, organized opposition to forced school integration through bussing was ever mounted in Buffalo, due in part to the lesson learned from the bad experience in Boston's school desegregation process and from the genuine effort to involve the community in the decisions.

Buffalo's successful transition to integrated schools under the control of Superintendent Eugene Reville, began with the first day of busing in 1976. No incidents were reported, although a teacher's strike delayed the start until September 26. Community leaders, politicians, school officials, and clergy banded together in a rare show of unity to prevent the disaster that took place in Boston earlier. Another factor, pointed out by Stephen J.L. Taylor, Associate Professor in the Department of Government at American University, was that most of the opposition was voiced long before Judge John Curtin's 1976 decision that struck down the *Arthur v. Nyquist* case, which attempted to block school desegregation in Buffalo.<sup>143</sup> The school plan would proceed as planned and the results would be cause for optimism. Test scores in reading and math improved, but as Judy Trent-Scales found, suspension, special education placement, and dropout

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<sup>141</sup> "Mrs. Slominski Drops Good Government Club, Denounces Its Tactics." *Buffalo News*, 9 October 1969.

<sup>142</sup> "3 Civic Groups Criticize Career of Mrs. Slominski." *Buffalo News*, 7 October 1969.

<sup>143</sup> Taylor, 122.

rates of African-American students stayed disproportionately high.<sup>144</sup> While whites were being attracted by special magnet schools and the promise of a unique curriculum, African-American parents were still dealing with the same problems. Was the low percentage of African-American teachers and administrators, along with the lack of cultural sensitivity in white teachers, negatively affecting their children? In following years, federal aid that funded the magnet program began to diminish and the schools began to resegregate. Buffalo's city budget reports reveal that the 2009 allotment for the schools totaled \$70,321,758, compared to \$171,594,000 in 1985.<sup>145</sup> Test scores in reading and mathematics have declined, while African-American exposure to whites has declined as more whites have left the city for the suburbs.

Erica Frankenberg and Chungmei Lee support the theory that exposure to different races and socioeconomic levels has a positive effect on academic achievement and suggest that a countywide desegregation model may be the answer.<sup>146</sup> This may never happen in Erie County however, as the New York State Constitution inhibits the annexation of surrounding municipalities, which would be the fastest way to merge school districts. Another factor is the widespread perception of suburban residents that Buffalo is a problem area and that any merging of the school districts would drag down suburban test scores.

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<sup>144</sup> Tent-Scales, 218.

<sup>145</sup> City of Buffalo. Comptroller's Office. *153rd Annual Report of the Comptroller/City of Buffalo, N.Y. Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1985*. Buffalo, NY. : 1985; *164th Annual Report of the Comptroller/City of Buffalo, N.Y. Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2009*. Buffalo, NY. : 2009.

<sup>146</sup> Frankenberg and Lee, 23.

### Redlining

Packaged with the geographical and racial isolation of African Americans is economic isolation. The aforementioned difficulty in obtaining mortgages, whether in high-risk or suburban areas, was aided by a process called redlining. This was a method by which banks refused home mortgages in what they deemed to be “high-risk” areas by marking them in red on a map. A 1975 study showed that over nineteen months, Buffalo received only 25.9% of the mortgages and only 18.2% of the total money allotted.<sup>147</sup> The suburban areas received the rest, even though twelve of the thirteen banks studied had headquarters in the city limits. The study also found that the predominately black Ellicott and Masten Districts received only 0.9% and 0.3% respectively.<sup>148</sup> Bankers were affected by the same perceptions that residents and officials fell victim to. African Americans were viewed as risks simply because they lived in an undesirable area. These areas would never become desirable however, without stable homeownership. One real estate broker’s client was approved for a mortgage based on financial criteria, then denied after the assistant mortgage officer found the area to be inside the redlined zone.<sup>149</sup> This problem was a common one and helped to prevent stabilization of the neighborhoods. That factor figures prominently in the unwillingness of present-day lenders to issue mortgages to prospective East Side homeowners. Robert Mark Silverman, Associate Professor at the University at Buffalo School of Urban and Regional Planning, conducted a 2008 study, which found that the East Side is still not receiving mortgages due to low socioeconomic

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<sup>147</sup> Erie County Citizens Organization. *Redlining and Disinvestment in Buffalo*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1975, 18.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 20.



status of the area, age of the houses, and short tenure of many residents.<sup>150</sup> Perception became reality as East Side residents were cut off from the rest of the population.

### Blockbusting

To make matters worse, when African Americans did occasionally purchase homes in white areas, a process called blockbusting was used as a means to maximize realtor profit while promoting fear that led to increased white flight. Realtors would convince white homeowners that the neighborhood property values would drop after when an African-American family moved in. Then the realtor would get the white owner to sell cheap, while selling to a black buyer at an inflated price. The Buffalo Common Council condemned this practice in 1964, stating that promoting or inciting "...neighborhood unrest, community tension, or fear of racial, religious, nationality or ethnic changes in any street, block, neighborhood or other area..." would be punishable by a fine.<sup>151</sup> This law was not backed by any type of enforcement however and realtors (both African-American and white) continued to practice blockbusting and help increase segregation. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the vast majority of available properties were located on Buffalo's East Side, as they had been abandoned; a buyer could purchase an entire block of residences in some cases.

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<sup>150</sup> Robert M Silverman. "Mortgage Lending Disparities in Metropolitan Buffalo: Implications for Community Reinvestment Policy." *The Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 38, no.1 (2008): 42. *EBSCOhost Research*. Database on-line. Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research; accessed March 6, 2010.

<sup>151</sup> Buffalo Common Council. *Proceedings of the Buffalo Common Council: January 7, 1964*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1964; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

**Figure 4. Available Residential properties in Buffalo as represented by balloons (from BuffaloRising.com, 2010).**



### Employment Trouble

The economic isolation and inability to acquire wealth through homeownership cannot be viewed without the context of lack of employment opportunity for blacks in Buffalo. The white residents of Buffalo benefited from an abundance of industrial employment, mostly in steel making, auto production, shipping, and grain storage. Buffalo was a large city in 1950 and one of the world's busiest ports. African Americans however, were usually the last to share in this prosperity. They faced the dilemma of being the "last-hired, first-fired," along with having to disprove the aforementioned

perception of blacks being unintelligent and unable to work without white supervision. Throughout the twentieth century, Buffalo's economy received a boost through the jobs provided by the Republic and Bethlehem Steel Companies, but African-American workers were often discriminated against. They were denied the higher paying jobs, such as foremen, and were saddled with the less desirable jobs. In 1980, two minority appellants sued Bethlehem Steel for discrimination, lost, and then had the order reversed on appeal. Bethlehem was keeping higher paying jobs from minorities who were also underrepresented in the overall area's steel industry.<sup>152</sup> This was the case for many area employers, including white businesses that operated on the East Side. Even when jobs became available in the suburbs, such as with the construction of the SUNY Campus in Amherst during the late 1960's, blacks were not immediately hired. A 1968 study from the *State Commission for Human Rights* revealed that only 0.8% of the skilled workforce in the Buffalo construction industry was African American and there were no apprentices being trained for foreman positions.<sup>153</sup> Obtaining a job was incredibly difficult when faced with discrimination and lacking efficient public transportation, yet accepting welfare increased the perceptions that led to discrimination.

This discrimination reared its head in various other forms as well. As the black population spread throughout the East Side, white flight increased and white businesses began to shut down. The East Side was left without an adequate supply of merchants. Those who remained charged high prices to those who lacked the means of transportation to travel elsewhere. *BUILD*'s records from 1968 show that it was actually more expensive to live in the ghetto. Residents bought in small quantities and often on credit,

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<sup>152</sup> Grant v. Bethlehem Steel Corporation R 635 F.2d 1007 (United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. 1980).

<sup>153</sup> BUILD Incorporated. "Survey of the Buffalo Construction Industry."

there were no large stores, the merchandise was substandard, and merchants raised prices on the days that welfare check arrived.<sup>154</sup> Residents were paying more and receiving less, just as they had previously with housing. The argument over grocery stores continues into the present, as there are some supermarkets on the East Side, but still none in the Ellicott District. The smaller, corner stores still prey on those who lack transportation by selling expired goods or individual items not labeled as such.<sup>155</sup> Residents often have to travel to other parts of the city to find adequate merchandise and fair prices. This comes at a time when supermarkets are looking for untapped markets; the East Side offers such a market.

The combination of isolating influences spilled over into violence during the summer of 1967. The predominately black East Side neighborhood near William Street and Jefferson Avenue (census tract #14 in Figure 3) was boiling over with anger. There was lingering resentment by Polish residents who had competed for jobs and housing with blacks earlier. Rents were still high for inferior housing. There were complaints of false arrests, lack of investigations of corrupt police, and police taking part in looting.<sup>156</sup> What was termed a “race riot” (initiated by African Americans) broke out, with fires set, looting of stores, and people breaking windows. When asked why there was such anger, residents responded that whites were profiting from blacks, but not providing jobs.<sup>157</sup> Something had to be done to quell the anger, so Mayor Sedita decided to meet with some area residents and listen to their concerns. Lack of jobs, unopened playgrounds, and inequity in education were among the problems discussed.<sup>158</sup> This episode further

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<sup>154</sup> BUILD Incorporated. “Operation Choice.”

<sup>155</sup> “Community Leaders Decry Filthy Conditions, Expired Food Found In Two East Side Stores.” Buffalo News, 16 August 1996.

<sup>156</sup> Frank P. Besag, *The Anatomy of a Riot*. Buffalo: University Press at Buffalo, 1967, 31.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>158</sup> “Broken Promises are Held at Root.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 28 June 1967.

damaged the perceptions that white had of African Americans. It was easier to blame the violence on “hoodlums,” instead of blaming the society that created the conditions that led to the disturbance.<sup>159</sup> The root problems were dismissed by the conservative white population, who were genuinely shocked by outbursts of violence.

### Conclusions on Race Relations

Although many of the negative perceptions have been successfully challenged through careful study, they still persist. Even the realtors began to admit that integrated neighborhoods could gain value when white neighbors were welcoming. In fact it was incidences of racist vandalism in opposition to blacks moving in that lowered property values.<sup>160</sup> During the 1980s, lenders used a new type of redlining: no mortgages of less than \$15,000, which inhibited home ownership in many neighborhoods.<sup>161</sup> Mixed race and income neighborhoods lead to integrated schools and a more equitable education. This in turn creates a more skilled workforce that appeals to companies who may wish to relocate in the area. This has proven to be a tough sell however, as the exodus of whites from Buffalo continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The suburbs have always resisted low-income housing, leading Buffalo to become what one official termed a “warehouse for the poor.”<sup>162</sup> Many in the suburbs are content to keep the status quo; they can work and

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<sup>159</sup> Besag, 65.

<sup>160</sup> “Integrated Areas Gain Value, Realtors Say.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 12 April 1968.

<sup>161</sup> “Closed Doors for Some Western New Yorkers.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 27 June 1980.

<sup>162</sup> “Wyatt Asks Moratorium on Low-Income Dwellings.” *Buffalo Courier Express*, 23 January 1975.

play in the city and then return to their communities. Discrimination was still present and contributing to continued segregation.

While more African Americans in Buffalo own homes today, the 2000 census shows that problems remain. Through the 1980s to the present, homebuyers did not purchase many homes in the city. As of 2000, only 43.5% of total housing units were owner occupied, while 57.7% of the structures were built before 1939. In Erie County as a whole, 65.3% of homes were owner-occupied and families with children were at 15.2% poverty. Less than 30% of Buffalo's population has a high school diploma, while 33.9% of families with children live in poverty. African Americans made up 38.6% of Buffalo's population, but only 13.6% of Erie County's population.<sup>163</sup> Buffalo has become a poor city in a segregated county made up of dozens of fiercely territorial factions. The reluctance of Western New York whites to share a neighborhood with African Americans has damaged the economic health of the region and limited opportunities to create an attractive workforce.

Despite the continued existence of discrimination and segregation, Buffalo possesses many redeeming qualities that are a result of its residents. The various African American neighborhoods still show signs of life and character, in spite of previous setbacks. Hamlin Park (labeled *HP* Figure 2), nearly destroyed by the intrusive Kensington Expressway, boasts numerous block clubs that strive to keep the area clean and orderly. Several charter schools now call the Ellicott District home and the A.D. Price housing complex

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<sup>163</sup> United States Census Bureau. *United States Census 2000: Profile of Selected Social Characteristics*: available from <http://censtats.census.gov/data/NY/1603611000.pdf> and <http://censtats.census.gov/data/NY/05036029.pdf>; Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

(formerly Willert Park) has new town homes and more amenities.<sup>164</sup> The Broadway Market is still in operation after extensive renovations and continues to serve the Broadway-Fillmore district.<sup>165</sup> An old orphanage in the Ellicott District (see Figure 2) is being converted to housing for low to moderate-income residents.<sup>166</sup> An urban farm project continues to flourish in the Fillmore District, close to the Broadway Market.<sup>167</sup> If city leaders can resist the urge to focus on “silver bullet” projects and devote more resources to further develop neighborhoods, infrastructure, and schools, the city will be a more desirable place to raise a family. If lenders can offer more options to prospective homeowners, than those families will have a chance to take root and prosper.

In addition to problems created by poor race relations, America’s obsession with the automobile has also played a role in the decline of cities. Buffalo is an example of this trend, which has persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the rush to alleviate traffic congestion during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many cities used federal funds to construct highways that displaced neighborhoods and blocked access to prime waterfront land. These highways required funds that could have been used to create efficient public transportation instead of intrusive, dominating ribbons of concrete.

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<sup>164</sup> “Housing agency awards pact for project’s second phase,” *Buffalo News*, July 27, 2009, <http://www.buffalonews.com/incoming/article5114.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

<sup>165</sup> “Broadway market business booming,” *Buffalo News* April 22, 2011, <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/communities/east-side/article399999.ece> (accessed May 14, 2011).

<sup>166</sup> “Housing planned at former Dodge Street orphanage,” *Buffalo News*, March 12, 2010, <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/article38258.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

<sup>167</sup> “Urban farming touted as tool for neighborhood revival,” *Buffalo News*, March 23, 2010, <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/article39994.ece> (accessed January 14, 2011).

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE AUTOMOBILE AND ITS ROLE IN THE DECLINE OF BUFFALO, NEW YORK

In the late-1800's, legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted proclaimed the city of Buffalo to be "the best planned city, as to its streets, public places, and grounds, in the United States if not in the world."<sup>168</sup> His system of parks and parkways, combined with the distinctive radial street plan of Joseph Ellicott, indeed made the Queen City the envy of late 19<sup>th</sup> century America.<sup>169</sup> Olmsted's Delaware Park parkways were described as "impressive and coherent", while magnificent Humboldt Parkway became the first landscaped parkway to connect two public recreation grounds.<sup>170</sup> In the midst of burgeoning industry, rapidly increasing population and the automobile traffic congestion that followed, the Olmsted system provided a much-needed respite for Buffalonians. The parks and the parkways that connected them became places for city residents to congregate, which provided neighborhood unity and improved the quality of life in Buffalo.

During the twentieth century, Olmsted's vision of a natural oasis in an urban setting came into conflict with the realities of politics and economics. The expansion of industry in Buffalo sparked population growth, and their transportation method of choice was the automobile. City and state leaders, eager to accommodate and accelerate both the development of industry and the influx of people, decided to sacrifice aesthetics for efficiency. They decided to construct a state highway and a series of expressways to

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<sup>168</sup>, Francis R. Kowsky, *The Best Planned City: The Olmsted Legacy in Buffalo*. (Buffalo: Buffalo State College Foundation, 1992.), 16.

<sup>169</sup> Joseph Ellicott was a surveyor for the Holland Land Company who laid the street plans for the Village of Buffalo in 1804.

<sup>170</sup> Kowsky, 20.



alleviate traffic congestion and provide businesses with thoroughfares that would assist them in transporting goods and materials. These highways and expressways were eventually linked, ironically replacing Olmsted's parkway system, using readily available federal funds.<sup>171</sup> Buffalo was hardly alone in this pattern of generating ribbons of concrete to satisfy Americans' attachment to the perceived freedom of automotive travel. Other northeastern industrial cities such as Cleveland and Pittsburgh engaged in excessive highway construction at the expense of nature.

This orgy of highway building and the subsequent failure to construct effective public transportation in the Buffalo area leads to an essential question. Were state and local leaders at fault for possessing a lack of vision regarding the aforementioned transportation decisions, or does the responsibility belong to the car-owning citizens and their demand for more roadways? Some historians, such as Buffalo business owner Mark Goldman, lay the blame at the feet of Buffalo's city planners and officials, with their "heavy-handed" approach to projects and "tribelike" attitude toward outside opinion.<sup>172</sup> Countering this view is Brian Ladd, Adjunct Research Associate at the State University of New York at Albany, who argues that automobile dependence is the culprit. He presents the American (and later European) love of automotive freedom as a sort of counterbalance to socialism.<sup>173</sup> Americans did not want to be told what to do by government officials and did not choose to be herded onto public transportation. Leaders were merely providing what the public was demanding. Neil Kraus (see Chapter 1) adds

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<sup>171</sup> Mark Goldman, *City on the Lake: The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, N.Y.* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1990), 24.

<sup>172</sup> Mark Goldman, *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 285, 295.

<sup>173</sup> Brian Ladd. *Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automotive Age.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 149.

to the debate by noting the lack of any consequential community resistance to highway and expressway construction.<sup>174</sup> With federal money pouring in and labor in demand, the general public accepted these projects as a form of progress. This chapter will examine the decision to devote public resources to highway building over public transportation in order to assess the role of the auto, citizen groups, and policy makers in Buffalo's general decline. There is ample evidence to conclude that this is a more complex problem and that the real fault lies in a combination of strong federal and state bureaucracy, inept local leadership, unorganized citizen activist groups, and a populace devoted to the convenience of the automobile.

### Traffic Problems

Buffalo's ascent as an industrial center began with the harnessing of Niagara Falls hydropower after 1896.<sup>175</sup> A diverse group of industries operated in the city, including chemical plants, steel plants, grain mills and automobile manufacturers. Shipping and railroads were the methods of transport for materials and goods. These industries boomed during World War I and World War II, as they were needed to provide weapons and supplies to the Allies. Buffalo's population increased 19.6% (423,715 to 506,775) from 1910 to 1920, while the next decade produced a 13.1% increase (506,775 to 573,076).<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Kraus, 125.

<sup>175</sup> Margaret M. Sullivan. "Buffalo." *World Book Advanced*. 2009. Database on-line. Available from World Book Online, <<http://worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar081380>>. Accessed 21 February 2009.

<sup>176</sup> Campbell Gibson. "Population Of The 100 Largest Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States: 1790 To 1990". June 1998. *U.S. Bureau of the Census*. Database on-line. Available from

People were flocking to Buffalo to take advantage of the employment opportunities available. Along with the increase in population came traffic congestion. City leaders struggled with possible solutions to alleviate the huge volume of traffic on city streets and feed the central business district more efficiently. Adding urgency to the dilemma were some officials, such as Erie County Engineer George C. Diehl, who predicted that Buffalo's population would soon reach two million.<sup>177</sup> Highways became a top priority as traffic had to be diverted to lessen valuable commute time. The only impediment to the building of highways was the question of who would provide the funding for such massive projects.

### Federal Funding

The funding question was answered after World War II with the creation of the Post-War Reconstruction Fund, which drew on a federal surplus of \$310 million from a booming U.S. economy.<sup>178</sup> New York State Governor Thomas Dewey promoted a highway that would run from New York City downstate to Niagara Falls. The New York State Department of Public Works issued a report in 1946 that echoed Buffalo officials' optimistic population estimates, projecting Buffalo's population to grow to 630,000 by 1960 and more importantly that vehicle registration would reach 300,000.<sup>179</sup> Traffic was

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Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html>>. Accessed 2 May 2006.

<sup>177</sup> Manufacturers Traders and Trust Company. *Planning the City*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1925.

<sup>178</sup> Michael R. Fein. *Paving the Way: New York Road Building and the American State, 1880-1956*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 183.

<sup>179</sup> New York State Department of Public Works. *Report on New York State Thruways and Arterial Routes: The Buffalo Urban Area*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1946.

becoming a serious problem that state officials claimed would get worse. The report marked the beginning of the supremacy of the automobile in the state as the Department of Public Works consolidated its power with engineers making the decisions—all geared toward the car owner as a worker/commuter.<sup>180</sup>

State officials promoted the New York State Thruway with a huge marketing blitz. With an original starting cost estimated at merely \$202 million, the Thruway would soon carry traffic from New York City to Buffalo in only seven hours. It would also move raw materials and finished goods to aid existing businesses and attract new ones. Governor Dewey hailed the Thruway as a part of New York's progress, a new "Erie Canal."<sup>181</sup> In addition, officials claimed that real estate values would increase along the highway route.<sup>182</sup> The only question that remained was where to place the Buffalo portion of the new super highway.

The Buffalo City Planning Association attempted to exert its influence on the Thruway placement decision, advocating a route that would slice through the center of the city, bisect Delaware Park, and then move northwest toward Niagara Falls. City planners wanted a route that would move traffic to and from the central business district, while preserving access to the waterfront.<sup>183</sup> An earlier study touted the value of a thriving waterfront: "Buffalo has the opportunity to create one of the most attractive and useful waterfronts to be found in any city. It would be inexcusable to muff it."<sup>184</sup> Even

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<sup>180</sup> Fein, 188.

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Dewey. "Today's Erie Canal." *Christian Science Monitor*. 30 August 1946, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>182</sup> Lowell Thomas. *The New York State Thruway Story*. (Buffalo: Henry Stewart Inc., 1955), 19.

<sup>183</sup> City of Buffalo Planning Association. *The Thruways and Buffalo's Future*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1946.

<sup>184</sup> Buffalo City Planning Commission. *The Modern City*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1944.

though industry and the automobile dominated decision-making, city planners still recognized that Lake Erie aesthetics played a large role in Buffalo's appeal.

### Displacement and Suburban Exodus

The ultimate decision, however, rested with New York State Supervisor of Public Works, Charlie Sells. Sells chose the Buffalo waterfront as the Niagara Section of the Thruway, parallel to the Niagara River, Black Rock Canal and Lake Erie. Although the waterfront view became obstructed, the alternative route would have meant the removal of approximately 3,400 homes, which was unrealistic.<sup>185</sup> The waterfront route was less intrusive, as it followed the route of the old Erie Canal and its towpath along with railroad right-of-way property. Nevertheless, a small number of homes were moved to new locations. The West Side neighborhood also lost several restaurants, gardens and fish markets along the water. Ferryboats to Canada from the foot of Ferry Street ceased operations.

Farther north, the residents of Buffalo's Riverside neighborhood (labeled *R* in Figure 2) saw their waterfront access restricted.<sup>186</sup> Riverside Park was reduced, fishing and hunting clubs were demolished, swimming pools were removed, and the Riverside Park casino was torn down.<sup>187</sup> After 1958, Riverside lost what gave it character—the Niagara River. The need for efficient transportation outweighed the integrity of the neighborhood.

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<sup>185</sup> Mark Goldman, *City on the Edge: Buffalo, N.Y.* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 145.

<sup>186</sup> Goldman, *City on the Lake: The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, N.Y.*, 201.

<sup>187</sup> Mark Goldman, "First There Was Black Rock." *Buffalo Architecture and History*. <<http://buffaloah.com/h/br/brgold/index.html>> Accessed 3 March 2009.

The Niagara Section of the New York State Thruway was completed by 1960 and Buffalo's neighborhoods were forever altered.

**Figure 5. Buffalo's Riverside neighborhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (from Buffalo Architecture and History)**



The rationale behind the Thruway was more efficient transportation, as shown by Charlie Sells' 1946 warning of "untenable traffic congestion."<sup>188</sup> Officials presented the highways as critical to the economic health

of the state. There were other factors behind the Thruway construction however. One factor was the flood of federal money that flowed into New York, \$33 million in 1946, that had to be used quickly or the state would face a reduction in funds.<sup>189</sup> What state leaders would not admit was that the Thruway was in part a massive make-work government project that relied on a temporary federal surplus. The public soon discovered that the original cost of \$202 million was inaccurate and that the eventual cost would reach \$1 billion.<sup>190</sup> Bonds had to be issued and tolls charged to cover the cost, counter to the "pay-as-you-go" approach touted by Dewey. Another factor pushing construction was the influence of the steel and automobile lobbies. More cars led to more

<sup>188</sup> "State Will Build Buffalo Thruway." *New York Times*, 8 June 1946, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>189</sup> "Gottlieb Defends Thruway Project." *New York Times*, 28 October 1946, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>190</sup> "Construction Cost." *New York State Thruway Authority*. <<http://www.nysthruway.gov/about/factbook/index.html>> Accessed 30 March 2009.

roads and vice versa. When work slowed toward 1950, automobile dealers complained of a possible loss of sales.<sup>191</sup> The automobile was now the driving force behind policy decisions.

The effects of New York State Thruway construction were numerous. The Highway Trust Fund of 1956 was one of these. From that point on, all revenue generated by tolls was set aside to be use exclusively for the building of more highways.<sup>192</sup> The Thruway Authority became an enormous entity, free to make decisions that benefited the car owner with little regard for anyone else. The new highways led to more suburban sprawl as the flow of people from Buffalo to the suburbs increased. Suburbanites were able to live farther away from their jobs in the city. New York State exacerbated the problem by increasing aid to town highway departments.<sup>193</sup> Local leaders can be faulted for ignoring the fact that Buffalo's population growth had slowed for five consecutive decades by 1940.<sup>194</sup> As population began to decline after the 1950's and more people left for the suburbs, leaders still pushed for more highways. They assumed that suburbanites would continue to patronize the central business district, not realizing that towns would build their own businesses. Ironically, the commute for the average American has increased since the highway boom, even though they were marketed as timesaving breakthroughs.<sup>195</sup> More highways equaled more traffic and less than twenty-five years later the Niagara Section of the Thruway was crumbling, requiring costly repairs.<sup>196</sup> The

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<sup>191</sup> Bert Pierce. "Speed-Up of Work on Thruway Urged." *New York Times*, 14 September 1949, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed 12 March 2009.

<sup>192</sup> Fein, 182.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>194</sup> Buffalo City Planning Commission. *The Modern City*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1944.

<sup>195</sup> Ladd, 123.

<sup>196</sup> "The Pothole: Made in the U.S.A." *Buffalo Courier Express*, 15 March 1982, in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

Highway Fund is almost depleted today, requiring states to eventually fund their own repairs. In addition, property values along the Thruway route dropped from 1950 to 1960, contrary to what state officials promised.<sup>197</sup> One positive effect that materialized was the lower rate of fatalities due to car accidents—a twenty percent decrease from 1954 to 1958.<sup>198</sup>

### The Kensington Expressway

Although the Niagara Section of the Thruway provided a north-south highway along the waterfront of Buffalo, there was no conduit to carry traffic on an east-west route through the city. City planners first proposed an arterial route along Hinman Avenue in the northwest section of the city, but the Common Council unanimously rejected it. They wanted an arterial that would siphon traffic from Delaware Avenue, Elmwood and Military Road into the Thruway and carry it downtown.<sup>199</sup> The site that was chosen demonstrated the importance of the automobile and the lack of regard for Olmsted's parks by planners. They picked a route that would minimize destruction of residential properties, but devastate Olmsted's system. The new expressway would have two sections, the Scajaquada and the Kensington. The Scajaquada bisected Delaware Park and disfigured the park's lake. The Kensington obliterated Olmsted's majestic Humboldt Parkway (see Figures 6-10) and bisected the Humboldt Park and Fruit Belt

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<sup>197</sup> Buffalo Members of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Study Committee. *Staff Report and Analysis of the Preliminary Evaluation of Alternative Public Transportation Facilities Report*. Buffalo, N.Y.: 1966, 7.

<sup>198</sup> New York State Thruway Authority. *8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report*. Elsmere, N.Y., 1958.

<sup>199</sup> Buffalo City Planning Commission. "Scajaquada Creek Parkway." Buffalo, N.Y., 1953.



neighborhoods. Planners saw Humboldt Parkway as merely a traffic conduit, so expanding it made sense and caused less disruption than alternate sites. Parkland was expendable, even if a renowned landscape artist designed it. The neighborhood was expendable as well, as it was quickly becoming African-American with the Jewish residents moving out.

Trees began to fall in 1958, as workers cleared Humboldt Parkway. There was some displacement, as 570 buildings, including many businesses, had to be removed to accommodate the new expressway.<sup>200</sup> The mostly middle class families were forced to scramble to find new housing, while many fled the neighborhood to avoid living next to an expressway. Buffalo was now viewed as a transfer point between Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and the rest of the Thruway system. There were 306,000 cars in the city by 1961.<sup>201</sup> The automobile was transforming the city in rapid fashion, but a debate emerged.

Some saw the expressway as a sign of progress, similar to the Thruway. In 1964, *Buffalo Business* magazine reported that “people must move about” and that “access to the industrial area” would improve the economy.<sup>202</sup> This view was typical of the business class in Buffalo who argued that parks and neighborhoods do not boost economies. Efficiency came into play again as the Chamber of Commerce complained that drivers and truckers were losing \$35 million annually due to lack of expressways.<sup>203</sup> Earlier, *Buffalo Business* had touted the Kensington as a good value for Buffalo, due to the state

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<sup>200</sup> *Buffalo Business*, May 1958.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, May 1962.

<sup>202</sup> “Buffalo’s Concrete Accomplishments.” *Buffalo Business*, October 1964.

<sup>203</sup> “Chamber Stand on Arterial Highways.” *Buffalo Business*, June 1954.

absorbing \$45 million of the cost with the city paying only \$6 million.<sup>204</sup> Again we see the lure of free money that had to be used immediately or lost. Support came from some of the city's architects as well. Milton Milstein concurred with business leaders when he stated that: "Our planning should indulge the driver habit as ingeniously and attractively as our planning skills will permit." He also praised freeways as a means for the driver to bypass undesirable areas.<sup>205</sup> Neil Kraus points out that the Kensington eliminated the need to traverse Buffalo's black East Side.<sup>206</sup> The area is isolated from the passing traffic, while expressway drivers and politicians can pretend that the African-American area does not exist, as they drive through the area on the below-grade Kensington. Humboldt Park and the Fruit Belt were hardly undesirable, but they were filling with African Americans and stood in the way of a quicker commute to the suburbs.

There was little outcry against the Kensington, and Buffalo lacked an "established community organization" to counter the destruction of the neighborhood, according to Buffalo architect and African-American community activist Robert T. Coles.<sup>207</sup> Small factions competed rather than come together for the common cause. Influential African-American politicians and clergy did not want to concede power to other groups. This was a reoccurring problem through to the present day. The Model Cities Agency, part of a federal urban aid program, was one of the groups who criticized after the fact. They complained that the Kensington isolated residents, 40 to 60 percent of whom did not own a car.<sup>208</sup> Some of those residents reported that the expressway construction prohibited

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<sup>204</sup> *Buffalo Business*, June 1954.

<sup>205</sup> Milton Milstein. "Another Look at Buffalo's Architecture." *Buffalo Business*. November, 1963.

<sup>206</sup> Kraus, 124.

<sup>207</sup> *The Fruit Belt: A Story of Family, Resilience, and Hope*. DVD. Produced and directed by Sharon Benz, Jessica Incorvaia, Amanda Walser and Katie Bartolotta. 31 minutes. 2006; Buffalo, NY: Daemen College, 2006.

<sup>208</sup> Model Cities Agency. *Model City Program*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1969.

movement from one side of Humboldt Parkway to the other for ten years. This was a factor in the failure of numerous neighborhood businesses and was also a major disruption to neighborhood life.<sup>209</sup> An impassable, enormous mud pit now separated friends and neighbors. In addition, the city lost \$1.8 million in taxes from properties that were removed for the Kensington in the initial section.<sup>210</sup> People from the suburbs were benefiting from the expressway without sharing in the cost of acquiring the right-of-way. All of these concerns, however, were superseded by the need for quicker traffic flow and more construction jobs.

The aesthetic and social value of Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway cannot be overlooked. It was a social gathering place where people from the neighborhood bonded and formed a sense of community. Coles, who built his home with its back facing the Kensington, criticized the trend of more expressways and parking: "Will we ever realize that the city and the automobile are incompatible, that the solution we see in more urban expressways and downtown parking is no solution at all."<sup>211</sup> He was in the minority however, as the majority of Buffalonians owned cars and influenced the decisions in public policy. Government leaders and urban planners did not view the neighborhoods and their charm as economic assets.

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<sup>209</sup> *The Fruit Belt: A Story of Family, Resilience, and Hope.*

<sup>210</sup> George Borrelli. "City to Ask County Again to Help Pay Cost of Property for State-Built Expressways." *Courier Express*, 2 February 1958, in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>211</sup> Robert T. Coles. "An Architect Looks at Buffalo." *Buffalo Business*, October 1963.



**Figure 6. Humboldt Parkway-1915 (from HotBuffalo.com)**



**Figure 7. Preparation for Demolition (from DanReitz.com, 2010)**



**Figure 8. Kensington Expressway Construction in 1963. (from DanReitz.com, 2010)**



**Figure 9. The Kensington Expressway Divides Neighborhoods. (from Buffalo Rising, 2010)**





1927 ↑



Humboldt Pkwy - Delavan  
"Hourglass" Area

↓ 1995



Figure 10. Humboldt Parkway Becomes the Kensington Expressway (from DanReitz.com, 2010)

### Rapid Transit

Buffalo leaders did attempt to counter the automobile culture by proposing a public transit system that would adequately serve the Western New York region, including those who could not afford to own a car. In 1964, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) reported that increasing sprawl had ruled out walking or bus trips to the central business district. In fact, only seven percent of all regional trips utilized public transit.<sup>212</sup> The transit system was inadequate and the explosion of automobile ownership did not bode well for the future of public transportation. In the same year, the Committee on Urban Studies began advocating regional planning, rather than competing with growing suburbs.<sup>213</sup> This was a daunting proposition however, as local government officials were and still are very protective of their jurisdictions.

Two years later a study of public transportation revealed that highways had actually increased the cost of travel, as many households now needed two cars.<sup>214</sup> The push for rapid transit was building momentum. Another factor that favored transit was the aforementioned study's prediction of future parking problems downtown if traffic continued to increase.<sup>215</sup> City planners had pushed for more parking ramps downtown, going so far as to remove the ornate Hotel Buffalo to clear space for parking in 1968.<sup>216</sup> The city was locked in a desperate struggle to make downtown more desirable to consumers. An advertisement in the September 1961 issue of *Buffalo Business* magazine

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<sup>212</sup> Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. *A Transit Development Program for the Niagara Frontier Region: Niagara Frontier Mass Transit Study*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1964.

<sup>213</sup> Committee on Urban Studies. *Urban Characteristics of the Niagara Frontier: An Inventory*. Buffalo, N.Y.: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1964, 93.

<sup>214</sup> Buffalo Members of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Study Committee, 6.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>216</sup> Goldman, *City on the Edge: Buffalo, N.Y.*, 172.

exclaimed: “Even parking ramps can be attractive!” as if the ramps were architectural gems.<sup>217</sup> Buffalo’s plethora of parking spaces had been praised earlier as a draw for suburban shoppers who could help to boost a still vibrant retail center downtown, not realizing that the suburbs would soon be self-sufficient and stores would flee to the suburbs.<sup>218</sup> The continued building of parking ramps was not a viable option anymore. Now officials and planners were ready to try rapid transit.

The road to rapid transit would not be simple, however. The African-American community needed the service, but was suspicious of the NFTA and the State Urban Development Corporation. In question was the consolidated power of the agencies that answered to no one, not even the state legislature.<sup>219</sup> Buffalo had previously gone along with the destruction of Humboldt Parkway, without any citizen input. There was a genuine concern that the highway interests would again prevail over the interests of the public transportation users. This concern unfortunately may have slowed the process at a time when time was a crucial factor in reaching public transportation goals.

Those goals were outlined in a series of transportation studies that were conducted in the late-1960s. One study from 1969 advocated a transit line that would extend to suburban Amherst (northeast of Buffalo), connecting with the soon-to-be-built University of Buffalo North Campus.<sup>220</sup> The Amherst area was growing and county officials recognized the benefits of a corridor between the suburb and the city. An efficient transit line would be the link that joined the two areas, rather than having them develop

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<sup>217</sup> *Buffalo Business*, September 1961.

<sup>218</sup> Charles M. Hall. “There Will Always be a Downtown.” *Buffalo Business*. Buffalo, N.Y., February 1958.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Harmon. *Wake-Up in the Split-Level Casbah*, November 1968, from the Robert T. Coles Papers: in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>220</sup> Erie and Niagara Counties Regional Planning Board. *Evaluation of Transportation Planning and its Impact on Regional Development*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1969.



separately. The “Buffalo-Amherst Corridor” became a popular concept, as the *Buffalo Courier Express* reported in 1970 that the corridor could become a “future growth route and residential center of the region.”<sup>221</sup> Regional planning had become a real possibility as the NFTA laid out more ambitious proposals, but problems soon appeared.

Buffalo’s African-American community leaders refused to be intimidated again by government. Coles voiced his concern in 1971 to Lewis G. Harriman Jr. chairman of the Area Committee for Transit (ACT). Coles argued that the citizens had no say in planning and that a plan for overhead transit would involve another high social cost for the neighborhoods affected.<sup>222</sup> Bunny Ross, a prominent Buffalo community activist, started a grassroots coalition comprised of sixty community organizations called No Overhead Transit (NOT) and collected 55,000 signatures to block the construction of overhead rails.<sup>223</sup> The residents of Buffalo’s black neighborhoods merely wanted to be consulted before their areas were significantly altered. Harriman shot back with an urgent plea to Coles to negotiate, or else lose the state matching funds for construction. This would also release \$171 million in funds from the federal government. Harriman words were concise: “The time for action is NOW!”<sup>224</sup> Harriman’s statement was prophetic, as the coming years brought staggering inflation and higher project costs.

Despite the arguments between the community and ACT, the state was prepared to commit funding, as was the federal government. Buffalo was unique in that it was not

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<sup>221</sup> “\$524,000 For Transit Study OK’d.” *Courier Express*, 14 January 1970, in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>222</sup> Coles, Robert T. Letter to Lewis G. Harriman, Chairman of Area Committee for Transit, 28 December 1971, from the Robert T. Coles Papers: in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>223</sup> Diana Dillaway. *Power Failure: Politics, Patronage, and the Economic Future of Buffalo*, New York. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 130.

<sup>224</sup> Harriman, Lewis G. Letter to Robert T. Coles, 20 October 1971, from the Robert T. Coles Papers: in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

required to provide any city funding for the project, as was the case in other cities. The cost for phase 1 of the construction, which consisted of Buffalo to Amherst and would be completed in 1976, was \$271,096,743; phase 2 (Buffalo to the northern suburb of Tonawanda—to be completed in 1980) was \$65,840,000.<sup>225</sup> With these two rail phases implemented and bus lines feeding them, Buffalo would have an adequate regional transit system, students could access the city, commuters could travel to downtown jobs, and people from low-income neighborhoods could access jobs in the suburbs. The route would have used abandoned railroads at grade, so the right-of-way cost was minimal.<sup>226</sup>

The entire Metro Rail project was estimated by the NFTA at \$474 million in 1974—all covered by state and federal funds.<sup>227</sup> It seemed as though the rapid transit line would come to fruition.

### Delays and Inflationary Pressure

By 1975 however, the project hit a roadblock. The Greater Buffalo Development Foundation (GBDF), an organization of business elites, released a study that labeled the proposed covered transit mall downtown as too expensive at \$26 million.<sup>228</sup> The mall was changed from below to above ground, which ignored the fact that Buffalo has harsh winters and cut off vehicular traffic to Main Street. Later, the NFTA and the GBDF made

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<sup>225</sup> Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. *A Transit Development Program for the Niagara Frontier Region: Niagara Frontier Mass Transit Study*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1971.

<sup>226</sup> Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. *A Transit Development Program for the Niagara Frontier Region: NFTA Map*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1974.

<sup>227</sup> Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. *Application of the NFTA for a Mass Transportation Capital Improvement Grant Under the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1974.

<sup>228</sup> Dillaway, 131.

additional changes that increased costs and caused more delays. After three years of argument, during which time business leaders did nothing, the GBDF asserted its own power and eliminated any chance of Buffalo developing regional rapid transit.<sup>229</sup> Local leadership received cooperation from citizens and outside government, but still failed to produce results.

The delays proved to be fatal to the regional concept. The late-1970s brought severe inflation, which sent costs skyrocketing.<sup>230</sup> The original plan to connect to Amherst and the Tonawandas was revised. The new plan was minimal—Downtown Buffalo to the University of Buffalo South Campus on the city limits. The 6.5-mile route provided a capital cost savings, but the 11-mile plan (to Amherst) would have resulted in a smaller operating deficit.<sup>231</sup> That cost now shifted to the city. The tunneling began in 1979 with NFTA Chairman Chester R. Hardt predicting “the revitalization of the Western New York economy.”<sup>232</sup> In many cities, property values increased with proximity to rapid transit. This was not the case in Buffalo however, as the rapid transit line did not extend far enough to provide the significant benefits that come with true regionalism.<sup>233</sup>

Buffalo’s attempt at constructing an adequate rapid transit system failed in many respects. A study released in 2007 backed the argument that without a regional economy

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>230</sup> Michael Desmond. “City Rapid Transit Cost Estimate \$400 Million; One Station May be Cut.” *Courier Express*, 16 February 1978, in Buffalo State College Special Collections, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>231</sup> Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority. *Metro for Buffalo: Transit Alternatives for the Buffalo-Amherst Corridor*. Buffalo, N.Y.: 1976.

<sup>232</sup> Richard J Roth. “Quiet Rites Mark Transit Tunneling Kickoff.” *Courier Express*, 3 April 1979, in Buffalo State College *Special Collections*, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed March 20, 2009.

<sup>233</sup> Tangerine M. Almeida and Daniel Baldwin Hess, “Impact of Proximity to Light Rail Rapid Transit on Station-area Property Values in Buffalo, New York,” *Urban Studies* 44, no.5/6 (May 2007): 1061-1062.

and a truly regional transit system, the effect on property values would be minimal.<sup>234</sup> This is due to the fact that Buffalo's Metro Rail transit line does not extend to where employment opportunities are increasing—the suburbs. In fact, a nationwide survey recently showed that 36 percent of entry-level jobs were outside the reach of public transportation.<sup>235</sup> A study from 1975 warned of the minimal impact on property values, and added that the encouragement of car use would cause sprawl (and government cost) to increase.<sup>236</sup> Ironically, the authors of the study (the GBDF) helped cause the delay that limited the final project. Other cities such as Toronto experienced a doubling of property values in property adjacent to transit stations.<sup>237</sup> Those transit systems are much larger and provide access to an entire region, not just the central city. In addition, African Americans are denied access to the suburbs, isolating them just as the Kensington Expressway did in Buffalo.<sup>238</sup> The fact that Buffalo subsidizes parking downtown with a number of ramps further undercuts the need for public transportation.<sup>239</sup> People will not use transit if parking is inexpensive, unlike cities like Boston or Toronto where parking is more costly. In addition, the failure to extend the transit system to Amherst allows the University of Buffalo's suburban campus to pull economic benefits away from the city. Amherst has developed while Buffalo continues to decline.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 1061-1062.

<sup>235</sup> Evelyn Blumenberg and Margy Waller, in *Taking the High Road: A Metropolitan Agenda for Transportation Reform*, Eds. Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes. Washington: The Brookings Institute, 2005.

<sup>236</sup> Greater Buffalo Development Foundation. *A Study of Community Benefits of Rapid Transit Development in the Buffalo-Amherst Corridor*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1975.

<sup>237</sup> Greater Buffalo Development Foundation. *Rapid Transit Station Areas Analysis for the Buffalo-Amherst Corridor*. Buffalo, N.Y., 1973, 87.

<sup>238</sup> Kraus, 210.

<sup>239</sup> Goldman, *City on the Lake: The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, N.Y.*, 303.

### Other Cities Correct Their Mistakes

These types of mistakes and failures are not exclusive to Buffalo however. Other cities, especially in the Northeast, have committed similar mistakes. The differences come in the response to those mistakes. Cleveland is one “rust belt” industrial city that experienced a marked drop in population during the latter half of the twentieth century. Their waterfront on Lake Erie is cut off from downtown by a major highway called the Shoreway. Their elite business leaders exert a great deal of influence on public policy, while the local media promotes any new development.<sup>240</sup> This control by the elite excludes citizen input, much like Buffalo. Decisions are made only with the consent of the major lawyers, bankers and developers. The economic emphasis has been placed mainly on “silver bullet” projects, again comparable to Buffalo. In recent years, the waterfront has seen additions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a new baseball stadium and a new basketball arena. These improvements, while impressive on the surface, have not stemmed the tide of declining population and crumbling neighborhoods in Cleveland. New strategies would have to be implemented.

One of those strategies is to stop filling the waterfront with artificial aesthetics and uncover its natural beauty and ability to attract people. Cleveland’s Shoreway highway was slated to be transformed (starting in 2013) into a low-speed, at-grade boulevard, restoring access to the Lake Erie shoreline.<sup>241</sup> This move is an attempt to improve the quality of life, shake off the industrial, “rust-belt” image and help retain young

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<sup>240</sup> Dennis Keating. “Cleveland: A Midwestern Rustbelt City Struggles to Sur(Re)vive.” *Urban Futures Seminar: Durham University and University of Tescide, United Kingdom*, 10 September 2007.

<sup>241</sup> Karen Farkas. “Plan to Turn Cleveland’s West Shoreway into a Boulevard Gains Momentum.” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. December 5, 2008.

professionals who prefer living in an urban setting. In accordance with the strategy of less investment in downtown “silver bullets” is a commitment to more investment in the neighborhoods, including new housing.<sup>242</sup> Retaining the population by improving the city as a whole, rather than creating a glitzy downtown, is the new focus of Cleveland’s planners.

Another city, albeit not a Northeastern one, that succeeded in removing an obstruction to the waterfront was Portland, Oregon. The Harbor Drive highway was completed in 1950 and combined with industrial property to cut off waterfront access.<sup>243</sup> Citizens banded together to rectify this mistake and demanded the return of their waterfront. In 1974 Harbor Drive was closed and later converted to parkland. An adjoining avenue was widened to handle the displaced traffic and negative impact was minimized. Government officials took the proactive steps of forewarning drivers of the closure and synchronizing traffic signals to aid traffic flow downtown.<sup>244</sup> Potential problems were eliminated through proper planning. Portland now combines historic sites with scenic open space to create an asset to the city.<sup>245</sup> By working in cooperation with all interests, Portland was able to open up its shoreline—a decision that provided aesthetic and economic benefits. Several annual festivals are held on the waterfront, boosting tourism and enriching city life in Portland.

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<sup>242</sup> James L. Tyson, “Has ‘Mistake on the Lake’ Been Fixed?” *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 April 1995, in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed 3 March 2009.

<sup>243</sup> Congress for the New Urbanism. *Portland’s Harbor Drive*.  
<<http://www.cnu.org/highways/portland>>

<sup>244</sup> Seattle Department of Transportation. *Seattle Urban Mobility Plan: Case Studies in Urban Freeway Removal*. Seattle, 2007.

<sup>245</sup> Larry R. Ford. *America’s New Downtowns: Revitalization or Reinvention?* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 79.

### Conclusions on the Predominance of the Automobile

Buffalo has the vision and the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past. Other cities have set precedents for highway removal, improved rapid transit, cooperation between organized citizen and government, and less state bureaucracy. The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy provides the vision in its 2008 plan, which calls for a comprehensive restoration plan of Buffalo parks. Included in the plan are the conversion of the Scajaquada Expressway to a parkway and the restoration of Agassiz Circle (between the Scajaquada and Kensington Expressways) as a formal entrance to Delaware Park.<sup>246</sup> The project is costly, but is comparable to the cost of maintaining the two expressways. The federal and state departments of transportation fully fund this maintenance, so funds are available to convert the Scajaquada. In 2005, the New York State Department of Transportation released a study that examined the feasibility of converting the Scajaquada into a two or four-lane boulevard.<sup>247</sup> The study concluded that a four-lane reduced- speed (35mph) parkway would meet the goals of restoring a park-like setting while still carrying traffic efficiently. Public opinion has started to creep into public policy in Buffalo.

The issues of the Niagara Section of the Thruway obstructing the waterfront and the Metro Rail rapid transit system extension have resurfaced as well. In 2009, the Buffalo Common Council unanimously approved a resolution supporting both the extension of the Metro Rail and the removal of the Niagara Section of the Thruway through the use of

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<sup>246</sup> Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy. *The Olmsted City. The Buffalo Olmsted Park System: Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Robert G. Shibley and Lynda H. Schneekloth. Buffalo, N.Y.: 2008.

<sup>247</sup> New York State Department of Transportation. *NY Route 198 Scajaquada Corridor Study: Grant Street to Parkside Avenue*. Amherst, 2005.

federal stimulus funds.<sup>248</sup> The removal of the Thruway is merely wishful thinking at this point, as no study has been conducted even though previous proposals have called for restoring the waterfront. Stimulus funds are only granted to projects that are “shovel-ready” and approved by the federal government, therefore a simple proposal does not qualify. The Metro Rail extension proposal cannot be considered by the federal government without a plan to cover operating expenses. This is not an unreasonable request, as most rapid transit systems are not self-sufficient. A new tax might have to be imposed in order to guarantee revenue, possibly at a countywide level. With the large number of suburban drivers in Erie County, a Metro Rail tax might not receive much support.

These obstacles are by no means insurmountable, if residents and leaders of the Buffalo and Western New York region can move away from their attachment to the automobile. The region has seen leaders with vision, such as the late New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who argued for a regional approach to transit. He asserted that government deliberately fostered sprawl and automobile dependence.<sup>249</sup> The highway lobby, which includes real estate developers, highway construction companies, trucking companies and automobile manufacturers, exerts considerable influence over government decisions. This influence has resulted in a continuing disparity in federal funding between highways and public transportation. One instance of this was the Milwaukee East-West Corridor Study in the early 1990’s. The proposed light-rail system was rejected by Governor Tommy Thompson and by the Federal Highway Administration in favor of

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<sup>248</sup> Brian Meyer. “Council hopes stimulus plan will extend Metro Rail.” *Buffalo News*, 4 February 2009, Available from [buffalonews.com](http://buffalonews.com). Available from: <http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/buffaloerie/story/569006.html> Internet; accessed 1 April 2009.

<sup>249</sup> Ladd, 128.



highway improvements that cost ten times more (\$ 1 billion).<sup>250</sup> Buffalo politicians and citizen groups must look to other cities who overruled the highway lobby and follow their lead. The transit lobby took a blow however, when the George W. Bush administration cut federal funding for transit projects by 50 percent in 2004.<sup>251</sup> A new Democratic administration under Barack Obama may help the transit advocates to regain their standing.

Buffalo's decline began as part of a natural pattern of shifting industry. Steel and other industries left for areas that were situated better geographically or offered lower overhead in terms of less taxes and labor costs. The city needed local leaders with vision that could help Buffalo develop a new economic base and stabilize the population. Instead, Buffalo's political and business leaders longed for the past and advocated grand "silver bullet" projects, such as the poorly situated convention center, that did nothing to improve the quality of life in the city. These elites formed redundant power groups and battled each other for control over the money that the state and federal governments dangled over them. They facilitated suburban sprawl by catering to car owners, failing to realize that the suburbs would eventually become self-sufficient. When it was apparent that more highways were not the answer, they failed to produce a viable transit option, delaying until the costs were prohibitive. The state and federal governments were equally complicit as they provided ample funding for improvements, but were overly influenced by the highway lobby. The disparity in funding between highways and public transit continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Finally, the citizens of Buffalo share in the blame for the

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<sup>250</sup> Blumenberg and Waller, 278.

<sup>251</sup> Bruce Katz, Robert Puentes and Scott Bernstein. In *Taking the High Road: A Metropolitan Agenda for Transportation Reform*, Eds. Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes. (Washington: The Brookings Institute, 2005.), 23.

decline. Just as the political and economic leaders fought for power, citizen groups also succumbed to infighting. The various factions had public support for the rapid transit line, for example, but could not come together to exert enough influence on those in power.

Today the power of heavy-handed, unresponsive local government and the influence of opportunistic economic leaders are still present. Projects that the majority supports are delayed by internal strife while other cities are forming coalitions and improving themselves. Regional rapid transit remains a dream that is fading, while highway repairs continue to be funded. Buffalo will continue to decline if the city continues to cling to the failed policies of the past. Citizens must demand that government implement policies that improve neighborhoods and the quality of life in the city, rather than catering to one interest group—automobile owners.

The next problem to affect Buffalo's decline concerned the relationship between government, organized labor, and big business. Chapter four outlines the decline of manufacturing jobs in Western New York, once a huge part of the region's economy. As manufacturing jobs disappeared, the region lost population and the City of Buffalo began its economic and population decline.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT, LABOR, AND GOVERNMENT IN THE DECLINE OF MANUFACTURING IN BUFFALO

During the period after World War II, Buffalo was a manufacturing giant and at the peak of its population. The nearly 600,000 people benefited from Buffalo's prime position as the nation's eighth-largest manufacturer and fifteenth largest city.<sup>252</sup> Buffalo had many advantages for luring industry that the city leaders never failed to flaunt. As far back as 1860, a city pamphlet touted Buffalo's geographical position between eastern and western markets, a sound infrastructure, and cheaper access to labor, power, and raw materials.<sup>253</sup> With the Western and Southern regions of the United States not fully developed, Buffalo took full advantage of its location on the eastern shore of Lake Erie. In addition, natural resources played a role in Buffalo's advantage as the same 1860 publication claimed "...at no other city can the ore and the coal meet so advantageously."<sup>254</sup>

Employment in post-WWII Buffalo was plentiful, as 1950s Buffalo boasted numerous large companies, including some multinational corporations. Bell Aircraft, American Brass, Houdaille Industries, National Gypsum, Dunlop Tire, Carborundum, Ford, General Motors, Trico, Westinghouse, Western Electric, and Buffalo Forge were but a few of the choices for the Buffalo labor force. In addition to these, Buffalo was a

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<sup>252</sup> United States Census Bureau. *The Seventeenth United States Census: 1950 U.S. City Population Rankings*; available from: <http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0027/tab18.txt>.

<sup>253</sup> The Association for the Encouragement of Manufacturers in the City of Buffalo. *To Manufacturers Who May be Seeking a Location for the Prosecution of Their Business: A Brief Notice of Some of the Many Advantages Possessed by the City of Buffalo, New York as a Manufacturing Town*. Buffalo, 1860. (Accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library): 3.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

major steel making center, with a Bethlehem Steel plant in Lackawanna and a Republic Steel plant in South Buffalo. Manufacturing provided nearly 45% of the total employment in Buffalo by 1950, with service jobs providing only 10.7%, and government a mere 9.1%.<sup>255</sup> Most of these workers were represented by labor unions, making Buffalo's labor force higher paid on average when compared to the rest of the nation. For example, in 1960, Buffalo per capita income was 7.8% above the national average.<sup>256</sup>

Bethlehem Steel led the pack in terms of these well-paying jobs. In 1951, the company announced plans to expand capacity at the Lackawanna plant capacity from 3.6 million tons annually to 4.68 million tons.<sup>257</sup> The demand for steel in the 1950s could not match that of World War II, but the U.S. was expanding and the devastated countries of Europe and Asia needed to rebuild their infrastructures. By 1965, Bethlehem's Lackawanna payroll alone ballooned to 21,500 workers, but what city leaders and workers did not recognize (or did not want to believe) was that Buffalo's population and manufacturing base was beginning to decline. The blame for this decline is often placed at the feet of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) or the United Automobile Workers (UAW), two major labor unions that successfully bargained for wages, benefits and work rules that surpassed those of Buffalo's non-union workers as well as the national average. By 1960, UAW works made 16% more in wages and benefits than the national average.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Kraus, 37.

<sup>256</sup> Samuel H. Ticknor, M&T Bank and Research. *The Economic History of Buffalo, 1825-1984*. (Buffalo, 1985.): 58. Accessed from the Monroe Fordham Regional History Center at Buffalo State College.

<sup>257</sup> "Lackawanna Mill to Become One of Largest in World." *Courier Express*, 23 January 1951.

<sup>258</sup> "New Hires in UAW No Longer Tops. MSNBC." *MSNBC*. Available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/37789668/ns/business-autos/>. Internet; accessed 23 February 2011.

Former management at many of the aforementioned manufacturing companies bemoaned the high wages and generous benefits won by workers through collective bargaining. They claimed that the inflexibility of the unions (leaders and members) in refusing wage concessions and relaxing of work rules contributed to the many plant closures, takeovers, and bankruptcies. The late John Strohmeier, journalist and Pulitzer Prize recipient, argued that union victories led to unnecessarily high wages and that “past practice” clauses created unnecessary positions in plants.<sup>259</sup> Thomas E Leary and Elizabeth Sholes, partners in an independent public history firm and authors of several articles on industrial history, counter with the claim that mismanagement, combined with poor distribution of capital and an increasing corporate appetite for “paper profits” (profits made through transactions rather than through selling a product or service) over actual production, led to the decline of manufacturing jobs in Buffalo and in the nation as a whole.<sup>260</sup> Judith Stein, Professor of History at the City College of New York, highlights the cooperation between the USWA and Bethlehem, noting that as early as 1970, the union assisted the company in pushing for a lower property tax bill and a delay in installation of pollution-control equipment.<sup>261</sup> Both parties, however, charge that local and federal governments fostered a climate in which American companies could not compete with foreign manufacturers. Christopher G.L.Hall, President of American University in Kosovo, adds the argument that the federal government had no industrial policy and left companies to fight each other in the free market, while other countries

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<sup>259</sup> John Strohmeier, *Crisis in Bethlehem: Big Steel's Struggle to Survive*. (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986.): 172.

<sup>260</sup> Thomas E Leary and Elizabeth Sholes, *From Fire to Rust: Business, Technology and Work at the Lackawanna Steel Plant, 1899-1983*. (Buffalo: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, 1987.): 2.

<sup>261</sup> Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.): 133.

captured U.S. markets.<sup>262</sup> In addition, the U.S. government fostered a climate of free trade and open borders that made the decline of manufacturing inevitable. An examination of these charges reveals that all have merit, but since labor, management and government are interdependent, they cannot be picked apart and pinpointed for the purpose of laying blame exclusively. Management, labor, and government all failed to act to save American manufacturing jobs and lacked visionary leadership; they relied on self-preservation as an impetus for action (or in many instances, inaction).

### Major Companies Vacate Buffalo

While the 1950s and 1960s were good economic times for Buffalo, there were signs that the city, and the region in general, was on the decline. Population growth in the city had slowed significantly since 1930, and started to decline after 1950.<sup>263</sup> The suburbs as well as the Southern and Western U.S. regions began to attract residents who moved to take advantage of increasing employment opportunities and a warmer climate. The St. Lawrence Seaway opening in 1959 ended Buffalo's commercial base and increased the dependence on manufacturing. Ships began to bypass Buffalo and travel through the Welland Canal, which became a more direct route to the Atlantic Ocean. As an example, grain exported from Buffalo declined from fifty-nine million bushels in 1956-1957 to

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<sup>262</sup> Christopher G.L. Hall, *Steel Phoenix: The Fall and Rise of the U.S. Steel Industry*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.): 102.

<sup>263</sup> Margaret M. Sullivan, "Buffalo." World Book Advanced.  
<http://worldbookonline.com/advanced/article?id=ar081380&st=buffalo>: accessed July 1, 2010.

802,000 in 1968-1969.<sup>264</sup> The grain shipment industry in Buffalo began its inevitable decline. Buffalo had opposed the Seaway since it was proposed in the 1920s, while federal officials tried to reassure local business leaders.<sup>265</sup>

David C. Perry, Professor of Urban Planning and Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, points out that local ownership of large companies had been on the decline as well since the 1920s as newspapers, department stores, oil transport, food processing, and granaries were bought out by outside interests.<sup>266</sup> Buffalo was losing control over its economy and becoming susceptible to the whims of corporations. The largest companies, steel and automobile manufacturers, were owned by multinationals. This can be an asset, as a large company is able to invest in a subsidiary due to more availability of capital. The downside is that large corporations frequently sell off profitable branches or close branches that are not as profitable as others to streamline and maximize profits. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, only a few manufacturing companies (Rich Products, Labatt, Sorrento Cheese, and New Era Cap Company) are headquartered in Buffalo, along with some banks (Manufactures and Traders Trust and First Niagara) and insurance companies (Merchants Insurance Group and Lawley Insurance). As manufacturing in the Northeast began plummeting, the downside became reality. Each postwar recession drove Buffalo's level of manufacturing jobs down and the subsequent recoveries did not restore the previous levels.<sup>267</sup> Global competition, lower wages, market shifts, and depletion of natural

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<sup>264</sup> Hayden, Brian. "St. Lawrence Seaway at 50: A Bypass for Buffalo's Port." [BuffaloNews.com](http://www.buffalonews.com/incoming/article160476.ece). Available from <http://www.buffalonews.com/incoming/article160476.ece>. Internet; accessed 24 February 2011.

<sup>265</sup> Buffalo Chamber of Commerce. *The Great Lakes Grain Movement, Buffalo and the St. Lawrence Seaway*. Buffalo, 1929; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>266</sup> David C. Perry, "The Politics of Dependency in Deindustrializing America: The Case of Buffalo, New York," in *The Capitalist City*, eds. Michael Peter Smith and Joe R. Feagan, 113-137. (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987.): 119.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

resources all combined to pull jobs elsewhere. In addition, companies were using technology to eliminate positions and shifting some production to different locations.

### Houdaille and National Gypsum

Houdaille Industries is an example of a Buffalo-based company that manufactured automobile bumpers, hydraulic shocks, and machine tools. It later became a huge conglomerate, acquiring construction materials companies, toolmakers, along with contracting and engineering services. As journalist and author Max Holland points out, Houdaille avoided antitrust laws by using this type of diversification, rather than vertical or horizontal integration.<sup>268</sup> With vertical integration, a company will purchase companies in the supply chain to control prices, while with horizontal integration, a company will purchase or “buy out” other companies that make the same products in the same stage of production. Diversification provided Houdaille with protection against recession; if one sector performed poorly, another would provide the cash flow to keep the weaker link running.

Houdaille performed very well through the 1970s, posting huge profits, including \$24.8 million in 1976.<sup>269</sup> They had low debt and a healthy cash flow, but left Buffalo in 1977, for Fort Lauderdale. Houdaille went up for sale initially because the Jacobs family

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<sup>268</sup> Max Holland, *When the Machine Stopped: A Cautionary Tale from Industrial America*. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1989): 57.

<sup>269</sup> “Houdaille Profits at Record Levels.” *Courier Express*, 25 January 1977



of Buffalo attempted to purchase the company through stock purchases.<sup>270</sup> The Houdaille chairman enlisted the help of investment bankers Goldman, Sachs, and Company to block the takeover attempt, but Goldman Sachs was more concerned with the three million dollar fee it would collect if Houdaille were sold. When the firm of Kohlberg, Kravis, and Roberts (KKR) used Goldman Sachs as an intermediary, a leveraged buyout of Houdaille proceeded. KKR used Houdaille's lack of debt to finance the purchase (interest on debt is tax deductible, therefore it is possible to negate a company's tax burden by accruing debt), the stock price soared because of the rumored takeover, and Houdaille's chief executive could not take the risk of the stock price crashing.<sup>271</sup>

With the exit of National Gypsum in the same year, Buffalo was left with no *Fortune* 500 companies headquartered in the city, and only five large, publicly owned firms.<sup>272</sup> National Gypsum had begun to expand overseas and acquired huge debt to do so. Their new company president closed their Buffalo plant, moved to Dallas, Texas and made record profits in the 1980s.<sup>273</sup> Older plants were expendable and building new plants with financing was tax deductible. Buffalo had disappeared from the national manufacturing spotlight and has not returned. Neither of these companies moved solely because of oppressive labor costs or restrictive labor rules; their owners made enormous profits from expansion using debt interest to lower their taxes. Other problems that did not involve labor, such as lower taxes, were also present. This was a national trend, not just confined to Buffalo.

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<sup>270</sup> George Anders. *Merchants of Debt: KKR and the Mortgaging of American Business*, (Washington, Beard Books, 1992) : 24.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>272</sup> "Exodus Leaves Only Five Big Publicly Owned Firms." *Courier Express*, 14 May 1977.

<sup>273</sup> "Company Histories: National Gypsum." *Funding Universe*; available from <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/National-Gypsum-Company-Company-History.html>. Internet; accessed 24 February 2011.

Author Max Holland blames Houdaille not for investing, but for investing ineffectively, micromanaging, and ignoring input from experienced employees.<sup>274</sup> This pattern of mismanagement was unfortunately a common one that negatively affected Buffalo's manufacturing jobs. Holland describes Houdaille as "a top-heavy bureaucracy, obsessed with procedure and prestige rather than function and need."<sup>275</sup> When companies are managed in this manner, they focus on the short term and leave themselves vulnerable to recession and/or inflation, then shift the blame to high employee costs. In Houdaille's case, they hired executives who were lawyers or accountants, rather than production people who had the knowledge and the will to innovate.<sup>276</sup> They were more concerned with procuring a return for stockholders and less with creating products and keeping jobs. Relations between labor and management became strained as a result. The once-great Houdaille Industries eventually became the target of the aforementioned leveraged buyout, was sold and renamed.

### Bethlehem Steel

The most substantial casualty of the manufacturing decline was the Bethlehem Steel plant in the city of Lackawanna, New York, which borders Buffalo to the south. Bethlehem acquired the Lackawanna facility through its \$60 million purchase of Lackawanna Steel in 1922 and proceeded to modernize the twenty-year-old plant with an eye on the growing automobile industry. The coming of World War II meant that

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<sup>274</sup> Holland, 133.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 268.

Bethlehem had to shift to producing huge amounts of steel for defense. The Lackawanna plant operated to capacity, becoming the largest steel making operation in the nation. Following the war, the plant continued to produce at a healthy pace, employing 21,500 by 1965. The auto industry fed the demand for steel, employing 22,000 by 1964, including companies such as General Motors, Ford, Buffalo Tool and Die, American Radiator, American Brass, Dunlop Tire, and Trico.<sup>277</sup> Employment was high and wages combined with benefits were generous for many in the manufacturing plants, but trouble was looming. The variables that led to these conditions had begun to change.

One of these variables was the relationship between management and labor. Bethlehem Steel in particular was known for its animosity toward organized labor. The company faced legal action by contractors in the 1920s due to Bethlehem's refusal to deal with companies who were unionized.<sup>278</sup> This set the stage for future relations between management and labor. In the 1940s, Bethlehem management rejected union interference in matters of production, further damaging relations and sending the two sides in opposite directions. From that point on, the union was pushed into using legal means to protect what had been gained through bargaining.<sup>279</sup> Relations continued to break down through the 1960s, denying the company of an important resource: human capital. Workers were not valued for their ideas on the shop floor because the company viewed them as replaceable parts. John P. Hoerr, a veteran reporter of American labor, cites a Japanese study that concluded that U.S. businesses trusted systems, not workers who merely ran

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<sup>277</sup> Mark Goldman, *City on the Lake: The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, N.Y.* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1990.): 171.

<sup>278</sup> Leary and Sholes, 57..

<sup>279</sup> John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry.* (Pittsburgh, The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988.): 294.

machines, similar to Houdaille's aforementioned obsession with procedure.<sup>280</sup> Bethlehem was a top-down company as well, with no cooperation on the shop floor. A 1963 study of business and industry in the region found that Buffalo's labor force was productive, even with the higher wages, but also had a higher level of labor unrest.<sup>281</sup> President Richard Nixon tried to repair management-labor relations by pushing the steel industry to accept higher wages in exchange for union-management committees to improve productivity. This effort failed, however, as managers refused to negotiate working conditions, focusing on labor reductions only.<sup>282</sup> Again, management dismissed the input of floor-level workers. By the time management and labor developed cooperative teams, the damage was irreparable.

### Management Troubles at Bethlehem Steel

Poor management practices also contributed to Bethlehem's decline. Strohmeyer documents numerous blunders, all fueled by the arrogance that permeated a hugely profitable corporation. In contrast to large metal fabricators, some independent companies hired engineering consultants and draftsmen only when needed and joined forces with other small companies to secure bids on projects.<sup>283</sup> This could have cut costs for Bethlehem and other large companies, but short-term planning and desire for

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 312.

<sup>281</sup> Committee on Urban Research: State University of New York at Buffalo. *Business and Industry on the Niagara Frontier*. Buffalo, 1963; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>282</sup> Hoerr, 291.

<sup>283</sup> Strohmeyer, 112.

quarterly profits prevented change. Subcontractors did work for Japanese companies also, which lowered their overhead.<sup>284</sup> In addition, many corporations like Bethlehem in mature industries were allied through directors who served on boards together. This helped them to control the steel and automobile industries for decades, but slowed the adaptation to a changing economy. The same banks and stockholders who supplied the cash to these giants required a return on their investment, thus mandating consistent profits and short-term vision.<sup>285</sup> The industries were structured to exploit the favorable conditions, and the subsequent difficulties resulted in lost profits and jobs.

Bethlehem and the steel industry in general also faced the problem of rising labor costs. Several factors led to the high cost of labor, however. One factor was the 1956 steel strike, which was lengthened by a poor economy. Management did not want to give in to labor, considering the political pressure to limit price hikes and inflation.<sup>286</sup> The strike ended one day following the start of the Suez Canal crisis, perhaps causing the Eisenhower administration to push for a resolution affecting an industry critical to national defense. The strike led to slightly raised wages, increased benefits, and a 7.4% hike in steel prices.<sup>287</sup> The administration had more pressing concerns, but the wage-price spiral continued upward.

Later in 1959, another strike stopped steel production for 116 days, opening the door for imported steel. This resolution did not result in a significant wage increase (the steelworkers instead received a cost-of-living adjustment indexed to inflation) and the price of steel did not rise until 1962, but the two strikes resulted in a continuous wage-

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<sup>284</sup> In fairness, Bethlehem and other steel companies would have faced a union fight over this practice.

<sup>285</sup> Leary and Sholes, 2.

<sup>286</sup> Hall, 46.

<sup>287</sup> Tiffany, 153.

price spiral, the depletion of steel stockpiles, and the realization by customers that quality steel could be purchased from foreign countries at a cheaper price. Management was taking a proper stand in order to counter the growing threat of cheaper steel from overseas, but their ongoing contribution to the poor state of labor-management relations left them in a position in which they could not easily achieve future concessions from labor. In addition, Paul A. Tiffany notes that steel companies did not push back at the bargaining table before 1959 because both unions and the companies had a monopoly on steel production and therefore shared the spoils.<sup>288</sup> Short-term vision and consistent profits kept change from taking place, and the cost-of-living adjustment became a ticking time bomb. Employee costs tripled from 1972 to 1982, to \$26.29 per hour (including benefits).<sup>289</sup> This could have been prevented through better relations with labor and attention to the long term.

Another mistake on the part of Bethlehem management included failure to bargain honestly and openly. Much of the blame for the failure of Bethlehem, and manufacturing in general, is placed on the powerful labor unions, but management could have avoided the dreaded “past-practice” rule, in which established jobs could not be consolidated or eliminated, by admitting during the 1959 strike that they had started inefficient practices.<sup>290</sup> The industry could not convince any floor-level management to step forward and admit that that they had done so, resulting in a victory for the union. Jobs were now strictly defined and fiercely defended by the union; any work done by someone that was not in their job description could result in a grievance being filed. A further examination into the Bethlehem safety record revealed that in 1969, there were 58,956 visits to the

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>289</sup> Strohmeyer, 76.

<sup>290</sup> Hoerr, 327.

emergency room by steelworkers.<sup>291</sup> This is a good indication of why the United Steelworkers of America refused to back down on “past-practice;” they did not trust the company to value the safety of its workers.

Poor allocation of capital became another avoidable blunder for the huge corporation. Bethlehem’s investment in the Lackawanna plant was substantial, but yielded low return.<sup>292</sup> The plant was over twenty years old when Bethlehem acquired it in 1922, and the parent company never fully modernized the facility, preferring to follow a piecemeal approach. The installation of the new basic oxygen furnaces (BOFs) occurred ten years behind the Japanese competition and utilization of American steel plants was only around 60% by the late-1950s. Meanwhile, imports were increasing from 784,000 tons in 1954 to 4,396,000 tons in 1959.<sup>293</sup> American companies were losing ground while Bethlehem was bragging about the new technology. John E. Jacobs, Vice President of Bethlehem commenting on the new BOFs in 1964 stated that: “They are the newest and, we are sure, the best in the world.”<sup>294</sup> Neither was true, and the Lackawanna plant now had a new threat looming in the Midwest with the construction of Bethlehem’s Burns Harbor, Indiana plant, which was completed in 1965.

The construction of a new plant was the result of an earlier failure to merge with an existing plant in the 1930s and again in the 1950s (Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company) due to legal action by stockholders and later an antitrust suit from the federal government.<sup>295</sup> Capacity increased and only high demand could keep the facilities

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<sup>291</sup> Leary and Sholes, 129.

<sup>292</sup> Kenneth Warren, *Bethlehem Steel: Builder and Arsenal of America*. (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008.): 222.

<sup>293</sup> Hall, 37.

<sup>294</sup> Bethlehem Steel Corporation. *Remarks by John E. Jacobs- Vice President of Bethlehem Steel Corporation at Press Tour of Basic Oxygen Furnaces, Lackawanna Plant*. Buffalo, 1964.

<sup>295</sup> Leary and Sholes, 80.

running. Fortunately for the steel workers, the Vietnam War provided that demand throughout the 1960s and kept Lackawanna active. The problem with Burns Harbor, as far as Lackawanna was concerned, was that new plants have a high capital cost that require running at full capacity to ensure a worthwhile return on the investment. A Brookings Institution study done in 1978 found that upgrading existing facilities was more cost-effective in the long run.<sup>296</sup> Short-term vision based on quarterly reports surfaced yet again. Bethlehem tried to calm fears of a Lackawanna shutdown, claiming that the new plant in Indiana was “no threat.”<sup>297</sup> Claiming that the market was growing showed either dishonesty or incompetence, given the growing threat of cheap imports and rising labor costs. The new plant actually increased Lackawanna’s production, as they supplied Burns Harbor with steel slabs until the new plant was completed.<sup>298</sup> What no one wanted to admit was that Burns Harbor was taking the Midwest market from Lackawanna and draining the capital that could have retooled the older plant properly. To compound the short-term approach, Bethlehem continued to invest in Lackawanna (in piecemeal fashion) even as it prepared to announce plans to close the plant in 1982.<sup>299</sup> The closure of Lackawanna was inevitable after the construction of the massive, new facility in Indiana, but the company refused to plan that far in advance.

The 1970s and early 1980s saw Bethlehem reap the rewards of that short-term thinking. The company refused to modernize through research and development, new ideas (which labor could have contributed to), or reorganizing the structure of the company. The answer, as always, was to expand rather than increase productivity and

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>297</sup> “Newest Plant No Threat to Bethlehem Facility Here.” *Courier Express*, 17 September 1965.

<sup>298</sup> “New Plant to Get Steel from Buffalo.” *Courier Express*, 5 December 1962.

<sup>299</sup> Warren, 232.



engage in diversification. The demand from the continuing conflict in Vietnam helped business, but in 1977 Bethlehem cut steel capacity from 6 million to 4.8 million tons at Lackawanna, laying off 9,000 workers in the process.<sup>300</sup> The issue here was the age, location, and productivity of the plant based on dubious capital expenditures. Labor relations remained a problem, but the Burns Harbor plant was not much better, although it did not suffer from the “past practice” rule because it was a newer facility. A General Motors strike preceded the layoffs, and Trico (Buffalo-based maker of windshield wipers) was forced to lay off workers as well.<sup>301</sup> The press in Buffalo was beginning to catch on when in late 1970, the *Courier Express* newspaper predicted that the Burns Harbor plant would eventually lead to the closure of Lackawanna.<sup>302</sup> The following year, Bethlehem refused to offer automakers lower steel prices, unlike other companies.<sup>303</sup> Imports increased as auto companies looked to cut costs and Bethlehem’s inflexibility and lack of cooperation with a buyer it depended on helped hasten its decline.

Another mistake of Bethlehem’s management (and the industry in general) was the failure to turn towards increased importation of iron ore. The U.S. supply is not as rich in taconite as mines in Australia and Brazil, and it required upgrading at the mine site by higher-paid U.S. mineworkers.<sup>304</sup> This increased the cost for U.S. steel companies and made them less competitive than countries like Brazil who had government subsidies, lower wages and cheaper raw materials. While the U.S. mining companies complained about the volume of iron ore imports by the mid-1980s, the automobile manufacturers

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>301</sup> “Steel Union Probes Cuts at Bethlehem.” *Courier Express*, 20 October 1970.

<sup>302</sup> “Lackawanna Plant’s Destiny was Sealed 8 Years Ago.” 3 December 1970.

<sup>303</sup> “Bethlehem Bars Deal with Detroit.” *Courier Express*, 13 August 1971

<sup>304</sup> The Congress of the United States Congressional Budget Office. *The Effects Of Import Quota on the Steel Industry*, Washington 1984: 53.

had no qualms with the importation of foreign steel for their cars. The steel industry could have decreased costs by using the same tactics.

The bad decisions continued for Bethlehem throughout the 1970s. The USWA charged Bethlehem with failing to modernize by applying new technology during a time of favorable trade agreements.<sup>305</sup> Bethlehem was indeed pumping capital into Lackawanna (a new bar mill in 1972), but again it was done in piecemeal fashion while the company fought labor over work rules and productivity. The overspending and mismanagement was also evident in the high salaries and perks for office staff: some clerks were earning \$30,000 in the mid-1970s while management received seven weeks vacation a year.<sup>306</sup> White-collar salaries rose with union salaries and they were not laid off with blue-collar workers, even during shutdowns until 1982. Waste and inefficiency characterized the corporate mindset of Bethlehem management. Meanwhile, U.S. Steel was beginning to diversify, using other healthy acquisitions (such as Marathon Oil) for cash flow, and making deeper cuts than Bethlehem.<sup>307</sup> Bethlehem refused to accept that it could do more than move into mining operations; diversification could have helped during the downtimes of steel's cyclical market. In contrast, U.S. Steel did not have to declare bankruptcy, because it changed and adapted to survive. Furthermore, U.S. Steel diffused the no-win situation of worker cuts leading to costly pension payments by pumping cash into the fund and claiming it as a tax deduction.<sup>308</sup> Long-term vision kept U.S. Steel viable, though drastically reduced, while Bethlehem continued to decline.

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<sup>305</sup> "Most American Steel Plants Creak." *Courier Express*, 2 October 1977.

<sup>306</sup> Strohmeyer, 113.

<sup>307</sup> Warren, 225.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, 273.

### Labor Mistakes

While management decisions helped to sink Bethlehem, the USWA leaders and its members also failed to slow the decline. Union corruption and ballot fraud during the 1960s is well documented and the desire for labor leaders to hold power was a disservice to the industry and the workers. This was the case for the UAW as well; corruption damaged the national image of the major unions through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The USWA refused to challenge management and production issues that could have saved jobs in the long run. They allowed workers to file grievances for the pettiest of infractions by management, which tacked on huge costs to an already generous compensation package. When local union leaders who recognized that cooperation would help secure jobs suggested concessions, the members voted those leaders out.<sup>309</sup> Like management, the leaders and members of the unions tended to think of their short-term interests, rather than long-term security. They achieved numerous hard-earned victories, but lost their livelihood and security. In addition, the unions failed to use their political clout effectively to stop the *Trade Reform Act of 1974* and the *Trade Agreements of 1979*, which provided a fast track for free trade and more imports, while giving the president more control over tariffs.<sup>310</sup> The farmers argued that foreign markets remained restricted to U.S. agricultural products and labor unions decried increase imports, but the effort was not sufficient to sway Congress.

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<sup>309</sup> Strohmeyer, 220.

<sup>310</sup> James Shoch, "Organized Labor Versus Globalization: NAFTA, Fast Track, and PTNR with China," in *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz, and Richard W. Hurd, 275-313. (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001.): 278.

### Government Failings and Globalization

Local and federal government share the responsibility for the loss of manufacturing jobs in Buffalo as well. The federal government's failure to institute an industrial policy and local government's gouging through property taxes are more examples of short-term vision that resulted in manufacturing jobs leaving for other regions or nations. Hall argues that the lack of an industrial policy (the U.S. did not subsidize steel and had no industrial bank) left steel companies to fight each other and then fall victim to the free market (only the U.S. had a steel industry that ran on free market principles), which was the downside of the U.S. economic system.<sup>311</sup> Other nations had the advantage of government support (or were run by the government), which included the support of the U.S. government as well as their own government. The fight against communism was the main concern of the postwar U.S. government. From 1957 to 1960, the Dwight Eisenhower administration joined with international agencies to provide foreign steel companies with \$585.8 million and also gave technical advice to the Japanese.<sup>312</sup> The irony here is that Eisenhower avoided domestic economic control, but was an interventionist abroad. The USSR wanted to supply the Japanese with coal and iron ore, but the Eisenhower stepped in, while ignoring the signs of declining industry at home.<sup>313</sup> This irony applies to the large manufacturers as well. They wanted limited government interference when times were good, then demanded intervention to curb foreign imports.

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<sup>311</sup> Hall, 102.

<sup>312</sup> Tiffany, 169.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 174.

The Japanese strategy was one of exports, so they increased their steel capacity far over domestic projections and used bulk carriers to ease transport costs.<sup>314</sup> Japan was gaining a larger share of the U.S. market, especially the Midwest, which was opened to foreign steel by the St. Lawrence Seaway completion in 1959. The U.S. steel companies wanted to recapture more of the domestic market, but there was virtually no cooperation between government and business in the period from 1958 to 1962, when imports gained a foothold.<sup>315</sup> The domestic steel companies were facing a no-win situation; they could not lower export prices due to fair trade laws and complained that foreign steel was simultaneously being dumped (sold at an artificially low price aided by subsidies) on the domestic market. They claimed they could not compete with other nations under those conditions.<sup>316</sup> The destruction of Europe and Japan was a double-edged sword; the U.S. was left to satisfy demand unchallenged, but the demand led to expansion over research and development. By the 1960s, Japan and other nations were using state-of-the-art plants and the U.S. was adding pieces to aging facilities, such as Lackawanna. The Japanese government promoted research with subsidies, built ports for steel companies, and loaned money for acquisition of raw materials.<sup>317</sup>

Compounding the dilemma was the negative perception of steel as a powerful industry that grew during a period of distrust of big business in America.<sup>318</sup> Not many people had sympathy for titans like Bethlehem or U.S. Steel. The 1972 movie *Godfather II* (set in 1959) gives a glimpse of this when the gangster character Hyman Roth utters to

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<sup>314</sup> Hall, 45.

<sup>315</sup> Tiffany, 179.

<sup>316</sup> American Iron and Steel Institute. *The Steel Industry Today: A Report to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Policy*. (New York, 1971.): 4.

<sup>317</sup> David Bensman and Roberta Lynch. *Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987.): 85.

<sup>318</sup> Tiffany, 187.

his colleague: "Michael, we're bigger than U. S. Steel."<sup>319</sup> Big Steel was synonymous with power and wealth as far as Americans were concerned.

The Jimmy Carter administration ushered in more problems for manufacturers as globalization spread industry and lowered the demand for skilled workers.<sup>320</sup> Developing countries began to take over industry that had provided high-paying work for Americans. Steel cans were replaced with aluminum, and lighter cars were produced for greater fuel efficiency after the energy crisis. As with his successors, President Carter was more concerned with the specter of communism than the decline of manufacturing in the Northeast and Midwest. Buffalo in particular lost over 16,000 manufacturing jobs from 1972 to 1982.<sup>321</sup> Carter's Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, attempted to stop inflation by reducing the money supply, but inflation rose, unemployment rose, and sales of homes and cars plummeted.<sup>322</sup> Manufacturing workers refused to compromise lest they lose their purchasing power. Steel companies saw sales drop as well and the high interest rate slowed capital expenditures. The Bethlehem plant in Lackawanna reduced capacity from 4.8 million tons to 2.8 million in 1977, leaving 8,500 employed workers.<sup>323</sup> The Buffalo area was hemorrhaging jobs and welfare rolls were rapidly expanding. Cost of living adjustments made pay rise with inflation (although wages were a smaller percentage of costs in 1980 than 1965), so cost rose, and capital was difficult to obtain.<sup>324</sup> Meanwhile, other countries such as Japan, Brazil, Mexico, Taiwan, and South Korea received low interest loans, subsidies, fixed wages, and trade restrictions to create

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<sup>319</sup> *Godfather II*. DVD. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. 1972; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount, 2005.

<sup>320</sup> Perry, 113.

<sup>321</sup> Teaford, 288.

<sup>322</sup> Bensman and Lynch.74.

<sup>323</sup> Warren, 231.

<sup>324</sup> Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.):296.

and protect jobs.<sup>325</sup> It was difficult to compete with low-wage nations; the only way would have been to develop higher quality steel and/or niche products. The window of opportunity for saving manufacturing jobs was quickly closing.

Fear of inflation and communism turned President Carter against protectionism, but he did institute a trigger price mechanism, which based the lowest accepted cost of foreign steel on Japan's price.<sup>326</sup> Any lower price was considered dumping, but U.S. importers simply started companies offshore to buy imported steel and then resell it.<sup>327</sup> The free market was working as designed; people were finding ways to make money. Carter pushed the Economic Development Administration in 1978 to loan steel companies money for modernization, but the funding was inadequate for an industry of that size.<sup>328</sup> Like with the industry itself, the efforts to intervene were too little, too late. Carter, slowed by the weak dollar's positive effect on the trade deficit, failed to form a policy that may have prevented the destruction of manufacturing in the U.S.

The 1980s brought a laissez-faire approach from the Ronald Reagan administration and companies began to fill management with college graduates (as opposed to production people) who looked to lower pay and raise production through harsh tactics. European companies restructured in the 1980s as well, but their efforts were met with violent opposition. Stein asserts that the difference is that European governments had a history of intervening in disputes, whereas the U.S. government's inaction resulted in

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<sup>325</sup> Strohmeier, 102.

<sup>326</sup> Stein, 238.

<sup>327</sup> Hall, 131.

<sup>328</sup> Stein, 239.

poor labor-management relations.<sup>329</sup> The “business-friendly” attitude of the Reagan administration was an attempt to reduce the power and influence of unions.

Reagan used unemployment to keep inflation down and placed business over labor. Business saw this as a period to finally break free of union control and “long-standing labor contracts, which restrict flexibility in negotiations and increased production costs.”<sup>330</sup> The firing of the striking air traffic controllers in 1981 set the tone for the administration’s actions. Reagan later installed an anti-union chair to the National Labor Relations Board to reverse pro-labor policies.<sup>331</sup> The government assisted companies in cost cutting by explaining how to use foreign labor. Meanwhile, right-to-work laws, federal subsidies, cheap land, and warmer weather hastened the exodus of businesses to the South and West.<sup>332</sup> Here we see another example of irony; Reagan gave trade protection, tax incentives (while cutting those for steel) and research money to Silicon Valley, while leaving the rest of manufacturing to the “free market.”<sup>333</sup> Clearly there were favorites as far as industries and regions were concerned. Energy, real estate, high technology, defense, and finance became the industries of the new economy. Buffalo saw gains in these sectors, but less than the national average and not enough to offset the huge loss of high-wage manufacturing jobs.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid, 295.

<sup>330</sup> Third Annual Tri-City/County Conference. *The Buffalo Area Economy*. Buffalo, New York, June 3-4, 1979. Accessed from the Monroe Fordham Regional History Center at Buffalo State College.

<sup>331</sup> Stein, 86.

<sup>332</sup> Right-to-work laws prohibit mandatory payment of union dues in certain states; this is called an open shop and is allowed under the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 285.

<sup>334</sup> Alec Friedhoff, Howard Wial, and Harold Wolman. *The Consequences of Metropolitan Manufacturing Decline: Testing Conventional Wisdom*. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010):4; Accessed from: [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2010/1216\\_manufacturing\\_wial\\_friedhoff/1216\\_manufacturing\\_wial\\_friedhoff.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2010/1216_manufacturing_wial_friedhoff/1216_manufacturing_wial_friedhoff.pdf). Internet; accessed 14 January 2011.



Local government did not have answers to the exodus either, and for years helped contribute to it. Property taxes for Bethlehem Steel were exorbitant, comprising 73% of Lackawanna's tax base and rising \$17 million in one year.<sup>335</sup> Local government was balancing its books on the back of Bethlehem. Harrison Radiator in nearby Lockport was experiencing similar problems with assessments as well.<sup>336</sup> The situation was so exploitive and damaging that at one point in the 1970s, the USWA cooperated with the company to demand (and successfully achieve) a lower tax bill for the Lackawanna plant.<sup>337</sup> On a positive note Representative John LaFalce of Buffalo proposed a federal industrial bank in 1984, but was rejected by the Reagan administration.<sup>338</sup> Steel companies and other manufacturers were caught in the shift to a service economy.

In 1982, on the day after the Christmas break, Bethlehem announced it would be closing the Lackawanna plant, taking 3,900 jobs (plus 3,400 who were laid off) with it.<sup>339</sup> Unemployment the following year rose to 12.2% in the Buffalo area.<sup>340</sup> This was typical in the Northeast during this period. By 1984, the Lackawanna plant and Republic Steel's South Buffalo plant were closed. Republic had picked Cleveland for the site of a new plant in 1978, but spent \$46 million on updates in Buffalo, only to close soon after.<sup>341</sup> In 1984 alone, Buffalo lost 2,100 jobs at Republic and 1,100 at the Chevrolet plant in the Buffalo suburb of Tonawanda.<sup>342</sup> The decade was one of declining employment and

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<sup>335</sup> Strohmeyer, 191.

<sup>336</sup> "Harrison Radiator Challenges Tax Assessment." *Courier Express*, 7 August 1982.

<sup>337</sup> "Bethlehem Asks Education Cost Cut." *Courier Express*, 25 July 1970.

<sup>338</sup> Stein, 284.

<sup>339</sup> "Bethlehem to Cease Steelmaking in Lackawanna; 3,900 Jobs Lost." *Buffalo News*, 27 December 1982.

<sup>340</sup> Ticknor, 72.

<sup>341</sup> "Republic Picks Cleveland for New Plant, Says Buffalo Remains in Future Plans." *Courier Express*, 21 December 1978.

<sup>342</sup> "The 1980s: Buffalo's Transitional Decade" Services and Trade Overtake Manufacturing, and Links to Canada Strengthen, *Buffalo News*, 31 December 1989.

continued population loss. Bethlehem's restructuring was partially blamed on high labor and environmental control costs associated with the aging Lackawanna site, but their largest losses occurred after it and other productive plants were closed.<sup>343</sup> Paying for early retirement and abandoning capital proved to be too much for the company, which went bankrupt in 2001 and was bought out in 2003. Other companies soon followed, leaving Buffalo with a fraction of the manufacturing jobs it once bragged about.

### The Trico Corporation

The Trico Corporation, Buffalo-based manufacturer of windshield wiper blades and one of the area's top employers, also eliminated its Buffalo locations while placing the blame on high labor costs, reduced auto sales, and competition from abroad. Trico operated three plants in the Buffalo area with a work force of about 5,000.<sup>344</sup> By the 1970s, Trico had built an enviable stock portfolio for a local company, with \$52 million invested in GM, Ford, Exxon, and AT&T. Similar to the steel and auto companies, Trico complained of labor costs, fighting the union (United Auto Workers) in the quest for lower overhead. By 1977, there were signs of trouble, as rumors surfaced about Trico planning to relocate their operations, but management denied these rumors. This happened shortly after the UAW won the right to represent Trico's workers after 35 years

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<sup>343</sup> Leary and Sholes, 113.

<sup>344</sup> "Union Concessions, Public Incentives Weren't Enough To Keep Trico Here." Buffalo News 8 December 2002, in *New York State Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H. Butler Library Research: accessed July 10, 2010.

under the Trico Worker's Union.<sup>345</sup> The key here is that management hinted that finances were stable and that the company would remain in Buffalo as long as economically viable. Goldman argues that Trico did not modernize or try to cut costs because they were making paper profits from their stock portfolio.<sup>346</sup> They coasted until the declining auto industry caused them to reassess their approach. Then in 1985, after weathering the cyclical economy of the early 1980s, Trico announced that it was closing two of the Buffalo plants and moving nearly 1,100 jobs to Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico. This occurred despite the fact that the UAW hired outside consultants to find methods to make the plant more efficient.<sup>347</sup> Trico wanted drastic reductions, not small concessions.

After the relocation, Trico's overhead dropped and its profits increased, but the \$1.20 per hour wages paid to workers in Mexico resulted in shantytowns on the Mexican border and harsh criticism from the UAW.<sup>348</sup> The idea behind building the plant (and others) was for the company to stay solvent, while providing an economic boost for Mexican workers, thus lowering the rate of illegal immigration into the United States. Time has shown that the latter was not true. The illegal passage to the U.S. has continued, while Trico showed that it could lose money regardless of the tax or labor situation. The company posed modest profits and some huge losses until being sold in 1994. In 2002, Trico announced that it would close the remaining Buffalo facility after having moved the headquarters to Michigan four years earlier. Labor made every attempt to help the

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<sup>345</sup> "Trico Management Denies Any Plan to Leave Buffalo." *Courier Express*, 13 May 1977.

<sup>346</sup> Goldman, 213.

<sup>347</sup> Lou Jean Fleron, Howard Stanger and Eileen Patton. *Employment Workplace Practices and Labor-Management Relations in Western New York*. (Buffalo, NY: Western Region, ILR School, Cornell University, 2004): 49; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

<sup>348</sup> "At The Border, A Study In Contrast." *Albany Times Union*, 30 December 2001, in *New York State Newspapers* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed July 10,2010.

company and retain jobs, but the tide of globalization, fostered by government and business, was too powerful to withstand.

### Conclusions on the Role of Management and Labor

As of 2011, Buffalo remained a “dependent” city, lacking capital, relying on outside interests, and still in the process of destructuring. Other Northeastern cities have moved further in the transition to new industry, such as Pittsburgh with its base of corporate control and finance.<sup>349</sup> The 2007 U.S. Census reveals that in Erie County, health care and social assistance jobs are the most numerous, employing 73,571. Retail comes in second at 53,571 and manufacturing has fallen to third at 48,058.<sup>350</sup> Although manufacturing jobs number slightly less than retail, the total payroll is more than double. Manufacturing still provides high-wage jobs, albeit significantly fewer than in previous decades. The Ford Stamping plant, the GM Tonawanda plant, and Dunlop are among some of the high-wage employers. The populations of the city and county continue to drop, while the level of education has risen as Buffalo attempts to move closer to a new economy. The percentage of those in Erie County with a bachelor’s degree (28.4 %) is higher than the nation average (27.4%).<sup>351</sup> In addition, the percentage of those who are age 65 or older

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<sup>349</sup> Douglas Koritz, “Restructuring or Destructuring?: Deindustrialization in Two Industrial Heartland Cities,” *Urban Affairs Review*, no.26 (1991): 497-511. *EBSCOhostResearch* [database on-line], Buffalo State College, E.H.Butler Library Research: accessed July 10,2010.

<sup>350</sup> United States Census Bureau. *United States Census 2007:Selected Statistics by Economic Sector, 2007*; available from <http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/>. Internet; accessed 2 July 2010.

<sup>351</sup> United States Census Bureau. *2006-2008 American Community Survey: 3-Year Estimates*; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Internet; accessed 2 July 2010.

dropped to 12.2% in the city of Buffalo.<sup>352</sup> It seems that a new influx of immigrants has helped a previously aging population to add more youth, which bodes well for a labor force that is also becoming more educated.

The decline of manufacturing in the U.S., and in Buffalo, is the result of a myriad of forces, some of which are part of natural economic transitions. While Buffalo could not keep its geographical advantage, due to shifting (and shrinking) domestic markets, other factors could have prevented the severity of the job losses. Better relations between management and labor, for example, would have led to lower overhead and increased productivity. In the late 1980s, the Steel Tripartite Committee of management, labor, and government joined to discuss depreciation allowances (oil companies received these for years), more time for environmental compliance, new technology promotion, and the trigger price process. After 100 years of steel making, cooperation was taking place.<sup>353</sup> The Japanese manufacturers used this cooperative method all the while, investing in new technology (aided by government), cross-training workers and valuing their ideas, aggressively pursuing foreign markets, and restricting foreign access to their own markets. Some U.S. steel companies, such as Nucor, decentralized their operations and placed the responsibility (and power) within their respective facilities.<sup>354</sup> In this way, the employees have a stake in the company's success and are not ruled by a paternalistic power structure. Meanwhile, Japan has fallen prey to the same globalization process that enriched them, as demand for inexpensive products has caused imports to rise in Japan

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Hoerr, 122.

<sup>354</sup> Roger S Ahlbrandt, Richard J. Fruehan and Frank Giarratani. *The Renaissance of American Steel: Lessons for Managers in Competitive Industries*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.): 70.

since the 1990s. Free trade led Japanese companies to begin to move manufacturing jobs to South Asian countries with lower wages, only to ship the goods back to Japan later.

Companies and workers in Western New York agree that labor-management committees raise productivity. Studies have shown that unionized companies in the area that reform their relationship with labor have higher productivity than non-union companies.<sup>355</sup> The non-union plants in other regions that do have higher productivity are usually newer facilities, so the efficient technology is the mitigating factor. In the U.S., research and development funding is lower in unionized (and older) industry, putting it at a disadvantage.<sup>356</sup> Properly distributed capital, combined with good labor relations and government support (including tax deductions for tuition reimbursement in high-skilled areas), can spell success for a unionized company, while still providing jobs that pay a living wage.

Since the huge job losses of the 1970s and 1980s, companies in Western New York have joined with labor to challenge government through demands for tax incentives and loans for businesses. The relationship is better than ever, but even this has not been enough to stem the tide of globalization and the current recession. The U.S. Department of Labor projects that the U.S. will lose over one million more manufacturing jobs through 2018.<sup>357</sup> The share of the production pie has continued to shrink rapidly as the U.S. transitions to a service economy, like many other industrialized nations. Now, more than ever, government must step up to provide more opportunity for training and

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<sup>355</sup> Lou Jean Fleron, Howard Stanger and Eileen Patton, 33.

<sup>356</sup> Richard Freeman, "Is Declining Unionization of the U.S. Good, Bad, or Irrelevant?," in *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*, eds. Lawrence Mishel and Paula B. Voos, 143-168. (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1992.): 160.

<sup>357</sup> United States Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Overview of the 2008-18 Projections*; available from: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm>. Internet; accessed 2 July 2010.

education for the work force, so they will be eligible for higher paying service jobs.

Unions must use their influence to push for these opportunities, instead of focusing solely on wage and benefit increases in existing jobs. Despite the sharp decline in union membership for manufacturing workers in the U.S. from 1983 (only 11.4% are now members), overall numbers rose in 2007 and 2008.<sup>358</sup> Workers recognize the need for protection in the expanding climate of free trade.

Part of the problem in Western New York, and in the nation in general, is that companies are using profit to purchase debt and to acquire other profitable companies in order to concentrate wealth. Buffalo has suffered more than other areas, not simply because of high wages, but also because of a lack of locally owned companies and available capital. Outside interests do not operate with concern for keeping jobs in the area; they exist to make as much profit as possible and have no vested interest. Therefore, labor is merely an input that must be obtained as cheaply as possible. The growth of service jobs is natural, in that it provides services for those who hold the wealth. This area has grown slower (in terms of service jobs) than the national average because it has less wealth. The growth of government jobs, although lamented by those in business, is natural also given the climate. The U.S. boasts more millionaires than any other nation by far, with one estimate for 2007 reporting over 3,000,000 households with financial assets of over one million dollars, while the richest 1% controlled 24% of income.<sup>359</sup> When wealth becomes concentrated, the middle class shrinks, losing its purchasing power and its share of tax payments to the government. To return that power and stimulate the

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<sup>358</sup> “Union Membership Up Sharply in 2008, Report Says.” *New York Times*, 28 January 2009.

<sup>359</sup> Capgemini and Merrill Lynch, *World Wealth Report:2008*; available from [http://www.us.capgemini.com/DownloadLibrary/files/Capgemini\\_FS\\_WWR08.pdf](http://www.us.capgemini.com/DownloadLibrary/files/Capgemini_FS_WWR08.pdf). Internet; accessed 2 July 2010.

economy (consumption is key), taxes are levied on the rich, which in turn pays for living wage government jobs.

While the service sector has grown, many of these jobs pay much less than union manufacturing jobs. Higher paying service jobs, such as accountants, computer programmers, computer scientists, and mechanical drafters are available to those who possess the educational qualifications, but are also prone to being farmed out to low wage countries such as India. In addition, U.S. defense contractors, who employ engineers at a higher wage level than other industries, have exacerbated the demand for engineers, leaving a shortage for other industries and stifling innovation.<sup>360</sup> A possible solution to this would be for industries to invest in training and development for new engineers, rather than expecting them to arrive completely prepared. These contractors have also been outsourcing manufacturing jobs for parts supplies, further reducing America's manufacturing capacity and making it impossible for the nation to convert to wartime production in the event of a major war.

The decline of manufacturing in Buffalo is a process that could have been slowed (it has been in recent years), but it was inevitable given the worldwide move toward free trade and open borders. Labor was indeed inflexible and its leaders at times corrupt, but even total capitulation could not have staved off the trend of farming out labor to underdeveloped countries. Likewise, even the most astute management could not have competed indefinitely with foreign competition that did not face the pressure of a domestic free market and had the cooperation and support of government. Finally, even local government who might have slashed property taxes and offered incentives could not have offset the willful attempt of the federal government to abandon the manufacturing

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<sup>360</sup> Holland, 269.



sector in favor of other non-trading “paper” industries such as finance, insurance, and real estate. In addition, no amount of government incentives or tax exemptions for entrepreneurs who engage in “start-ups” will create high-tech (and low-skilled) jobs if those companies are free to move their operations overseas without a tariff on the product of that labor when they launch into mass production. An aversion to a trade war is ironic from a federal government that enthusiastically intervenes in foreign affairs without regard to cost. Also, the diminished manufacturing capacity in this country and the lack of an industrial bank (former Buffalo Rep. John LaFalce’s idea) make it difficult to transition to a productive manufacturing business. In a nation of over 300 million people, it is simply not reasonable to expect that the entire work force will consist of highly skilled jobs. There has to be living wage, low-skill employment, or the ranks of the jobless will swell to depression-like numbers and the social assistance sector will become overburdened.

Despite the setbacks of the past, there is still hope for the future of Buffalo and Western New York in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter five will outline several proposed strategies, which may help stem the economic and population decline in Buffalo. These proposals include new zoning laws to replace outdated ordinances that were enacted when Buffalo was a city dependent on heavy industry. Another proposal is capitalizing on Buffalo’s rich history and world-renowned architecture by converting historic structures into new commercial and residential space. Immigration is another strategy to bring a new wave of entrepreneurs into the city and to help stabilize the population, similar to the immigration of the early 1900s, which swelled Buffalo’s population. Buffalo’s low housing prices can act as a magnet for new immigrants. In addition, using

the “shrinking cities” approach to eliminate excess housing may help to increase property values and reduce the amount of city services needed. These vacant parcels of land can then be used for community gardens and urban farms. Together with an improved waterfront that provides convenient access to the Niagara River and Lake Erie, these proposals may move Buffalo from a position of decline to one of revitalization.

## CHAPTER 5

### BLUEPRINTS, PROPOSALS, AND STRATEGIES: PROSPECTS FOR REVITALIZING BUFFALO, NEW YORK IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

“The neighborhood shows a strange inability to update itself, enliven itself, repair itself, or to be sought after, out of choice, by a new generation.”<sup>361</sup> Urban activist and writer Jane Jacobs used this quote to highlight her belief that although homogenous neighborhoods change little in physical terms, perceptions of the neighborhood change greatly. Labels such as “run-down” and “blighted” tend to be used to describe a once-prosperous area that has been tossed aside by the middle class in the rush to resettle in newer, suburban settings. Buffalo is all too familiar with the pattern of demolishing blight and the subsequent attempts to revitalize the area by replacing the unwanted buildings with more modern structures. Does the simple act of replacing old with new lead to a better neighborhood, or is vibrant city life something more than the physical?

What many in the city and those who migrated fail to realize is that Buffalo has always had its share of blight, and even during times of economic prosperity there have been derelict physical structures along with grimy industrial sites. In addition, problems with excess traffic and pollution contributed to a decline in the quality of life in the city. Buffalo, and other large cities, are in a constant state of flux, performing demolitions, building new structures, rehabilitating old structures, and adjusting to traffic levels. The difference between Buffalo’s earlier history and the present is that city leaders have always worked with a growth template, expecting that the population would increase and accommodating for it. Prevailing thought among leaders and planners has always been

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<sup>361</sup> Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of American Cities*. (New York: The Modern Library, 1961.): 259.

that a city that is not growing in population is dying; it will continue to shrink in population and prosperity until it is no longer considered a city in terms of population. During the prosperous times, local leaders failed to accept that slowing population growth would eventually become population decline, and today they see decline as reversible. The growth approach hinders attempts to stabilize population loss and to improve the quality of life for existing residents.

In order to help Buffalo to maximize its vibrancy, economic future, and quality of life, leaders and residents must accept that Buffalo will not return to its position as a manufacturing giant with over a half-million people. Leaders will have to adjust to a new reality and capitalize on the physical and human qualities that make Buffalo unique. The challenge will be to find which strategies will effectively promote these assets, rather than attempting to lure or create a “silver bullet” with the idea that one large project can do what the entire population of a city cannot. The history of Buffalo is littered with these large-scale quick fixes.

The first of these well-intentioned, but ineffective projects was the destruction of the viable Ellicott District neighborhood and its housing project replacement (see Chapters 2 and 3) in the 1950s in an attempt at urban renewal. The damage is still apparent today, as the public housing projects that replaced the homes are isolated from the nearby downtown area. A second was the construction of the 190 section of the New York State Thruway (see Chapter 4), which isolated valuable waterfront property and eliminated neighborhoods. Even with the construction of new waterfront condominiums, the area remains cut off from downtown by the Thruway. A third project was the Kensington/Scajaquada Expressway (see Chapters 3 and 4), which bisected an East Side

neighborhood along with part of Olmsted's Delaware Park. The stable, middle-class neighborhood was decimated in order to expedite travel to downtown and the nearby suburbs. City leaders did not realize that the suburbs would develop their own retail and industry. Decisions like these detract from Buffalo's character while rendering the opinions of its residents as unnecessary. This chapter will examine alternatives to urban renewal decisions of the past in an attempt to find strategies that will help stabilize the population improve the quality of life in Buffalo and make the economy more vibrant.

Any study of how to revitalize a city would be incomplete without the input of the late writer and activist Jane Jacobs, whose ideas on urban life and renewal have been widely read by students of planning, yet largely ignored by modern planners of the postwar era. She advocated community involvement in the form of neighborhood block clubs, which when supported by government, could become agents of change.<sup>362</sup> As part of a larger district, they can work together with other districts to counter the central power of the mayor's office. Gerald E. Frug, Professor of Law at Harvard University, offers a less optimistic opinion that city residents have been acclimated to bureaucracy and the views of planning "experts," while losing their hold on democracy and grass roots power and falling victim to apathy and distrust.<sup>363</sup> Jacobs also echoes the desires of ordinary residents in her support of mixed-use parks, which provide space for different forms of recreation in order to be used frequently.<sup>364</sup> This is counter to the view of expert planners and preservationists in Buffalo, who are more inclined to adhere to Frederick Law Olmsted's original vision of pastoral landscapes. Jacobs opines on waterfronts as

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>363</sup> Gerald E. Frug, *City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.): 23.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid, 198.

well, asserting that cruises and other forms of public access are necessary to draw crowds on weekends and nights, not just working hours. This is in opposition to the power base in Buffalo and their vision of building retail on the waterfront first, anchored by a major tenant.<sup>365</sup> The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC), which controls the latest Buffalo waterfront project, is made up of mostly business leaders and politicians (including Buffalo, NY Mayor Byron Brown and Erie County Executive Chris Collins). The Corporation is more concerned with representing the power structure in the city and county, rather than involving local community leaders. This is reminiscent of past mistakes in Buffalo; ignore the input of the community leaders and push for a “silver bullet” anchor, such as a large retail store. The attraction of the waterfront should be the waterfront itself, along with the historic Erie Canal terminus. These unique assets can attract people who will then attract business. The tendency to downplay the draw of existing assets while pushing for new attractions to be constructed is a common one among Buffalo’s major players.

Another point of contention, especially in Buffalo, among those who study urban life and planning is the recent trend toward embracing and planning for a smaller city footprint. Labeled “shrinking cities” or areas of “smart decline,” several urban areas that have consistently lost population in the postwar era have implemented or are considering altering their planning to accept the fact that population loss is not reversible, at least not to the levels of the peak years after World War II. Youngstown, Ohio and Rochester, New York are two cities that have embraced the concept of a shrinking city and have begun to implement plans to combine demolition of vacant, unusable properties with an effort to consolidate lots into larger parcels that will be reserved for future development

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<sup>365</sup> “Gambling on Success of Bass Pro.” *Buffalo News*, 31 January 2010, B1.

or for “greening.” Lots will be kept landscaped to avoid becoming eyesores, but officials will not encourage building of new homes in a city that has an abundance of available inventory. Several lots may be used for community gardens, which have been successfully initiated in Buffalo in the past with the aid of non-profit organizations such as Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo. Edward Glaser, Harvard Professor of Economics, concurs with the concept of shrinking; maintaining that cities like Buffalo cannot compete at the level of cities in the Sunbelt.<sup>366</sup> They believe that existing, viable neighborhoods (and their residents) should receive assistance from city government to remain sustainable and vibrant. Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown disagrees and asserts: “I don’t buy into the idea that Buffalo needs to shrink.”<sup>367</sup> As his predecessors believed, prosperity and increasing population are dependent on a “silver bullet” project that will draw people and economic development.

Scholars also debate the subject of immigration and its ability to revitalize urban areas. History shows that immigration is a source of innovation, energy, and labor that can keep the cycle of regeneration flowing in cities. Buffalo is a prime example of the contributions of immigrants, with its rich history of Italian skilled tradesmen, Polish domination of the meatpacking industry, Irish contributions to the labor force along with Catholic schools and churches, and German banking and insurance operations.<sup>368</sup> These newcomers enabled Buffalo’s population to swell and strived to better themselves, while helping the city to reach its own potential as a whole. Jane Jacobs points out the

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<sup>366</sup> Edward L. Glaeser. “Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?” *City Journal*, October 2007. Available from: [http://www.city-journal.org/html/17\\_4\\_buffalo\\_ny.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/17_4_buffalo_ny.html). Internet; accessed 24 July 2010.

<sup>367</sup> WGRZ. “Abandoned Housing Crisis In Buffalo.” Accessed from: <http://www.wgrz.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=76773&catid=13>. Internet; accessed 25 July 2010.

<sup>368</sup> Buffalo Architecture and History. “The History of Buffalo, New York.” Accessed from: <http://buffaloah.com/h/histindex.html>. Internet; accessed 29 July 2010.

importance of new immigrants with fresh perspectives and ideas by stating that “Immigrants add new small things and they have a chance to grow.”<sup>369</sup> This is quite the opposite of local leaders, who favor large projects spurred and aided by government that are supposed to create a critical mass to revitalize Buffalo. Agreeing with Jacobs is John O. Norquist, former mayor of Milwaukee, who advocates less-restricted immigration as a means of providing a diverse economy that possesses much more potential than a homogeneous city can.<sup>370</sup> Robert A. Beauregard, Professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University adds that Boston’s first growth in forty years was the result of increased immigration and that New York City saw more new arrivals in the 1980s than during the turn of the century. Meanwhile, Buffalo’s population dropped more in the 1990s than in the 1980s.<sup>371</sup> Immigration had helped other cities to stabilize their population. It was the slowing of immigration, noted by Dowell Myers, USC Planning Professor, which contributed to the decline of Northeastern cities during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>372</sup> Cities benefit from the influx of new blood, which provides a new generation of workers and taxpayers.

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<sup>369</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz. “A Conversation with Jane Jacobs.” *Tikkun Magazine*, May/June 2001.

<sup>370</sup> John O. Norquist. *The Wealth of Cities: Revitalizing the Centers of American Life*. (Reading: Perseus Books, 1998.): 137.

<sup>371</sup> Robert A. Beauregard. *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*. (New York: Routledge, 2003.): 208.

<sup>372</sup> Dowell Myers. *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the Future of America*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007.): 56.



### Zoning Laws

The disadvantages of a homogenous environment also stem from archaic zoning laws in older cities. Professor of Urban Planning and Policy at Rutgers Frank Popper and political science professor at the College of Staten Island Deborah Popper mention that past zoning ordinances were designed in anticipation of growth, when city leaders thought that populations would continue on a never-ending upswing.<sup>373</sup> Buffalo was no exception to this trend; a 2006 comprehensive plan for the city predicted that the population would eventually expand after the decline ended.<sup>374</sup> Leaders refuse to accept that the city will not grow to its former glory and the planning process has reflected this. The report states that zoning ordinances have not been significantly overhauled since 1951.<sup>375</sup> This restriction prohibits the mixed-use (retail, residential, light industry) neighborhoods advocated by 21<sup>st</sup> century planners. In addition, it inhibits the type of mixed-use development envisioned for the downtown area of Buffalo. The origin of this zoning was with the Hoover administration, which modeled zoning to separate industry from housing, producing isolation and lack of residential areas downtown.<sup>376</sup> The suburbs and their new shopping areas negated the need to travel into the city strictly for shopping. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Buffalo city government is replacing its outdated zoning ordinance and attempting to establish “walkable” communities that are not planned around the use of

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<sup>373</sup> Deborah and Frank Popper, 3.

<sup>374</sup> City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning. *Queen City in the 21st Century: Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan*. Buffalo, 2006; accessed from the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library: 1.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>376</sup> Norquist, 106.

automobiles.<sup>377</sup> Public transportation can aid this transformation, if it is properly maintained. The process will also become more streamlined, eliminating some of the barriers to development. The challenge will be for citizen groups and the Common Council to maintain a voice in how land is developed, to avoid project that upset the balance of the area.

### Saving Buffalo's Architecture and History

In addition to outdated zoning laws, failure to preserve diverse architectural gems has helped to hasten decline and hinder gentrification of viable neighborhoods, such as the Hydraulics District in South Buffalo (southeast of the downtown area: see Figure 2), which was dominated by the Larkin Soap Company. One of the more famous structures, the Larkin Administration Building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, was allowed to deteriorate until it was finally demolished in 1950. The Western Trading Corporation purchased the building for a mere \$5000 with plans to build a truck terminal on the site, but later changed the location.<sup>378</sup> A world-class piece of architecture fell due to inept local leaders who were more concerned with quantity over quality. Today, preservationists have fought successfully to have many of Buffalo's landmarks added to the National Register of Historic Places, and many of the structures have been rehabilitated for use as residential property or office space. The building used by Graphic

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<sup>377</sup> Buffalo Rising. "Buffalo Green Code: Mayor Brown Announces Zoning Code Overhaul," BuffaloRising.com, Available from: <http://www.buffalorising.com/2010/04/buffalo-green-code-mayor-brown-announces-zoning-code-overhaul.html>. Internet; accessed 21 July 2010.

<sup>378</sup> Buffalo Architecture and History. "The Larkin Building, Buffalo, NY: History of the Demolition." Accessed from: <http://www.buffaloah.com/h/larkin/admin/index.html>. Internet; accessed 29 July 2010.

Controls in the Larkin district was rehabilitated for office space and light industry in 2001. Various developers have acquired other buildings in the same district, seeking to capitalize on a critical mass. With a mix of high-end residential, light industrial and offices (along with existing homes), the district may eventually attract retail and become a revitalized, mixed-use neighborhood. This model meshes with Jane Jacobs' vision of mixed-use areas that avoid stagnation because they are in use constantly.<sup>379</sup>

A leader in this redevelopment is Howard Zemsky, Managing Partner of Taurus Capital Partners LLC, a privately held investment group. He spearheaded the rehabilitation of the mammoth Graphic Controls building (renaming it the Larkin Building, to acknowledge the history of the Hydraulics District) and has acquired twenty-five other structures in the district, with the intention of creating a mixed-use area of restaurant, parks, apartments, and businesses that will restore the Hydraulics District to its former glory.<sup>380</sup> Zemsky's efforts have begun a critical mass of development and activity in the district, as public and private groups seek to join in the opportunity. Another private developer has purchased the 1.2 million-square-foot former Larkin Manufacturing complex at 701 Seneca Street. Electric company National Grid, First Niagara Bank, the City of Buffalo, and New York State have all contributed to rehabilitate more structures and improve the streets, sidewalks, landscaping, and lighting in the district.<sup>381</sup> The Hydraulics District is beginning to turn the corner through proper urban planning and cooperation by public and private entities.

Another completed project is the Genesee Gateway Building, which comprises an entire city block in the downtown area and is now open for leasing with office, retail, and

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<sup>379</sup> Jacobs, 323.

<sup>380</sup> "Zemsky Sows the Seeds of Revival." *Buffalo News*. 23 May 2010: B1.

<sup>381</sup> "Editorial: Buffalo Rising." *Buffalo News*. 12 December 2010: G4.

residential space. This coincides with Jane Jacobs' vision, as she noted that older buildings have lower capital costs than new builds.<sup>382</sup> National Grid and the Wendt Foundation teamed with developers to get the Genesee Gateway project running. This is an example of cooperation among various groups minus the heavy hand of urban renewal. When local government assists in securing federal and state tax credits for rehabilitating quality structures, rather than attempting to clear the area and replace it with new builds, the area retains its history and character. In 2002, then Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello attended a Pittsburgh preservation exchange where he learned that preservation and reuse of existing structures stimulates the real estate market.<sup>383</sup> Then in 2009, Howard Zemsky testified in Congress on behalf of a federal tax incentive program called the Renewal Community Initiative, which allotted federal funds for rehabilitation of historic structures and gave tax credits for hiring workers from low-income areas. This program led to \$170 million in development in the City of Buffalo, but was not renewed for 2010, due to a poor U.S. economy.<sup>384</sup> These projects have succeeded in saving historically significant structures and providing employment for residents in the immediate area. An added benefit of these successful rehab projects has been the higher concentration of architectural firms headquartered in Buffalo. Rehabilitation of landmarks is an industry in itself and can generate employment and capital for the city. The irony here is that the expansion of industry and the need for space led to the demolition of many historic structures and today the restoration of the remaining gems provides new economic vitality and opportunity for the city.

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<sup>382</sup> Jacobs, 247.

<sup>383</sup> City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning, 38.

<sup>384</sup> "The Buffalo News, N.Y., David Robinson column." *Buffalo News*. 19 Dec. 2010: G4.

### Immigration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Another factor in economic vitality involves the attraction of new residents to the city through a method that proved successful in the past: immigration. Buffalo has not been a major attraction for immigrants in recent years, which has been the case for most of the Northeast, excluding Boston and New York City. Buffalo's percentage of foreign-born residents stood at 4.4% in 2000, but census estimates from 2006-2008 show the percentage moving over 5%.<sup>385</sup> An influx of immigrants could help to stabilize and even slightly expand the population, if the number of immigrants continues to rise. The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians in Philadelphia produced a study which points out that immigration will be the leading cause of population growth (66%) in the U.S. during the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>386</sup> Those cities that welcome immigrants and have programs to help with acclimation to life in an American city have benefited from the influx. More prosperous cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and San Jose would have lost population in the 1990s were it not for the new arrivals.<sup>387</sup>

Buffalo has attracted a number of refugees from the Balkans, Indochina, Latin America and Africa in the past decade, which can bring negative perception, but has yielded positive results. Some critics feel that these immigrants can put a strain on education and social services, but studies show that the public investment provides returns rather quickly. In Buffalo several refugees have become business owners, despite

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<sup>385</sup> United States Census Bureau. *2006-2008 American Community Survey: 3-Year Estimates*; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Internet; accessed 2 July 2010.

<sup>386</sup> Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians. *Urban Revitalization in Philadelphia: Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Improving Opportunity in the Local Economy*. Philadelphia, 2004. Available from: <http://www.welcomingcenter.org/pdfs/ImmigrantEntrepreneurship.pdf>. Internet; accessed 21 July 2010; 5.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, 5.

having no credit history. In New York State, 28.7% of all startups are due to immigrants, who are more likely than natives to start a business.<sup>388</sup> The challenge will be providing help to immigrants through a streamlining of the cumbersome bureaucracy, which can prove insurmountable for some. While there is a need for protection of the public welfare through licenses and permits, the current system takes months for a prospective business owner, who has to pay rent while waiting for permission to start. While there are organizations such as the Westminster Economic Development Initiative that will assist immigrants in navigating the rules, the process itself needs to be simplified to help the entrepreneurs and the economy in general.<sup>389</sup> A business owner contributes more to the economy than a welfare recipient who is forced to waste his or her skills. More proactive cities, such as Boston, provide comprehensive assistance with public funding. The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians helps new arrivals to navigate city services, provides access to English as a Second Language (ESL) services, and registers individuals once they become citizens.<sup>390</sup> In Pittsburgh, the Global Pittsburgh website provides information for immigrants and encourages businesses to hire them.<sup>391</sup> These cities are taking the lead in moving immigrants into the mainstream, rather than waiting for the second generation to contribute.

The path to increased immigration will not be an easy one, however. A 2005 Gallop poll showed that 44% of Americans thought that immigrants were an economic drain, with opinion split along party lines (Republicans were mostly opposed to increased

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<sup>388</sup> "Buffalo's New Entrepreneurs: Rising Number of Immigrants Start Businesses." *Buffalo News*. 25 July 2010: A1.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Welcoming Center, 16.

<sup>391</sup> Alligood, Li Sun. "Creative Shrinkage: In Search of a Strategy to Manage Decline." BUP/MCP Thesis, University of Cincinnati, Design, Architecture, Art and Planning : Community Planning, 2008. Available from: <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/ALLIGOOD%20LI%20SUN.pdf?ucin1212081537>. Internet; accessed 26 July 2010; 52.

immigration).<sup>392</sup> Myths about the “poor” foreigners who refuse to assimilate have caused an increase in the number of respondents who favor a decrease in immigration. Combine this with the controversy over illegal aliens on the U.S. southern border, intense media exposure, and Congressional debate, and the negative perception persists. This occurs despite the fact that immigrants have high rates of self-employment, pay more taxes and accept less welfare on average than natives, and produce billions of dollars in payrolls.<sup>393</sup> Isolated, negative incidents (usually crime) are the focus of media attention, rather than the long-range statistics that give a clearer picture.

Attracting immigrants by creating a department similar to the Office of New Bostonians would help the city in numerous ways. Immigrants from larger cities such as New York are aware of Buffalo’s organizations like Journey’s End Refugee Services, the International Institute of Buffalo, Catholic Charities, and VIVE, Inc., which help immigrants adjust to American life; they advise fellow countrymen to travel to Buffalo because of these opportunities.<sup>394</sup> These organizations provide shelter, food, clothing, along with *pro bono* legal work and support. By expanding these services, Buffalo will be able to take advantage of an influx of youth to reinvigorate its aging population. These groups rely on donations and are not-for-profit ventures. The City of Buffalo has no official government office to assist new immigrants, as Boston does. Government participation with one of the aforementioned organizations would be an improvement, especially if it involved assisting immigrant students and parents with education. This is a missed opportunity to bring in new residents and assist them in making ties to the city through homeownership, entrepreneurship, educational involvement, and association with

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<sup>392</sup> Myers, 6.

<sup>393</sup> Welcoming Center, 12.

<sup>394</sup>“Rally Urges Immigration Reform.” *Buffalo News*. 17 July 2008; B5.

others from their home countries. Presently, the City of Buffalo government serves only as a deterrent to the aspirations of new immigrants through burdensome business regulation and lack of assistance for immigrant students and their parents. As the children and grandchildren of the previous immigrants exit Buffalo for the suburbs, they will be replaced by new immigrants looking for the same opportunities their predecessors had.

### The Shrinking Cities Approach

Aside from stabilizing the population, another point of contention is the push to examine the new concept of “shrinking cities,” or “smart decline.” Cities such as Youngstown, Ohio and Rochester, New York are designing a smaller footprint for their cities by clearing and “greening” vacant properties, rather than opting to build more housing. These areas will then be shut off from city services such as sanitation pickup, snow plowing, and police patrol, which will save money for city government. Buffalo’s heavy population loss since 1950 left the city with a 15.7% vacancy rate for housing units that can cost the public up to \$12,000 over a five year period. There have been 4,500 demolitions since 1995, with plans for 3,000 more.<sup>395</sup> The problem is that there is no plan in place to address what happens after demolition, aside from saving lots for new home construction.

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<sup>395</sup> Local Initiatives Support Corporation. *Blueprint Buffalo: Regional Strategies and Local Tools for Reclaiming Vacant Properties in the City and Suburbs of Buffalo*. Buffalo, 2006. Available from: [http://www.vacantproperties.org/resources/BuffaloBrief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.vacantproperties.org/resources/BuffaloBrief_FINAL.pdf). Internet; accessed 21 July 2010; 9.



Economic experts like Edward Glaeser question the rush to build new homes in cleared areas when there is an oversupply of structures.<sup>396</sup> This will only serve to drive property values down and pull residents from established neighborhoods, such as the historically African-American and middle class neighborhood of Hamlin Park (labeled *HP* in Figure 2). A 2010 Buffalo News study found that Buffalo's new residential builds over the past two decades, which were also subsidized for first-time homebuyers, were bought by people who merely moved from one Buffalo neighborhood to another. Most came from the Hamlin Park area. Only eight percent of the buyers came from outside of the city; many of those were former residents of Buffalo.<sup>397</sup> City government is paying for residents to fill one area at the expense of another area, doing what federal urban renewal did in the 1950s. Funds should be used to strengthen these established neighborhoods by making loans available for rehabilitating older homes. Jacobs calls this "gradual" money, which improves neighborhoods more than massive federal projects that obliterate areas.<sup>398</sup> Neighborhood character results from homeowners taking pride in their property, even if it requires assistance from local government. Unfortunately, the Byron Brown administration has suspended programs for emergency roof repairs, code violation repairs, and down payment and rehabilitation assistance due to a lack of funds.<sup>399</sup> While existing neighborhoods crumble, the local government and developers seek to build new homes and create instant neighborhoods on a blank slate. This approach has been proven to be a failure, as history has shown.

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<sup>396</sup> Glaeser, "Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?"

<sup>397</sup> "The Housing Shuffle." *Buffalo News*. 21 September 2010: B1.

<sup>398</sup> Jacobs, 401.

<sup>399</sup> City of Buffalo. "City of Buffalo Owner-Occupied Housing Programs." City of Buffalo Website. Available from: [http://www.city-buffalo.com/files/1\\_2\\_1/city\\_departments/SPlanning/pdfs/OwnerOccupiedPrograms.pdf](http://www.city-buffalo.com/files/1_2_1/city_departments/SPlanning/pdfs/OwnerOccupiedPrograms.pdf). Internet; accessed 21 July 2010.

Advocates for smart decline, such as Frank Popper, point out that the U.S. is still stuck in the mindset of Manifest Destiny, which dictates that the population must always seek to spread out and populate the whole of the continent.<sup>400</sup> Many who view smart decline as defeatist, including Mayor Brown of Buffalo, have resisted the idea that a city can improve itself by shrinking. Cities that have accepted shrinking have focused on the remaining areas, where they partner with universities, help with business startups, and attempt to lure investment.<sup>401</sup> Some neighborhoods in Buffalo cannot be saved, due to the fact that there are only a few structures left. Buffalo may eventually embrace the concept of shrinking, as neighborhoods continue to depopulate, lowering demand further and becoming magnets for crime.<sup>402</sup> Leaders must begin the process of creating an inventory of vacant properties to decide which areas are beyond rehabilitation.

### Flint, Michigan

The city of Flint, Michigan has dealt with its vacant properties by forming a land bank for the county, which consolidates lots into larger parcels. They have initiated programs such as adopt-a-lot, pocket parks, rehabilitated rentals, and sales of adjacent lots to homeowners for one dollar. This is funded through the state tax foreclosure fee, land sale funds and revenue from brownfields tax increment finance revenue from

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<sup>400</sup>Deborah and Frank Popper, 4.

<sup>401</sup>Laura Schatz. "Innovation in the Face of Population Decline: "Smart Shrinkage" in Youngstown, Ohio." Paper prepared for ACSP/AESOP Roundtable and SCiRN PhD Academy Chicago, Illinois, July 2008. Available from: [http://mailer.fsu.edu/~iaudirac/garnet-iaudirac/WEB2/Youngstown\\_LSchatz.pdf](http://mailer.fsu.edu/~iaudirac/garnet-iaudirac/WEB2/Youngstown_LSchatz.pdf). Internet; accessed 21 July 2010, 9.

<sup>402</sup>Justin P. Hollander. "Moving Toward a Shrinking Cities Metric: Analyzing Land Use changes Associated With Depopulation in Flint, Michigan." *Citiscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research* 12, no.1 (2010), 6.

bonds.<sup>403</sup> Having control over the vacant lots, rather than letting them sit unused has made residents feel safer as well. The operation is self-sustaining and can be replicated in Buffalo. New York State allows counties to create land banks, but no formal arrangements have been made at this time. One problem is that Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are not available for land banking and greening of lots, despite local efforts to introduce federal legislation to allow it.<sup>404</sup> The availability of those funds would open up many opportunities for Buffalo to follow the lead of other cities.

### Youngstown, Ohio

Youngstown's plan, called *Youngstown 2010*, has four main goals to help the city shrink and improve the quality of life in the viable areas. The plan calls for acceptance of population decline and shrinking, defining the city's role in the regional economy, improving the image and quality of life, and includes a call to action for the entire population.<sup>405</sup> Unlike urban renewal, residents are valued for their input and opinions; no one will be forced to move from an area if they refuse. In addition, the plan will be reassessed every ten years. As of 2010, 43% of Youngstown's land was vacant and the

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<sup>403</sup> Joseph Schilling, and Jonathan Logan. "Greening the Rust Belt: A Green Infrastructure Model for Right-Sizing America's Shrinking Cities." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 74, no.4 (2008); 458.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>405</sup> Terry Parris. "Shrinking Right: How Youngstown is miles ahead of Detroit." *Hi Velocity*. 3 June 2010. Available from: [http://www.hivelocitymedia.com/features/Youngstown6\\_3\\_10.aspx](http://www.hivelocitymedia.com/features/Youngstown6_3_10.aspx). Internet; accessed 21 July 2010.

city had lost over half its population since its high point.<sup>406</sup> While Youngstown has a smaller population than Buffalo, the comparisons are very similar.

Youngstown took the initiative and formed the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation (YNDC), a partnership formed by the city government and the Raymond John Wean Foundation, which targeted three areas to revitalize through help with loan down payments for homebuyers. In return, the homeowners must commit to live in the home for three years and participate in neighborhood revitalization.<sup>407</sup> This helps to form a cohesive neighborhood in which residents have the feeling of ownership of the area, not just their homes. The YNDC is very active, listing homes for sale in the target areas, turning vacant lots into parks, gardens and natural habitats, providing “deconstruction training” to recycle materials from demolitions, and marketing the neighborhoods as commercial ventures. They place signs, host welcome parties for new homeowners, and encourage existing neighbors to hold open houses to demonstrate how their home rehabilitation has progressed.<sup>408</sup> Youngstown has very deliberately planned their shrinking, but their plan is not a quick fix and will require years to produce quality results.

### Buffalo Debates the Shrinking Concept

Buffalo has resisted the concept of shrinking, claiming that there is not enough funding available to maintain empty lots, rather than turning them over to developers as

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation. *Programs*. Youngstown, 2010. Available from: <http://www.yndc.org/programs>. Internet; accessed 21 July 2010.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

quickly as possible. Some neighborhood activists, such as the West Side Collaborative point to the rehabilitation of that neighborhood through maintenance and some new builds, but these were not comparable to the decimated areas of the East Side, some of which have more empty lots than homes.<sup>409</sup> Mayor Brown of Buffalo is also not sold on the concept, insisting that the city's population will again begin to grow. While this may be true, given unknowns such as immigration, no one expects the population to return to anywhere near the previous high. In addition, the Albany-based Environmental Advocates of New York reports that up to forty percent of land in Buffalo is made up of brownfields (unused, possibly contaminated land).<sup>410</sup> Many developers currently possess land that is not being developed; allowing them to acquire more wastes opportunities for small entrepreneurs to make the land productive as urban farms or for existing homeowners to expand their acreage. There is simply more supply than demand and new builds will continue to pull down property values.

The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) of Buffalo has called for a series of steps to reclaim vacant properties in order to shrink Buffalo's physical environment. The first step would be to stabilize viable neighborhoods by linking homeowners to rehabilitation resources.<sup>411</sup> This strategy has been proven to produce positive results and return on investment, but Buffalo's current budget situation prohibits additional help for homeowners at present. The LISC also recommends bringing in architects and designers for existing developments to participate in a competition to "right size" Buffalo.<sup>412</sup> Other

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<sup>409</sup> "Can Buffalo Lead the Way in Solving Nation's Vacant Housing Problem?" *Buffalo News*. 26 September 2008.

<sup>410</sup> Environmental Advocates of New York. *Brownfields*. Available from: [http://www.eany.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&catid=36%3Aissues&id=178%3Abrownfields-&Itemid=79](http://www.eany.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=36%3Aissues&id=178%3Abrownfields-&Itemid=79). Internet; accessed 20 March 2010.

<sup>411</sup> Local Initiatives Support Corporation, 20.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

cities, such as Philadelphia, have used this approach to gain new perspectives on city planning. In addition, the LISC suggests a citywide vacant properties enforcement unit, which could handle any legal issues and save money in the long run.<sup>413</sup> While Buffalo resists these efforts, other cities such as Philadelphia are proving that greening vacant lots can increase nearby real estate sales prices by as much as 30%.<sup>414</sup> Updating zoning laws, streamlining and consolidating redevelopment programs, and creating a land bank (possibly countywide) to shut down services to selected areas can help to achieve savings and increase tax revenue by making existing properties more valuable.

While the city of Rochester, New York, which is smaller than Buffalo in land area and population, turns to abandoning (including demolitions and elimination of city services) entire neighborhood areas to transform them into “green” or park-like areas, Buffalo insists that it will not permanently shut down sections of the city. Although thousands of vacant structures have been demolished, the city government has no comprehensive plan to reuse the empty lots that are scattered all over the city.<sup>415</sup> City government has again stood by passively as private, not-for-profit organizations have utilized the lots for urban farming and community gardens. Like with immigration, the city government has been an impediment to these individuals who seek to reuse the properties, instead of acting as a coordinator. The archaic city planning code discourages agriculture and city officials claim that empty parcels are to be reserved for future residential development.<sup>416</sup> This is another example of city government displaying the

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>415</sup> “Shrinking of Cities Catches Traction.” *Buffalo News*. 21 August 2010: B1.

<sup>416</sup> Al Vaughters. “Is Vacant Lot Opportunity for Growth?” *WIBV. Com*. 6 April 2009. Available from: [http://www.wivb.com/dpp/news/is\\_vacant\\_lot\\_opportunity\\_for\\_growth\\_090406](http://www.wivb.com/dpp/news/is_vacant_lot_opportunity_for_growth_090406). Internet; accessed 21 March 2010.

lack of a comprehensive plan, instead relying on scattered development that only benefits developers themselves and gives city government leaders an opportunity to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Building additional housing in a city with a declining population makes less sense than redeveloping existing structures (such as the aforementioned Hydraulics District), which offer the added benefit of historical charm and character.

### Examples From Other Areas

While Youngstown, Rochester, and Flint have set examples, they have also shown which pitfalls to avoid. To succeed in right sizing, cities must avoid the mistakes of urban renewal by making their effort a collaborative one. Proper community involvement with planning and execution is a must. Youngstown started workshops in 2002 to bring together community leaders and groups, business owners, labor unions, and individuals. They submitted their ideas and concerns to a professional urban planning group, which then used advertisements to inform the people of Youngstown of their plans.<sup>417</sup> This is in contrast to the previous heavy-handed methods of urban renewal (discussed in chapters 2 and 3), which obliterated neighborhoods without citizen input. Despite the careful planning, Youngstown has had some difficulties, such as long-time residents who refuse to relocate, but will not use eminent domain to force them out.<sup>418</sup> Patience is key for the

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<sup>417</sup> Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation.

<sup>418</sup> Les Christie. "You Can't Pay Them Enough to Leave." *CNNMoney.com*. 24 April 2008. Available from: [http://money.cnn.com/2008/04/15/real\\_estate/Youngstown\\_plan\\_roadblock/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2008/04/15/real_estate/Youngstown_plan_roadblock/index.htm). Internet; accessed 21 July 2010.

plan to succeed and not alienate residents. Flint has experienced problems with poorly kept vacant lots in predominately poor, African-American neighborhoods.<sup>419</sup> The small percentage of owner-occupied structures in poor areas prevents the city from selling adjacent lots. In addition, Philadelphia encountered problems with concerned residents after failing to properly engage them in the reclamation process for areas to be cleared and removed from city services.<sup>420</sup>

Philadelphia did show innovation in the process of greening lots, however. The city uses workforce-training organizations to provide individuals who are homeless or ex-convicts to tend to the vacant lots. They receive funds from the U.S. Department of Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Forest Service and report an increase in adjacent property values of 17%, while lots that remained abandoned caused a 20% decrease.<sup>421</sup> Buffalo can use ideas similar to these to increase the amount of parkland in the city; some West Side groups have already done so. The Fargo Estate Neighborhood Community Garden on Buffalo's West Side is one example of a community garden, which was established with the help of the aforementioned Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo. Even city government admits that Buffalo has less parkland than other cities of comparable size.<sup>422</sup> This approach works best on neighborhoods that have small pockets of vacant properties, rather than most of the area.

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<sup>419</sup> Hollander, 12.

<sup>420</sup> Schilling and Logan, 460.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, 456.

<sup>422</sup> City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning, 97.



### The “Greening” of Buffalo

Those areas that have large numbers of vacancies are perfect candidates for land banking. While it would be counterproductive to hand this land to developers for home construction, the land can still serve a useful purpose: urban agriculture. Buffalo is home to several urban agriculture ventures, including the Wilson Street Urban Farm. Owner Mark Stevens started the farm on a small parcel of vacant lots on the East Side, despite initial objections from city government. The city wanted to keep the land available for development and avoid contamination problems, so Stevens was forced to sign an agreement to let the city take the property if they have a buyer and was also required to use raised beds for his crops. The delay and the extra costs made the farm unprofitable in the initial year, but a full growing season and an expected doubling of crops should help Stevens turn a profit in 2010.<sup>423</sup> Stevens moved from a rural area of Western New York to farm in the inner city and contribute to a sense of community through the introduction of impoverished residents to nature and the benefits of fresh produce. Dagmar Haase, researcher at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig, Germany, also notes that this “perforation” of properties can benefit the city by providing biodiversity that highly developed areas cannot.<sup>424</sup> There is a considerable need for fresh produce on Buffalo’s East Side (see Figure 2), as the area is home to only one supermarket. Perhaps the homestead program could be linked to a volunteer organization to help homeowners start their own gardens after purchasing adjacent lots for one dollar.

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<sup>423</sup> Dave McKinley. “Urban Farming Catching On In Buffalo and Across America.” WGRZ.com. March 2010. Available from: <http://www.wgrz.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=75660&catid=37>. Internet; accessed 23 July 2010.

<sup>424</sup> Dagmar Haase. “Urban Ecology of Shrinking Cities: An Unrecognized Opportunity?” *Nature and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2008); 2.

Another urban agriculture venture in Buffalo is the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP), supported by public and private funds, which describes itself as “an urban agriculture youth development program, that includes an urban farm and greenhouse, a Farm to School Program, a youth dinner coop, a Mobile Market and Youth enterprise program.”<sup>425</sup> The organization employs teens that are trained in farming and business skills, and includes an aquaponics system to raise tilapia fish for local buyers. MAP also runs a mobile market, which services several areas of the city along with community workshops.<sup>426</sup> Like the Wilson Street Urban Farm, MAP provides the community with education, skills, and sustenance. This is important, considering that most food products are shipped between 1,500 and 2,000 miles on average to U.S. cities, with seven to fourteen days in transit.<sup>427</sup> Projects such as these are vital, as more farmland in Erie County is lost to sprawl and small neighborhood stores lack fresh produce. In addition, the presence of workers and volunteers laboring at these farms can act as a deterrent to crime in the area.<sup>428</sup> The teens that work on urban farms will use their job skills later as adults, so linking schools to the projects is a natural fit.

Another urban farm venture is Queen City Farms on Buffalo’s East Side. The farm operates on three acres of vacant land and sustains itself through donations and by selling a portion of its harvest. The remaining crops will be sold at affordable prices to the neighborhood, providing fresh produce to those who cannot travel to a supermarket. In 2010, a greenhouse was added, with volunteer help from Americorps and donations from

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<sup>425</sup> Massachusetts Avenue Project. “Programs at MAP.” Available from: <http://www.mass-ave.org/>. Internet; accessed 23 July 2010.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> North American Urban Agriculture Committee of the Community Food Security Coalition. *Urban Agriculture and Community Food Security in the United States: Farming from the City Center to the Urban Fringe*. Available from: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/PrimerCFSCUAC.pdf>. Internet; accessed 27 July 2010; 4.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 18.

the home improvement retailer Home Depot.<sup>429</sup> In addition, local schools and colleges use the farm as an opportunity for community services hours. The farm uses the vacant land to provide goods for the immediate area and services for the entire city. In the past, this land would have been saved for developers to profit from.

Another non-for-profit organization helping to make Buffalo more aesthetically pleasing is Grassroots Gardens. Grassroots began in 1992 and is involved in over 70 community gardens throughout the city of Buffalo.<sup>430</sup> They use parcels of vacant land and assist residents in creating and maintaining community gardens. Grassroots partners with several schools, block clubs, and businesses to help sustain itself, while being sponsored by several Buffalo Common Council members and local foundations. Grassroots also promotes conservation through the use of rain barrels and rain gardens. This organization is another example of public/private partnership that improves the quality of life for city residents.

### Upgrading Existing Parks

While mentioning the subjects of greening vacant lots and urban farming, Buffalo's existing parks must be addressed as well. The system of parks and parkways designed by Frederick Law Olmsted are part of the city's charm, something that adds to the quality of life in the area. The city has recently reacquired the maintenance of the system from Erie

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<sup>429</sup> Americorps. National Service. "Greenhouse Goes Up at Queen City Farms." Available from: <http://www.wnyamericorps.org/greenhouse-goes-queen-city-farms>. Internet; accessed 20 March 2011.

<sup>430</sup> Grassroots Gardens of Buffalo. Available from: <http://www.grassrootsgardens.org/>. Internet; accessed 20 March 2010.

County and plans to adhere to the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy's plan. The *Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is ambitious, but will likely prove too costly for city government to fund in full, especially the proposed modifications to the Kensington/Scajaquada Expressway, which the Conservancy would like to see narrowed to one lane and covered in the below-grade sections.<sup>431</sup> The expressway has caused disruption to Delaware Park and to the surrounding neighborhood, but massive federal funds for highway removal or downgrading are unlikely to be allocated any time soon. In addition, the Conservancy's desire to restore the parks to Olmsted's original design of huge expanses of pastoral landscape bordered by dense trees is contrary to Jane Jacobs' view that parks should be inviting, with recreational activities at the borders.<sup>432</sup> The Conservancy would move these areas out of sight, which could discourage residents from using them frequently. Delaware Park is a good example of a frequently used, visible park that makes its recreational attractions accessible. The parks in the Olmsted system are large enough to accommodate structured and unstructured activity. Continued, everyday maintenance is critical to keeping the parks attractive, while occasional improvements will satisfy the Conservancy and its supporters.

### Improving the Waterfront

Another natural attraction that needs to be addressed is Buffalo's waterfront. Improvements have been made to waterfront property, but a comprehensive plan has yet

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<sup>431</sup> Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy. *The Olmsted City. The Buffalo Olmsted Park System: Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Robert G. Shibley and Lynda H. Schneekloth. Buffalo, N.Y.: 2008; 112.

<sup>432</sup> Jacobs, 348.

to be implemented. The 1970s saw the creation of the Erie Basin Marina, in the 1980s Waterfront Village condominiums were built, and in 2008 a 13-story tower and additional mid-rise condominiums were completed. While more downtown/waterfront residents will provide more opportunity for retail, office, and entertainment venues, city government should focus more on simplifying the permit process for retailers who wish to locate in these areas, so as to provide more diversity and avoid isolating residents. A vibrant, viable neighborhood possesses what Jacobs calls "...pools of mutual support..." Residents will then mix with workers, creating opportunity for activity on nights and weekends, instead of strictly weekdays. Buffalo has a history of single-use areas, mostly due to zoning laws, which eventually become isolated and die out. Shopping districts, theater districts, and office districts are only in use during certain times of the day, preventing the vitality of a mixed-use environment.

The Chippewa district is an example of an area that had the potential to become diverse after Mark Goldman started the Calumet Arts Cafe, a restaurant that featured various types of live music, but now has begun to morph into what Goldman terms a "bar-driven strip."<sup>433</sup> Problems with disturbances caused by a critical mass of drinking establishments have caused the area to develop a reputation similar to the one it had twenty years earlier, when it was a red-light district. In 2010, four people were killed outside a bar five blocks south from the Chippewa district, negatively affecting the image of Buffalo's bar scene. A better mix of venues can negate these types of problems, but the demand for youth-oriented bars and the need to sell huge amounts of liquor to turn a profit makes that unlikely. Increased police presence and earlier closing times have been proposed, but no decisive action has been taken.

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<sup>433</sup> Donn Esmonde. "Chippewa's Pioneer Has Some Regrets." *Buffalo News*. 28 March 2010.

Another cause for concern is the current waterfront plan, dubbed “Canal Side,” which has spawned argument over the importance of securing an “anchor tenant.” Seeking a mammoth office or retail development, chairman of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) Jordan Levy echoes the failed projects of the past.<sup>434</sup> Seeking a “silver bullet” to instantly revive the area, Levy’s vision is contrary to Jacobs, who asserts that primary uses do not create diversity alone.<sup>435</sup> Economic professor at Buffalo State College Bruce Fisher concurs, stating that retail itself will not create density.<sup>436</sup> Building a large retail store or office building does not have the same effect of several small, mixed venues. Combine these with natural and genuine historical attractions and the area becomes unique to Buffalo.

The ECHDC’s board of directors is comprised of a Buffalo lawyer, a former city administrator, a New York State labor representative, two executives from the Rich Products Corporation, a venture capitalist, the mayor of Buffalo, the Erie County Executive, and an environmental activist. There are no experts in urban planning on the board and until recently, the planning process had been closed to the public. The early emphasis on securing a large retailer is a result of the lack of urban planning expertise and the misguided belief that retailers lure people rather than people luring retailers, as was proven by the development of the suburbs. Participation from the community, including preservationists and urban planners who can offer a concept rather than ideas for projects, was missing.

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<sup>434</sup> Mark Sommer. “Where Does Canal Side Go from Here? Anchor Tenant Versus Small Buildup.” *Buffalo News*. 1 August 2010.

<sup>435</sup> Jacobs, 211.

<sup>436</sup> Bruce Fisher, “What Will it Take?” *Artvoice* 6, no.44 (October 31, 2007). Available from: [http://artvoice.com/issues/v6n44/news/what\\_it\\_will\\_take](http://artvoice.com/issues/v6n44/news/what_it_will_take). Internet; accessed 26 July 2010.

The fact that the waterfront is on the shore of a Great Lake (Erie) and contains the terminus of the legendary Erie Canal makes for such an attraction. Edward T. McMahon, director of land use planning for The Conservation Fund, points out that people want authentic attractions that are unique to the area.<sup>437</sup> The restoration of the Erie Canal and the cobblestone streets of the district provide unique attractions. Visitors can travel anywhere in the country to see a colossal retail store, but not for the Erie Canal terminus. In addition, the ECHDC has acted independently, repeating the past pattern of exclusion, by not soliciting the input of the public. Buffalo restaurant owner and author Mark Goldman states: "As long as there is no buy-in from the community, all these projects are bound to fail."<sup>438</sup> Legal challenges to the attempts to lure an anchor tenant show how Buffalo's residents have learned from the mistakes of the past and now work to hold leaders accountable to the public, while forcing them to heed public opinion.

The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation's (ECHDC) Board of Directors later changed its plans, focusing more on access to the waterfront than luring an anchor tenant. In 2011, the Board extended the contract for the Central Wharf, renewed a contract with Buffalo Place (a not-for-profit organization that partners business leaders and legislators) to provide more than 300 events at the Inner Harbor, approved repairs for the Buffalo Lighthouse, and announced the creation of a water taxi service. In addition to these improvements, plans have been made for a public canal system, bridges, and a street plan that is based on maps from the late-1800s. Also included in the proposed construction are retail space, a hotel, and a public market. These changes were the result of public pressure for a "lighter, quicker, cheaper," option that could be built immediately

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<sup>437</sup> Edward T. McMahon. "Lowell, Other Cities Preserve Their Heritage," in *Cities and Growth: A Policy Handbook*, ed. Roger L. Kemp, 147-150. London, McFarland and Company, 2008; 148.

<sup>438</sup> Sommer.

and at minimal cost.<sup>439</sup> What is critical here is access to the waterfront and to the historic Erie Canal Terminus; these are what will attract people to that area. If people are attracted, then retailers and hotels will follow. A mixed-use approach will help ensure that people will visit the site at different times, providing more demand for these services.

### Conclusions on New Strategies

Buffalo has shown signs of resurgence in the past two decades, despite continued (but slowing) population loss. The city has once again become desirable for young professionals who seek the vibrancy of urban life and enjoy living close to their place of employment. Beauregard notes that these professionals, along with immigrants moved into cities in the 1990s, but doubts that middle class families would choose the city.<sup>440</sup> If Buffalo can improve the quality of life through smart decline, then families will be drawn to a city with a good mix of essential services (police, fire, education), unique attractions, cohesive neighborhoods, an enhanced reputation, and public activities. The city must focus on areas that can be improved, and amputate those areas it cannot support.

The continued influx of immigrants may help to stabilize the population, but care must be taken to ensure that they receive the assistance to enable them to maximize their potential and move into the middle class, while still desiring to remain in the city. Buffalo should make every effort to expand its public involvement in immigrant services, whether that means starting a separate department, or simply assisting the private

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<sup>439</sup> Mark Sommer. "Activists Turn Up the Heat on Harbor Development." *Buffalo News*. 27 November 2010: B1.

<sup>440</sup> Beauregard, 217.



organizations that currently exist. Immigration will be the key to innovation and growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Buffalo must harness this potential to remain viable as a large city.

In addition, Buffalo must also continue and support its experiments with urban agriculture. The Massachusetts Avenue Project, Wilson Street Urban Farm, and Queen City Farm have shown that private organizations can work together with universities, individuals, and businesses to create ventures that positively affect neighborhoods. City government must support these efforts, if not with funding than at least with simplified bureaucracy. A city of over 260,000 people can support more than a handful of urban farms; government can help the city become self-sustaining while promoting health and entrepreneurship.

Those benefits also apply to the waterfront as well. The opportunity to enjoy a natural wonder, along with one of the greatest man-made wonders, will draw people and add to the quality of life in the city. If public input is valued, and those in positions of power can show some deference to the public, the waterfront can reach its potential as a unique Buffalo attraction. What this has in common with the other proposals to improve Buffalo is that it has the greatest chance of succeeding if all parties are allowed to contribute to the discussion. Residents, business leaders, public officials, and planners must collaborate to produce blueprints that will not fail due to unforeseen problems. This type of cooperation has helped to move other rust belt cities such as Youngstown, Rochester, and Flint into the future; Buffalo must join them in the move toward quality over quantity.

## CHAPTER 7 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the primary sources, several conclusions are apparent in regards to the economic and population decline of Buffalo during the last six decades. First, Buffalo's political leaders have been grossly inadequate in their distribution of federal funds. Their attempts at a "silver bullet" project that will cause a major spin-off of jobs, development, or in-migration have proved futile. This approach is repeated in the recent attempts to lure a major retailer to the waterfront, which had to be challenged in court by community activists. In addition, scattershot development has been used in place of a comprehensive plan for the city. Buffalo needs government leaders who will willingly partner with private interests and encourage citizen input to promote improvements to benefit the city as a whole. The "lighter, quicker, cheaper" approach to waterfront access and the trend of urban agriculture are examples of this.

Second, the poor state of race relations in Western New York has done irreparable damage to Buffalo. After years of discrimination, African Americans are now increasingly isolated in the center city. Whites have fled in great numbers to suburban areas, causing sprawl and increased infrastructure costs. Urban planning decisions (such as the Kensington Expressway) were made without regard to the African American neighborhoods and benefited developers and suburban commuters.

Third, the reliance on the automobile has led to a bias in the distribution of federal funds. Low-income residents of Buffalo are shut out of employment opportunities in suburban areas due to the inadequate system of public transportation. While the majority of funds have been spent on highways and wider streets, public transportation has

regressed to a point where it is less efficient than it was in the late-1800s. The Western New York area cannot be a cohesive region without a comprehensive system of public transportation.

Fourth, the demands of labor unions are not the sole reason for the decline of manufacturing jobs in Western New York. While businesses did struggle with increasing labor costs, a better relationship between the two parties, with the mediation of government, could have prevented some of the jobs losses. Government must offer incentives for businesses that stay in the area and place financial pressure (tariffs, regulation) on those who move their operations overseas. The development in Buffalo's Hydraulics District is an example of cooperation between government and business that has led to progress. However, labor unions must continue to be flexible in order to retain jobs and help businesses stay competitive.

Lastly, in order to remain a viable, large city, Buffalo must be willing to learn from similar cities that have had success in stabilizing economic and population loss. As mentioned in chapter six, promoting immigration and helping immigrants to adjust to life in Buffalo can help build communities to replace those that have migrated elsewhere. Also, developing a comprehensive plan for vacant land should include the continued support of organizations that assist residents in starting and maintaining community gardens. Urban agriculture must be promoted and assisted by city government as a viable alternative to new housing developments on large, vacant parcels. This will provide sustenance for low-income areas rather than enriching developers. In addition, Buffalo residents must continue to demand that the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation provides a waterfront plan that grants access to the water and promotes the historic Erie

Canal Terminus, rather than one that relies on failed approaches. Buffalo can be a viable, but smaller city that is attractive to people of all races and socioeconomic statuses.

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