“Sugar Top” and the “Cobblestone Jungle”:

Urban Redevelopment in Pittsburgh’s Hill District 1955-1959

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ABSTRACT

From 1955 to 1963, the city of Pittsburgh implemented a redevelopment movement to remove the Hill District, a slum that stood between the city’s two central neighborhoods. The Pittsburgh Redevelopment Movement viewed the mostly African American Hill District as a “blighter barrier” to the city’s modernization. Thus, Mayor Lawrence and his government chose the Hill’s lower class region, the Lower Hill, as the construction site for a Civic Arena and “Cultural Acropolis” in an attempt disintegrate this slum. The 1950s Hill District held the majority of Pittsburgh’s African Americans, however it was not an enclave of black unity or solidarity. The Hill District became a space in which class struggles waged until the Civil Rights Movement, when the black middle and lower classes united as a race in response to redevelopment’s threats. This study unpacks the Hill District black middle class’s allowance of the Lower Hill District’s destruction until 1963, when the community declared that redevelopment could continue “Not Another Inch.”

The Pittsburgh Courier, the black middle class’s newspaper based in the Hill District, is the primary source examined by this thesis. The Courier was based in the Hill District and reflected the ways in which the black middle class imagined its class identity and its relationship with the Hill District’s lower classes. Its articles revealed the counter-consciousness that caused the black middle class to adopt Pittsburgh redevelopment rhetoric and refuse to seek community solidarity along racial lines. The change in the
Courier’s portrayal of urban redevelopment in 1963 ended the black middle class’s adoption of redevelopment rhetoric and revealed a new “black” discourse.

The purpose of this study is to tease out the Pittsburgh redevelopment movement’s counter-history: the history of how the Hill District ultimately redefined Pittsburgh redevelopment. This thesis examines the change in the Pittsburgh Courier’s responses to the urban renewal movement, but also the change in the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s actions. I will unpack the ways in which the Civil Rights and Pittsburgh redevelopment movements ultimately created a Hill District identity of “blackness.” This study reveals the intricate and contradictory effects of urban renewal.
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INTRODUCTION:
Pittsburgh and its Hill District

The progression from the slums of the Lower Hill to the tenement blocks of the Middle Hill and the green avenues of the Upper Hill is almost a diagrammatic outline of the American dream.

-- Franklin Toker

Notwithstanding the unforgivable indignities to which Negroes in Pittsburgh were constantly subjected, the inescapable, lamentable truth is that never at any point in time have we truly united for the interests of all Negroes in this area.

-- Ralph Lemuel

In 1955 the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority announced its plans to construct a Civic Arena as the centerpiece of the city’s Renaissance movement, which planned urban renewal and redevelopment projects to modernize the city. The Civic Arena would allow city officials to unite Pittsburgh’s central business and educational districts by modernizing the slum that stood between them: the Hill District. The Hill District was a predominantly black neighborhood adjacent to Pittsburgh’s central business district. The city’s elite predominantly white power structure considered the Hill solely as a deteriorating slum. My thesis analyzes race, class and urban renewal through the lens of the Pittsburgh Courier, and its coverage of the construction of the Civic Arena from 1955 to 1959. Based in the Hill District, the Courier was an African American newspaper and the voice of the black middle class. This newspaper provides a unique vantage point on the effort to “renew” or more appropriately remove the Hill District.

This thesis’s investigation of the Courier’s stories and responses to the construction of the Civic Arena from 1955 to 1959 highlights the Pittsburgh redevelopment movement’s counter-history; the class relations within the Hill District that reveal why the government was able to demolish


part of a community with little protest. The Hill District’s middle class adopted the Renaissance rhetoric in support of the Civic Arena’s construction over the Lower Hill in an attempt to gain power and mobility outside of the Hill. The redevelopment of the Lower Hill drastically impacted the social and physical structure of the Hill District as a whole. Through the Courier, the discourse and attitudes of the Hill District’s class stratification and racial geography that shaped its redevelopment become clear.

In my thesis I define class in accordance to Eric Lott’s definition that class is an “analytical tool and historiographical category,” that allows a group to define itself against an “other.”³ In this thesis the Hill’s black middle class defines itself against multiple others: the black lower and working classes of the Lower Hill, as well as Pittsburgh’s white elites. The relationships in which the black middle class engaged with these “others” shaped their class-consciousness and reflected a desire to gain political power both within the Hill District and within the city of Pittsburgh. Cross-class interactions further emphasized class boundaries as middle class actions solidified the Upper Hill’s role as the progress and hard-working area and alienated the working and lower classes, according to Lott.⁴ In my thesis, cross-class interactions between the Upper and Lower Hill District revealed that the middle class perceived the working class neighborhood as a public space of leisure value rather than a neighborhood of equal economic and social worth. In order to understand the relationship between the Hill District’s Upper and Lower Classes during Pittsburgh’s Urban Redevelopment Movement, the topography and ethnic relations within the city must be contextualized and historicized. As we shall see, the racial and class geography of the Hill District reflected the complexities and

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⁴ Lott, 51
distinctiveness of the city’s varied topography that framed its segregation, as well as its particular history of settlement.

**The Heart of Pittsburgh: The Golden Triangle, Oakland, and The Hill**

Pittsburgh’s three rivers -- the Monongahela, Alleghany, and Ohio -- frame the “Golden Triangle,” downtown Pittsburgh’s central business district. Its location at the convergence of three rivers allowed for efficient trade and a means of competing with other American cities involved in the industrial market. The Golden Triangle also housed the Pittsburgh City Council and the mayor’s office. During the 1900s through the 1950s, Mellon Bank, US Steel offices and other businesses densely packed the Triangle’s two hundred and fifty-five acres. Thus, the city’s most influential banking and industrial forces’ offices operated within one concentrated area. All Pittsburgh major metropolitan roads point to the Golden Triangle, which asserts the area’s dominance and reputation as the Pittsburgh area’s corporate power core. Geographically and economically centered in the heart of Pittsburgh, the Golden Triangle is, and was, the national face Pittsburgh presents to the United States. It was the most public part of the city.

Pittsburgh’s second most influential neighborhood, or “second founding,” is Oakland. Three miles east of the center of the city, Oakland is the intellectual center of Pittsburgh. From its perch above the city on a plateau about a mile long and a half-mile wide, Oakland houses the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, numerous museums, cathedrals, and the main Carnegie Library. Between these two powerful metropolitan areas rests Pittsburgh’s Hill District, a low-income neighborhood alien to its thriving surroundings. Bounded by two of the

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5 Toker, 19
6 Ibid., 21
7 Ibid., 80
city’s central roads, Fifth Avenue on the Hill’s lower end and Bigelow Boulevard in the north, the Hill District was traditionally defined in the eyes of downtown elites by its poverty.  

As seen in Figure 1 in the Appendix, the Hill District was nestled in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh but did not contain similar infrastructure or industry. The Pittsburgh landscape defined the Hill’s rectangular shape. Its shorter ends border the Golden Triangle and Oakland. From 1900 to 1959 the Hill District, also known as the Third and Fifth Wards, consisted of three sections: the Lower Hill, Middle Hill, and Upper Hill. Figure 2 of the Appendix shows the structure of the present day divisions of the Hill District. Because of Pittsburgh's hilly topography, the Lower and Middle Hill stood physically beneath the Upper Hill. The Lower Hill, roughly 100 acres, was the area from Grant Street to Crawford Street—Grant is one of the central streets in downtown Pittsburgh and Crawford was one of the central streets to the Hill District, although presently most of this area has been “redeveloped” and is no longer residential. Where houses once stood, a three-lane highway cuts into the neighborhood to allow convenient access to the Civic Arena, home to the Pittsburgh Penguins ice hockey team. The Middle Hill began on Crawford and extended until Herron Avenue, near the University of Pittsburgh and the outskirts of Oakland. Finally, the Upper Hill extended upward from Herron Avenue to Bigelow Boulevard at the top of Herron Hill. Thus, the Upper Hill rested at the top of the Hill, and overlooked the Lower Hill below it. This topography was crucial to the history of the Hill District.

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8 Buni, Andrew, Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974, 24
9 Toker 234
From Immigrant Stronghold to Cultural Enclave

Pittsburgh’s topography of mountains, plateaus and valleys isolated migrating ethnic groups into pockets distributed randomly throughout the city during the 1900s. Originally the Lower Hill District housed prosperous European immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany. Wylie Avenue in the Lower Hill District was a former locale of runaway slaves known as “Little Hayti.” From the 1850s through 1890s, the Hill District’s prosperous immigrants relocated as poor Jewish and Italian immigrants arrived. Between 1900 and 1930, Pittsburgh’s ethnic group concentrations conformed to the natural boundaries the land presented: Italians lived in Bloomfield and part of East Liberty, while Poles lived in Polish Hill and the South Side. Ethnic neighborhoods became segregated as generations of immigrants moved to areas where the majority of their ethnic group lived. Unlike these segregated ethnic communities the early Hill District was an integrated and multicultural space where a large percentage of residents were African American.

Although during the first half of the twentieth century the Hill District attracted European immigrants, by the 1950s it became a segregated black neighborhood. Before World War II, the Hill District’s residents were diverse and lived in harmony. Its population was separate from other black communities in Pittsburgh such as Homewood and Braddock, which were also isolated from one another and lacked political power within city government. This phenomenon of “severe fragmentation” in the black community prevented a black solidarity and

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11 Bodnar, 209
12 Buni, 23
13 Glasco, Laurence, “The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh: To Make This City ‘Some Place Special,’” [unpublished scholarly article, University of Pittsburgh], 4
14 Toker, 275
weakened black political power in a city where economic opportunities were few. Unlike the Hill, Homewood and Braddock did not hold the majority of Pittsburgh’s African Americans and were not nestled between the two main metropolitan neighborhoods and thus held a less threatening presence in the eyes of the city government. Homewood and Braddock’s low-income communities did not present the city government with a constant reminder of the poverty and deterioration of low-income communities.

The Lower Hill bordered Pittsburgh’s central business and industrial district. Its convenient location and diverse population appealed to working class immigrants. Black immigrants in nearby states did not have to travel far to reach the lucrative Lower Hill. The majority of African American migrants in the early 1900s arrived from Virginia, Washington D.C., and Maryland to a Lower Hill that consisted of a mixture of African American, Jewish, Italian, Irish, and Lebanese families. Consequently early twentieth-century black migrants and European immigrants, with no connections in Pittsburgh, moved to the Lower Hill in hopes of housing, employment and the fulfillment of the American Dream.

In her memoir of her childhood in the Lower Hill District during the 1920s, Gloria Fuller Smith wrote that “living in the 2800 block were Irish-Scotch, Polish and African Americans. On the block behind us, Barn Way (to our north) was Jewish people...” Her childhood address in the Lower Hill no longer exists due to Civic Arena construction. Smith, who is African American, describes dinners with her Irish neighbors and neighborly garden competitions with her Polish neighbors. The Lower Hill was “like a little town where people were involved with

16 Bodnar, 154
17 Bodnar, 175-177
18 2806 Breckinridge Street in the Lower Hill
the marriages, births, deaths of one another." Smith’s recollections of a lack of crime, abundance of good living conditions, and intimacy help reveal the community that initially existed within the Lower Hill District. In the 1910s through 1930s, the Lower Hill’s racial and ethnic integration molded the community’s culture and identity. However, while the Hill’s culture thrived, its structures fell apart from age, overcrowding, and disease.

Because their construction dated back to the 1860s and 1870s, the Lower Hill’s brick row houses lacked indoor plumbing and/or central heating. Original lots’ dimensions were “24 to 30 feet wide and 100 to 120 feet deep,” however; lots allotted for one house eventually held two or three as Hill District population thickened throughout the decades. Lower Hill apartment buildings lacked fire escapes, central heat, hot water, and other necessities. In fact, an apartment building on 59 Logan Street in the Lower Hill posted a notice that read: “Tenants living under miserable conditions, but always occupied.” The city soon declared 59 Logan Street a “fire trap.” By 1920, these out-dated and non-renovated structures deteriorated. Constant influxes of new residents resulted in scarce housing while existing structures crumbled under an excess of occupants. Pittsburgh’s government continued to overlook the Hill District, while its residents continued to hold low paying unskilled jobs that were disappearing and its infrastructure deteriorated. Competition for decent housing was not the only obstacle faced by Lower Hill residents; as the number of migrants to the Lower Hill increased, the health of Pittsburgh’s steel industry decreased.

The success of Pittsburgh’s dominant and heavy industry early in the twentieth century was unsustainable and ultimately resulted in an overall lack of growth and development of the

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20 Smith, 1
21 Bodnar, 175
22 Bodnar, 176
city as a whole. The best characterization of Pittsburgh’s economy during the 1920s to 1940s is as an erratic “boom and bust” economy. Additionally, during wartime many white Pittsburgh laborers entered the army, which opened up ample job opportunities for African Americans that normally were unavailable to them. Thus, during World War I, and later during World War II, the Hill District’s location attracted explosive numbers of black migrants from the South. However, these jobs were temporary and disappeared at the end of the war. This left the Hill District with a population of overcrowded and unemployed residents. The explosive increases and overcrowding of African American migrants ultimately drove many white ethnic groups to other nearby communities.

After World War I, the steel and coking industries moved westward to newly booming cities such as Chicago, Birmingham and Gary. In response to this decline, Pittsburgh’s steel industry rationalized its labor force and decreased the number of unskilled labor positions, which further increased competition for jobs. As with all American cities during this time, Pittsburgh’s African Americans encountered intense discrimination from employers and industries. By the 1930s Great Migration Pittsburgh’s industry had already peaked. Thus, securing skilled jobs was difficult for white Pittsburghers and implausible for blacks. Pittsburgh’s slowing economy no longer appealed to foreign immigrants, thus migrants to Pittsburgh were mainly African American. The majority of newer black migrants were from the Deep South, were single men looking for industrial employment, nearly half were from rural

24 Glasco, “Internally Divided . . .,” 226
25 Bodnar, 185
26 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh . . ., 162
28 Glasco, “Internally Divided . . . ,” 224
29 Bodnar, 185
30 Ibid., 187
backgrounds, and at least a third of these migrants came from agricultural work.\textsuperscript{31} Pittsburgh's earlier black Northern migrants already had experience in urban environments and in the industrial sectors through their backgrounds in cities. This urban background prevented the rough transition that Bodnar, Simon and Weber claim is "inherent in the shift from a preindustrial to an industrial society." After 1915 African Americans migrated quickly allowing little time for adjustments.\textsuperscript{32} The declining steel industry and job competition combined with the continuing growth of new migrants and overcrowding in the Lower Hill District inspired many older and more established African Americans, called "Original Pittsburghers," to move away from the Lower Hill to the Upper Hill and black communities with better living conditions.

Discrimination and competition in an unpredictable economy kept the majority of African Americans out of the skilled labor market. Consequently, in the 1950s most African Americans worked in unskilled or dangerous positions in the steel industry, as janitors or porters, and as garbage men or truck "helpers."\textsuperscript{33} Social mobility was not attainable through these jobs, and therefore difficult to achieve through economic status. However, despite Pittsburgh's struggling economy, before the redevelopment movement the Lower Hill District was "black people running their own lives, and we loved and cherished it because it was all we had," according to Robert R. Lavelle a resident and former press-oiler for the Pittsburgh Courier.\textsuperscript{34}

Despite the above hardships, all other aspects of Lower Hill life came alive during the 1930s. The Hill District gained national fame through its reputation for its cultural resources and the famous musicians they attracted. The Lower and Middle Hill District clubs blasted music, filling the streets with jazz. Various show girls paraded through the area week to week. The non-

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 227
\textsuperscript{32} Bodnar, 191
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 242
stop atmosphere pumped energy into the community and attracted middle-class blacks from all over the city night after night. Rather than frequenting the Hill District for political reasons, the middle class visited the Hill to interact in an entertainment and touristy setting for an evening and then returned to their own community. Locals proudly recalled that Wylie Avenue “really ran a twenty-four hour day ... it was the only street in America that began at a church and ends at a jail [sic].” Clubs such as the Crawford Grill and New Granada Theatre featured artists such as Nat King Cole, Stanely Turrentine and Art Blakey. Playwright August Wilson and George Vincent grew up in the Hill District and represented the rich culture abounding in the culturally diverse area.

As quoted in a New York Times article on the neighborhood’s history, Hill District resident Jorgé Myers states, “The character of this neighborhood is what gave Stanley [Turrentine] the juice, gave August [Wilson] the juice.” This “juice” not only attracted nationally renowned musicians, but also gave Lower and Middle Hill residents a public space in which to take pride and identity. During daylight hours this area belonged to working and lower class blacks, Jews, and Eastern Europeans. But throughout the night the Lower Hill was an integrated space where middle-class blacks from the Upper Hill, or “Sugar Top,” frequented the bars and clubs of Wylie Avenue. The Lower Hill became a tourist attraction for blacks from other communities that gave locals pride, but it also revealed the fracturing of the black community. But to the city, the Hill District remained defined by its poverty and an obstacle between the Golden Triangle and Oakland.

35 Wiley Avenue Days, VHS, Directed by Rick Sebak Pittsburgh: PA,WQED Multimedia, 1992
36 Clemetson
37 Ibid.
38 Wiley Avenue Days
During the 1950s Pittsburgh city officials implemented a Renaissance in an attempt to modernize the city’s economy. The Renaissance’s Redevelopment Program wanted to “renew” the Hill District through the construction of a cultural center in the Lower Hill. To make Renaissance programs appealing to both the city of Pittsburgh’s white elite and the residents of the Lower Hill, Mayor Lawrence and the URA made promises that appealed to both audiences. To the city of Pittsburgh the Renaissance promised modernity, progress, and the recovery of Pittsburgh’s national reputation. To the residents of the Hill District the Renaissance promised the revitalization of their community and better housing options for displaced residents. This dual set of promises created an imagined potential for new economic and social opportunities for Lower Hill residents who otherwise felt trapped.

As stated in reporter Paul Jones’s article about the prospects of new housing for African Americans, “the other major problem that must be solved is that of sites... this means building on sites where the presence of Negroes isn’t likely to stir up any controversy or create any unwillingness on the part of whites to purchase other homes in the immediate vicinity.” The financial and social difficulties of leaving the Hill District did not make relocation appear appealing, but the Renaissance could improve African Americans’ ability to move to new, integrated areas. Redevelopment promised that “some 2,000 units of public housing will reach the construction stage within the year [1959]” to eradicate slum housing, and that “the Pittsburgh Housing Authority hopes to have perfected plans that are as perfect as modern

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41 “Urban Renewal Projects Affect 3,000 Families,” Pittsburgh Courier, March 28, 1959, City Edition
techniques can make them, to ease the rehabilitation program."^{42} This promise appealed to Hill District residents of all areas.

However, because of Pittsburgh’s black population’s fragmentation and scattering, as well as the absence of financial ability, Lower Hill residents could not easily relocate. Additionally, organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People did not flourish until the 1960s in Pittsburgh because of the lack of unity in the black community. The NAACP told its Pittsburgh branch that it was “weaker than any other unit we have in a city of the same size.” Lower Hill residents could not utilize the institutions, space, and opportunities available to gain hegemony and unite the Hill District because class and neighborhood divisions prevented the concept of a common black community from developing into a reality.^{43}

Within this atmosphere of cultural development and isolation sat the office of the Pittsburgh Courier, a newspaper that at once was the vessel of black middle class unity and the voice of the black community. In its articles from 1955 to 1960, Courier responses to the Pittsburgh redevelopment projects in the Lower Hill reveal the different views Hill District African Americans held towards their community space. Before the construction of the Civic Arena, the middle class mimicked URA rhetoric in order to gain distance from the working class to assert power, and gain attention from both the city and redevelopment elites. This voice drives the Courier’s coverage of the Lower Hill redevelopment process and paints a picture of the lower and working classes as powerless and in need of middle class assistance. Only in 1963, when redevelopment threatened the middle class Upper Hill did this voice change. The black middle class attempted to unify the black community to respond to an incursion in their own

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^{42} "Word on Lower Hill: ‘Say Goodbye Next Spring’: Residents, Old Landmarks Must Bow to Progress, Pittsburgh Courier, August 27 1955, City Edition
^{43} Glasco, “Internally Divided...,” 229
neighborhood. This thesis examines the different responses from the working class and middle class black community throughout the Hill District Redevelopment as a lens in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on how class and race shaped the process of redevelopment and the Hill District as a whole.

**This Thesis’s Development**

The first section of this thesis discusses the actual process of redevelopment as Pittsburgh Mayor David L. Lawrence envisioned and designed it. The rhetoric of “progress” in the context of an economically struggling Pittsburgh after World War II defined the movement’s goals. Mayor Lawrence partnered with rich corporate figures like Richard K. Mellon to remold and polish Pittsburgh and its national image. However, there was an obstacle to Pittsburgh progress: the Hill District. City Council referred to the Hill as a “black ghetto,” a literal barrier to a Pittsburgh Renaissance progress that strove to unite the Golden Triangle and Oakland.

Renaissance leaders proposed a redevelopment of the Lower Hill. This proposal included the construction of a “Cultural Acropolis” to bring new life to the district. Within this “Acropolis” is the Civic Arena, pictured below, a building of “mad ambition” that embodied the Renaissance movement’s “taste for the colossal.”44 The city government created the Urban Redevelopment Authority as the tool to make this proposal a reality.

Established in 1946, the Urban Redevelopment Authority was the nation’s first organization dedicated solely to redevelopment; however, despite its expansive federal funding, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was unable to redevelop the Pittsburgh Hill District successfully.45 Redevelopment failures resulted from Hill District responses and protests when

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44 Toker, 15
45 Ibid., 234
the 1960s renewal plans grew to engulf not only the Lower Hill, but middle-class residences in the Middle and Upper Hill as well. Thus, studying class and racial formation in the Hill District in this period is an important scholarly contribution. The section on Pittsburgh’s urban renewal presents the action to which the Hill District population reacts and provides a context to the responses to redevelopment coming from the black community.

After unpacking the context and conditions of Renaissance and the pre-Redevelopment Hill District, the second section of this thesis reveals how the Upper Hill community functioned and defined itself as seen through articles from the Pittsburgh Courier. As a middle-class paper, the Courier catered to the ambitions and tastes of the Upper Hill residents more so than their lower and working class Middle and Lower Hill neighbors. The voices in the Courier reveal the Upper Hill population’s imagining of its relationship with the Lower Hill in the face of redevelopment and the class stratification within the black community. Initially, the Courier’s articles painted the Lower Hill’s redevelopment as positive. The community’s dilapidating infrastructure, unsanitary living conditions, and lack of employment generated images and discourse that cast Lower Hill residents as an “other.” The Upper Hill community envisioned itself as middle-class, and therefore fundamentally different from the Lower Hill’s working and lower class population. The redevelopment of the Lower Hill could open new business opportunities to the Hill District’s middle classes. Thus, they did not see early Redevelopment as presenting a threat to their physical or political space.

Racial discrimination resulted in a void in opportunities that forced middle-class blacks to redefine status within their communities and paper. But by clinging to class lines rather than uniting as a community, the Upper Hill in turn destroyed its community. The razing of the Lower Hill displaced unemployed and impoverished blacks without offering them realistic relocation
opportunities. Accordingly, the only plausible option was to move further into the Middle Hill, which consequently pushed Middle Hill residents over the border of the Upper Hill. This physical restructuring and reshaping of Hill District space changed social formations, and reshaped the Hill as a neighborhood.

The third section of the thesis places the story of Redevelopment in the context of the cultural and class imagination of the Lower and Middle Hill before the construction of the Civic Arena. Unlike the black middle and upper classes, the lower classes had no direct voice in Pittsburgh Courier or in its coverage of the Redevelopment processes. Rather, the Lower Hill District’s presence in the Courier articles, and therefore in middle-class black consciousness, was in sensationalist stories describing filthy living conditions and hopelessly decaying infrastructure. The voice bestowed upon the lower classes in these articles was not one directly from Lower Hill or Middle Hill residents, but one inorganically imposed upon these classes through the Courier’s middle class lens. While Civic Arena construction displaced Lower Hill residents, no article spoke directly through these residents to voice their concerns. The absence of this voice in a paper that represented black progress and worked to inspire civil rights activism reveals the depths of class stratification within the Hill District community.

Although their histories intertwine and link together, there was no solidarity between the Upper and Lower Hill communities until Redevelopment threatened the Hill District’s middle class. Government action along with the strengthening of the Civil Rights movement in Pittsburgh’s black civic organizations forced the recognition of black solidarity within the Hill District. Between 1960 and 1963, there was a fundamental change in Courier rhetoric. Articles began championing race rights and black power issues rather than solely those of the middle

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46 Darden, 1
47 Glasco, “Internally Divided . . .,” 227
class. As protests grew in abundance, the Courier absorbed the working class into its voice. Thus, the Pittsburgh city government forced the Hill District community to establish a solidarity that did not form earlier due to the fractured nature of Pittsburgh's black community, divided along class lines.

The existing literature about the Pittsburgh Hill District during Redevelopment gravitates towards a view of Hill District residents as "passive" in the face of urban renewal. Pittsburgh historian Laurence Glasco argues that post-World War II black Pittsburghers experienced divisions along class lines. However, at the same time he argues that the construction of the Civic Arena "without protest is simply another sign of the community's passivity." According to Glasco only when the middle-class residences in the Upper Hill, and upper parts of the Middle Hill, learned of URA plans to redevelop their neighborhoods did protest arise and the redevelopment movement stopped.48 As my thesis will demonstrate, what Glasco defines as passivity was actually a factor of local class geography.

Additionally, Glasco writes in "Internally Divided: Class and Neighborhood in Black Pittsburgh," status and prestige in the black community relied on symbols reaching beyond economic means alone. This project functions in agreement with Glasco's arguments that status for Pittsburgh blacks rested in social aspects and neighborhood residence because almost no black Pittsburgher possessed copious financial resources.49 Unlike Glasco's argument of passivity, this argument will reveal the middle class role in controlling the Hill District response to redevelopment. The class divisions in the Hill District community and space guided the ways in which the URA redeveloped the Hill. The initial allowance of demolition in the Lower Hill

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49 Glasco, "Internally Divided...?"
was not passivity, but in fact a middle-class decision. Articles in the *Courier* presented the redevelopment as the precursor for better housing and better business opportunities for the Hill District.

This thesis builds upon Bodnar and Glasco's arguments that Pittsburgh's hilly topography fractured the black community of the Hill, which in turn delayed the arrival of black power rhetoric and civil rights unity that other urban black populations experienced in cities such as New York and Chicago. The fragmentation of black communities was difficult to overcome due to the racial discrimination of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, communities like the Hill District that began as amply diverse grew progressively stratified and fragmented during the Great Migration in the 1940s, as new black migrants filled Hill District houses and whites moved to more stable and wealthy areas where segregation blocked black residence. No matter how financially stable a black family became, it was impossible to purchase real estate outside of communities established as "black." Furthermore, as Roy Lubove argues Pittsburgh Redevelopment policy was a top-down business partnership in the 1950s, a contention supported by my research. Only after a threat to the black middle class did the Hill District communities unite to challenge the Redevelopment's "top-down" urban renewal policy. Lubove argues that ultimately the Hill District's black community halted the redevelopment process and only allowed it to continue after they revamped it into a more community-based style of Redevelopment.

The stratification of the middle and working classes in the Hill District prevented the formation of a black racial solidarity. The Hill's middle class craved political power within their communities.

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50 Bodnar, 199
51 Ibid., 192
52 Darden, 6
53 Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh...*, 110
black community, and ultimately within the city government. And while there were African Americans involved in the city government, they were "an anomaly." Homer S. Brown was a member of the state legislature during the 1940s who voted for the Redevelopment of the Lower Hill. According to Glasco, "no one has explained how or why" Brown was able to gain eligibility and a stable place in the state government. And K. Leroy Irvis was elected to state legislature in 1958 because he won the Hill votes, and also won Oakland’s vote by sharing the Democratic ticket with James Clark who was white. African Americans who came to political power in Pittsburgh needed the support of the white community because the black community’s fragmentation did not allow it to hold effective political sway. Ultimately the fight for African American political power did not pay off until the middle and working classes united as a community and as a race to demand change.

The middle class voices of the Courier reveal that the Upper Hill community’s power drew from its status and perceived political power. The preservation of the pockets of power in an unequal and racist city such as Pittsburgh was crucial to black middle-class success. As seen in Gramsci’s arguments of contradictory consciousness and hegemony, the middle-class’s breaking point with Redevelopment Authority hegemony came when it threatened their community. Thus, the Hill District community is much more complicated than a simply passive environment. The Hill was the launching pad from which the middle class hoped to propel towards power. By supporting URA plans to redevelop and modernize the Lower Hill, the middle class put forth an ideology that paralleled that of the white elite’s. Thus, unthreatened by

54 Glasco, “Internally Divided” 229
56 Ibid.
57 Glasco, “Civil Rights …,” 5
58 Bodnar, 221
the construction called for by the renewal projects, the black middle class of the Upper Hill District embraced the city’s Redevelopment promises. The Renaissance movement’s spirit and rhetoric of modernization and progress was a result of Pittsburgh’s unstable economy and failing national image.

SECTION TWO:

Urban Removal: The Pittsburgh Renaissance

In the 1940s, after the Great Depression and World War II, the steel industries crumbled leaving Pittsburgh in a “crisis situation.” Its population growth slowed and no new industries developed. Pittsburgh’s reputation became one of a “smoky city” in reference to the steel mill’s leftover smog and soot that permeated the city’s air and architecture. In the past Pittsburgh never championed images of cleanliness or beauty because its booming industry attracted many businessmen, laborers, and capital. In 1909 a visiting journalist, Samuel Hopkins Adams, commented that

[...a high infant mortality rate in Pittsburgh might be better] for the unfortunate and innocent victims themselves, and certainly for the community at large, that this puny, helpless breed of hunger, filth, and misery which creeps about the city’s man-made jungles, should succumb in infancy to the conditions that bred but cannot support them.

Similar opinions of Pittsburgh continued for over fifty years. Chicago, Detroit, and other major American cities viewed Pittsburgh as a mill town rather than a modern city.

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60 Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*..., 106
61 Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*..., 107
62 Ibid., 1
Before its industry collapsed the city had no need to sell a crisp and clean image because the city’s economic attractions outshone the filth left in their wake. But when the steel and iron industries left outside visitors viewed Pittsburgh’s appearance in disgust. The city failed to attract or produce new industries after World War II’s wartime economic boom subsided. Corporations moved their headquarters out of Pittsburgh and into more lucrative cities. Pittsburgh’s workers, residents, and city officials watched the rest of America modernize and explore new industries while their city remained in a static and dirty state. It was clear that Mayor David Lawrence, his city government and Pittsburgh’s corporate elite needed nothing more than an escape route from this “crisis situation.”

Urban Anatomy

Pittsburgh’s corporate and industrial elite dominated its urban anatomy. The city’s large-scale heavy industry controlled the economy, and provided no external economies that would produce “large numbers of small suppliers and businesses.” Thus, labor unions were the main body of Pittsburgh’s urban industry. Each of Pittsburgh’s isolated ethnic communities revolved around one of the city’s major labor unions, with the exception of Pittsburgh’s black communities. By the 1950s Pittsburgh’s Polish communities held a heavy influence in the metal trades and the Italian communities in construction and metal trades. Unlike Pittsburgh’s African American populations, these ethnic communities built upon traditions established by community members of previous generations. The majority of black workers worked in the manufacturing industries in the lowest skilled positions, while a quarter of African American workers in

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63 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh..., 2
64 Bodnar, 106
65 Ibid., 118
67 Bodnar, 237
Pittsburgh found employment in the domestic and personal service industry. Black jobs were the least mobile in comparison with Pittsburgh's Polish and Italian communities. Additionally, almost no African Americans belonged to the Pittsburgh government or elite. Richard Mellon was Scotch Irish and Mayor Lawrence was Irish. Thus while other ethnic groups integrated into the city and joined the elites and labor unions, African Americans were unable to do so.

In the workplace Pittsburgh African Americans were subject to daily humiliations and discrimination from fellow workers. Glaso argues that this discrimination and inability to procure mobile jobs intensified African Americans' search for power and status within their own community. It became clear that black workers would not be able to procure status or power in the Pittsburgh urban anatomy. Although the Pittsburgh Renaissance of the 1950s was Mayor Lawrence's flagship for reestablishing a Pittsburgh image of modernity and progress, black workers were not a part of Pittsburgh's vision of itself as a holistic polity, and thus not included in this new image. This is apparent in Mayor Lawrence's Redevelopment plans and references to the Hill District as seen below.

**Mayor Lawrence's Renaissance**

Mayor Lawrence was a Democrat who wanted to broaden the New Deal coalition in order to attack Pittsburgh's growing problems. Determined to reverse his city's urban deterioration within his terms from 1946 until 1959, Lawrence engineered the Pittsburgh Renaissance as a means of revitalizing and renewing the city, the first federally funded

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68 Ibid., 241  
69 Duffus, R.L., "Is Pittsburgh Civilized?" in Lubove, Roy ed., Pittsburgh, , 161  
70 Glasco, "Internally Divided...,” 226
movement of its kind.\textsuperscript{71} As stated in the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s twenty-year report on the Renaissance, its goal was to prevent an “urban decline” and at the same time make Pittsburgh revolutionary again through an “untried” renewal process “helping to set a pattern for what was to follow in cities and towns across the land.”\textsuperscript{72} A physical renewal program would restore Pittsburgh’s status as a modern flagship of innovation, and allow Lawrence to create a new style of city government-private business partnership.

Mayor David Lawrence worked with Richard K. Mellon to engineer a Renaissance for the city of Pittsburgh. Mellon owned the affluent Mellon Banks in Pittsburgh, influenced many of the city’s businesses and industries, and directed many nationwide corporations.\textsuperscript{73} Working together, Lawrence and Mellon established a public-private relationship and created an efficient reform system. This alliance united two different sides of Pittsburgh urban enterprise: the government and the corporations. To the Mayor, the movement’s business aspects were just as important as its political ones.\textsuperscript{74} Due to the public-private alliance between the Pittsburgh government and elite business owners, reforms were undisputed. In Lawrence’s mind opposition to renewal was “morally unacceptable.”\textsuperscript{75} The Lawrence and Mellon partnership approached redevelopment like a business, and used the Urban Redevelopment Authority to enact their reforms.\textsuperscript{76}

Mayor Lawrence chaired the Urban Redevelopment Authority, which he created in 1946. The Pittsburgh city government used the URA to interact with private sector companies and organizations that shared similar ideals about city renewal. As both the Mayor of Pittsburgh and


\textsuperscript{72} Urban Redevelopment Authority, “Urban Renewal in Pittsburgh,” University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962, Introduction

\textsuperscript{73} Fitzpatrick, Dan, “The Story of Urban Renewal,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post-Gazette}, May 21 2000

\textsuperscript{74} Weber, 259

\textsuperscript{75} Weber, 258

\textsuperscript{76} Lubove, \textit{Twentieth Century Pittsburgh...}, 118
head of the URA, Lawrence could effectively carry out his desired reforms. Because of the public-private relationship between the Mayor and the professional elite, the URA program had an intimate relationship with Pittsburgh's commercial and industrial firms' expansion. It enacted programs to help modernize the city not only through environmental and educational reform, but also through structural reform as well. The reforms implemented by the URA created environments conducive to the development of luxury housing and therefore the improvement of the Pittsburgh tax base. The URA drew its projects' funds from the city, state, and federal levels. Its first project was the Gateway Project, which constructed new buildings for various Pittsburgh corporations; this was the first case of physical renewal in URA history. The URA provided Lawrence and his partners with a vessel of redevelopment that effectively carried out projects. It was crucial to fulfilling Renaissance goals.

The ultimate goal of the Renaissance was to redevelop Pittsburgh in order to restore land values in the central city, and attract new industries, investors, and capital. The Renaissance was Pittsburgh's opportunity to join the "big leagues," or other modernized American cities, according to Lawrence. The Renaissance focused on environmental controls such as pollution control and smoke control, redeveloping the city's central business district, and the expansion of industry. Ultimately physical renewal projects, like the Gateway Project, took priority. Pittsburgh's post-War economy made the construction of "The Point" park downtown possible in 1946. "The Point" park was the tip of the Golden Triangle designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

77 Ibid., 122
78 Ibid., 130
79 Weber, 263
80 Mallet, 182
81 Ibid.
82 Weber, 263
83 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh..., 118
and redeveloped by the URA to be a historic park and an office complex. Lawrence believed that these changes would craft the image of a cleaner, modern and beautiful Pittsburgh.

A “Cultural Acropolis”

In 1947, Mellon and Lawrence began to search for an appropriate area to build a “cultural Acropolis” that would be the centerpiece of the Renaissance and urban redevelopment movement. This cultural center would embody the “big league” aura Lawrence wanted Pittsburgh to acquire. “Big league” infrastructure, cultural groups, and sports teams would help bring Pittsburgh into the modern market and allow it to compete with other modernized cities. He envisioned this cultural center containing a modern Civic Arena, an arts center, restaurants and a symphony hall. Pictured in Figure 3 of the Appendix, aspects of the Civic Arena blatantly reeked of modernity. The Arena, pictured below, was a giant dome made of glistening stainless steel. Its roof would be retractable to make concerts under the stars a summer possibility.

At 415 feet, this dome was the largest in the world. It would hold almost 20,000 patrons, all of whom would be awestruck by the complexity and technical innovation of the arena. Additionally the URA wanted to build luxury apartments nearby and a glamorous and modern Center for the Arts. Lawrence pictured the arena as the centerpiece of his “Cultural Acropolis,” which he imagined embellishing with modern architecture and fountains. The Housing Act of 1949 was the catalyst for beginning this project. It provided federal funding and approval for the

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84 Toker, 22
85 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh..., 131
86 Mallet, 183
87 Mallet, 183. See Appendix Figure 4.
88 Toker, 235
89 Mallet, 184
90 Ibid., 185
city to buy and clear land, and then develop it.\textsuperscript{91} Thus the location of the Renaissance’s most integral creation was crucial to its success.

Originally the URA considered 15 different sites, the majority of which bordered upper and middle class neighborhoods. According to Michael Weber, author of David Lawrence’s biography, these choices were “improbable.” Developers vetoed these sites because introducing a public arena “would have had a detrimental effect on the stable neighborhood, which could by no stretch of the imagination be called blighted.”\textsuperscript{92} Additionally, when the URA originally chose a “stable” site and signed confirmation papers to begin construction, an influx of petitions from locals in protest of this decision changed the URA’s decision. But in 1951 the Allegheny Planning Commission presented the URA with a neighborhood where “there would be no difficulty in having the area certified as blighted.”\textsuperscript{93} This option was the Lower Hill District.

The Hill District did not have a position to fill in the Mayor’s sought-after “big league.” The Lower Hill “walled Pittsburgh in from the east.”\textsuperscript{94} In October 1947 the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce released a statement that claimed in their data that, “between 1914 and 1946, assessed valuations in the Lower Hill fell 45 percent, while assessed valuations citywide fell 16 percent.”\textsuperscript{95} This statement was not ignored. As “the city’s worst slum,” the Hill District did not represent worth or stability to the city government. The Hill District’s lack of taxable structures or businesses was an emblem of static progress. The city of Pittsburgh created the Hill as a blighted area before Redevelopment, but Redevelopment rhetoric emphasized this view.

The Chamber of Commerce found the Lower Hill District to be “the largest area of contiguous realty open to potential stimulus [in Pittsburgh] ... [and also the best location in terms

\textsuperscript{91} URA op. cit., 1955 in Mallet, 190
\textsuperscript{92} Weber, 267
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 270
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 200
\textsuperscript{95} Mallet, 182
of its relationship of site location to the overall Triangle development program." The Allegheny Conference on Community Development saw the Hill as a "blighted barrier" to the creation of a cohesive and modern downtown Pittsburgh. The URA, Mayor, and city government considered Downtown Pittsburgh and Oakland the true "regional capital of the Pittsburgh metropolitan area." Mayor Lawrence wanted to modernize his regional capital, and the overcrowded and disease-ridden Hill District presented an enormous obstacle. Therefore, the Lower Hill District represented both the city's problems, and its path to redemption. By redeveloping this blighted area the URA would modernize the community between Pittsburgh's central neighborhoods, profit from increased tax revenue on new buildings, and jump-start the URA's physical redevelopment campaign.

Placing a modern structure in a "decaying" neighborhood appealed to Mellon and Lawrence. The construction of fresh and attractive infrastructure in a poor and deteriorating area would allow the URA to clear out unwanted space, relocate the former residents, and then attract new investors to further develop and modernize the area. The URA worked alongside the City Planning Commission to envision and realize the construction of a Civic Arena in what was then a large portion of the Lower Hill community. The federal government provided the Urban Redevelopment Authority with fifteen million dollars in federal renewal funds, and the state provided an additional million dollars so that Pittsburgh could construct its "Acropolis" center, and redevelop the Lower Hill District. Figure 4 in the Appendix pictures a section of the Lower Hill designated for redevelopment. The "Cultural Acropolis" project was the centerpiece to the redevelopment movement.

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96 Mallet, 182
97 Ibid.
98 Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh...*, 127
Dual Promises

In order to ensure a smooth completion of construction and guarantee its success, the URA and Mayor Lawrence made a dual set of promises to the Hill District residents and to the city of Pittsburgh. To the Lower Hill the redevelopment promised stable and better housing that ultimately could lead to homeownership. To the city of Pittsburgh the redevelopment promised state-of-the-art modernity, profits from taxing to-be-constructed luxury buildings, and clearing a slum to create a less threatening Hill District. The Urban Redevelopment Authority, the organization embodying the Renaissance goals, had already seen successes in its pollution control and construction of a park at the Point, thus most citizens trusted it to professionally uphold its promises.\textsuperscript{100} However, it soon became clear to which set of promises the Pittsburgh government and Urban Redevelopment Authority dedicated the majority of their efforts. Between 1950 and 1990, the Lower Hill’s population dropped from 17,334 to 2,459 people.\textsuperscript{101}

Many of the redevelopment movement’s professional elite and potential investors viewed the Lower Hill not only as a blighted barrier to Pittsburgh’s modernization as a whole, but as a “seething slum” that without redevelopment would threaten the vitality of the center.\textsuperscript{102} A publically owned facility, like that which the cultural center promised to be, gained value through the prestige it brought to its city rather than the worth of its property. Therefore, the URA had to enhance the surrounding area in order for the Civic Arena Acropolis to fulfill its value. The proximity of a slum would do the opposite. The deteriorating Hill District would contradict the image of a prestigious and modern cultural center that Mayor Lawrence so desperately aspired to. A cultural center catering to the mostly white middle- and upper-classes

\textsuperscript{100} Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh..., 118
\textsuperscript{101} "The Story of Urban Renewal," Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, May 21, 2000
\textsuperscript{102} Pittsburgh Press, op. cit., 14 May 1961 in Mallet, 190
of Pittsburgh built into a slum would force its patrons to acknowledge poverty issues, and 
therefore cause discomfort. So, redevelopment spread to the area surrounding the Civic Arena 
construction site. The URA decided to raze the Lower Hill in order to bolster the potential for 
modernity and prestige of a Cultural Acropolis, and to deplete part of the crumbling barrier that 
stood between Oakland and the Golden Triangle.

Tired of living in overcrowded conditions, the Hill District residents wanted better 
housing as ultimately promised by the URA. Continuous rhetoric of Pittsburgh newspapers and 
government members cast the Hill as disease ridden, blighted, and hopeless. Residents read in 
the papers and heard from the news about the terrible conditions of the “slums” they called home, 
but they also felt the effects of this attitude towards their neighborhood. A Pittsburgh Chamber 
of Commerce Report from 1956 exemplifies general attitudes towards the Hill:

Since the 1920’s the Lower Hill has deteriorated. Today for every acre used for housing, 
155 families are cramped into the squalor of crumbling tenements. Unquestionably, in 
this cobblestone jungle that chokes off the eastern end of the Golden Triangle, Pittsburgh 
can realize its greatest sociological gain and an important economic advantage.

The language above refers to the Hill as a “jungle” full of “squalor,” a language never used in 
descriptions of the “Golden” Triangle business district. This description is animalizing, revealing 
outside views of Hill District residents. As an isolated community that revolved around a 
booming nightlife rather than a conventional economy, the Hill District did not receive respect 
from Pittsburgh’s city officials.

Economic opportunities were rare for Lower Hill District residents who unlike their 
Upper and upper Middle Hill neighbors were members of the lower or working class. As more 
African Americans migrated to the Lower Hill, the lack of employment opportunities hindered

103 Mallet, 185
104 “Hill Redevelopment Area Perils Health, Robin Says,” Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, April 25, 1953
105 “Lower Hill: Hopes for Living on a Higher Plane” Pittsburgh Renaissance City of America, Pittsburgh Chamber 
of Commerce, 1956, 8
residents from gaining economic mobility. As John Bodnar writes, “blacks were blocked at every
turn.”  

A promise from the city government to change living conditions, provide low-income
housing, and to relocate these residents to a more fruitful area offered hope and the potential for
a new future.  

The URA set up a relocation field office in 1956 next to the Civic Arena construction site
between Grant Street, bordering the Golden Triangle, and Crawford Street, one of the Lower
Hill’s central streets. Then the relocation of Hill residents and arena construction began. The
developers ultimately removed 1,300 buildings, 413 local businesses, and displaced 8,000 people
by construction’s completion in 1961. Demolition began in 1956 and the Civic Arena opened
five years later. During this rapid destruction and construction of the Lower Hill the URA
could not find or build replacement housing for former residents. Throughout the chaotic process,
it was clear that the URA would not be able to relocate those it displaced. In addition to losing
valuable community landmarks like the Crawford Grill, their homes, and their hope, the
displaced Lower Hill residents had to find their own housing as well. Rather than relocating
black people to diverse neighborhoods in an attempt to desegregate Pittsburgh, relocation
increased the density in existing black neighborhoods, especially the Hill District. While some of
the displaced African American residents had the resources to move to other black communities
in Pittsburgh, such as East Liberty, Wilkinsburg and Homestead, the majority moved back into
the remnants of the Lower Hill, and into the Upper Hill. Of the 1239 officially relocated black

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106 Bodnar, 254
107 “Pittsburghers Speak Up: Do You Think that the City Needs a Fair Housing Ordinance?” Pittsburgh Courier, August 30, 1969
109 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh..., 131
110 Glasco, “Civil Rights ...,” 6
111 Mallet, 185
families from the Lower Hill, 800 moved to the Middle and Upper Hill District. Thus, locals grew to know urban renewal as “urban removal.” The trend of displacement and demolition in the Lower Hill remained unchallenged throughout the construction of the Civic Arena.

What Redevelopment saw as “the Hill” was actually three separate and classed communities. The Hill District was not a unified neighborhood, but rather three distinct and classed regions: the Lower, Middle and Upper Hill. These region’s names literally depict their physical locations; the Lower Hill rested on the same plateau as the Golden Triangle, the Middle Hill began the incline of “the Hill,” and the Upper Hill perched at the top. The Hill District’s class distinctions were allegorized through its landscape. The Upper and the upper Middle Hill contained the middle and upper classes, while the lower Middle and Lower Hill contained the working and lower classes. Unlike the Lower Hill, the Upper Hill contained the Hill’s only recreational green space, the 13-acre public Herron Hill Park.

Initially there was little local opposition to the Lower Hill’s redevelopment because residents believed the promises and rhetoric that their deteriorating neighborhood required this physical reconstruction. Additionally, the upper middle and Upper Hill residents did not protest either. Instead, Upper Hill and upper Middle Hill residents adopted the URA and Mayor Lawrence’s Renaissance discourse referring to the Lower Hill demolition. These middle-class members did not consider the Lower Hill a real part of their community. The fragmentation over class lines prevented any true working class protest or action in response to the Lower Hill redevelopment. Articles in the local African American weekly newspaper, The Pittsburgh

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112 Weber, 271
114 Reid, Ira De A., Social Conditions of the Negro in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA: General Committee on the Hill Survey, 1930, 26
115 Mallet, 183
116 “Need for Changing: Why They Are Yet Effective,” Pittsburgh Courier, September 20, 1969
Courier, reveal the lack of a universal Hill District identity. As the next two sections of this thesis will reveal, the middle class’s determination to assert power took precedence over the need to assist the lower classes’ redevelopment struggle. The Hill District’s middle class African Americans defined power in terms of city discourse and Renaissance missions in an attempt to gain political influence in the city government. However, class in the Hill District functioned within a racialized context despite the lack of racial solidarity in the black community.

SECTION TWO

The Upper Hill: The Black Middle Class’s Quest for Power

African Americans residing in Pittsburgh before 1915 eventually claimed the identity of “Original Pittsburgher.” “Original Pittsburghers” had industrial backgrounds and they lived and moved as families rather than as individuals like 1930s migrants. Through hard work over the decades following their arrival to Pittsburgh, this initial group of black migrants purchased homes and established sustainable lives. By the 1930s and 1940s, these families attained financial security and moved out of rented rooms and into houses. Until the 1950s, homeownership became the mode through which blacks could most effectively run their lives and express class status in the Hill District. The homeowners in the Upper Hill District during the 1950s were these older migrant families. This splintering of the neighborhood’s self-made middle-class away from the working and lower classes increased class stratification within the Hill. 117

117 Bodnar, 178
During the 1930s and 1940s foreign immigrants such as the Italians moved to Bloomfield, and the Jews moved to Squirrel Hill. The Lower Hill’s black residents with financial stability, mainly the “Original Pittsburghers,” moved to East Liberty, Homewood-Brushton, or Beltzhoover, and the Upper Hill. These neighborhoods took the middle and upper class blacks from the Lower Hill, which held the majority of Pittsburgh’s African Americans by 1930. Black political and social hegemony was not possible because the community was dispersed all throughout Pittsburgh. As the Hill District grew to be less diverse, it grew to be more stratified along community and class lines. The Upper Hill’s history revealed how it grew to be the Hill’s black middle class’ home.

Unlike the Lower Hill, the Middle and Upper Hill’s sloping hills did not attract new immigrants during periods of migration. Thus, the area was less densely populated than the Lower Hill and attracted the more affluent Hill residents attempting to escape overcrowding. The majority of Hill District residents who moved to the Upper Hill possessed the financial means to own a home, a crucial status within the Hill District. According to a survey performed by Ira De A. Reid for the National Urban League on the social conditions of African Americans in the Hill District, a larger number of African Americans lived in the Upper Hill (Fifth Ward) than in the Lower Hill (Third Ward). These were the “Original Pittsburgher” residents who moved in order to distance themselves from newer migrants. In 1920 35.4 percent of the Upper Hill were African Americans, or 10,383 people, and 21.5 percent of the Lower Hill were African American, or 5,782 people. The Upper Hill represented black middle class

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118 Glasco, “Internally Divided . . . ,” 226
119 Reid, 21
120 Glasco, “Internally Divided . . . ,” 225
121 Reid, 27
122 Ibid., 21
status and community power in its location at the top of a hill with not only the best view of Pittsburgh, but looking down upon the Middle and Lower Hill.  

In the 1930s Upper Hill and Lower Hill interactions revolved almost exclusively around the social scene of the Lower Hill District’s bars and jazz clubs: in a sense it was a relationship of slumming that occurred within a slum. Middle class African Americans descended into the Lower Hill, or “Little Harlem, imbibed, danced, relaxed, and performed its status on the Lower Hill’s rich cultural stage. At the end of the night, the Upper Hill residents returned to their houses and the Lower Hill residents returned to their rented rooms. Although the Upper Hill residents often frequented the cultural institutions available in the Lower Hill District, the Lower Hill residents rarely entered the Upper Hill. The main reason Lower Hill residents regularly entered the Upper Hill community was to fulfill domestic labor arrangements. This separation of social space reinforced the image of an Upper Hill of middle class blacks with stable housing and incomes compared to an overcrowded Lower Hill filled with unemployed bar hoppers. By the 1930s, the Lower and Upper Hill residents lived in different areas under different conditions, attended different churches, and belonged to different civic associations. Although both black communities combated discrimination and a stagnant Pittsburgh economy, their fragmented class and social identities prevented the development of a unified community voice or power.

Middle Class Identity

Class in the Hill District was not defined by economics alone. Laurence Glasco argues in “Internally Divided: Class and Neighborhood in Black Pittsburgh” that class differentiation existed within the Pittsburgh black communities than in others because the city’s topography

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123 Toker, 241
removed the majority middle-class from the general black population.\textsuperscript{124} The Hill relied upon its own resources and small economy to function within its own boundaries. This economy mainly employed residents in the domestic services, personal services, and at times labor.\textsuperscript{125} The majority of Hill District working-class males worked as laborers and janitors. However the Hill’s middle class African Americans worked as carpenters, porters, messengers, barbers, watchmen, ministers, tailors, business agents, and engineers. Men employed in those jobs were few, with each of the previous occupations held by only two or three Hill District residents.\textsuperscript{126} By 1950, less than one percent of Hill District blacks held professional jobs such as lawyers, dentists, and politicians.\textsuperscript{127} The general scarcity of opportunities of employment in skilled positions meant that the majority of Hill District residents did not have incomes equivalent to Pittsburgh’s middle class whites. This racialization of class meant that economic capital could not be the only determinant of class status in the Hill District. In the Hill District a black middle class elite developed by basing its power off of social status and stability.\textsuperscript{128}

The Hill District middle class contained restrictive social sets, especially the Original Pittsburghers, and each belonged to its own set of fraternities and social clubs. Social fraternities and sororities offered exclusive memberships to members of the Upper and Middle Hill known for their status, wealth, or good reputation. These social clubs included the Elks, Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, True Reformers, the Aurora Reading Club, Goldenrod Social Club, and White Rose Club. These organizations provided the middle class with a space to network, discuss ways to improve their community, and discuss politics.\textsuperscript{129} The Leondi Club was the most

\textsuperscript{124} Darden, 7  
\textsuperscript{125} Buni, 24  
\textsuperscript{126} Reid, 56  
\textsuperscript{127} Glasco, “Double Burden...,” 425  
\textsuperscript{128} Glasco, “Internally Divided...,” 225  
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 225
reputable club, known as a “place where one could dine and play billiards with other ‘gentlemen.’”

To be a “gentlemen” in the Hill District a man was a member of the most exclusive club and attended his religion’s oldest church, a gentleman need not have excessive wealth.

Churches were important for middle class social purposes as the middle classes frequented different churches than the lower classes. In the black community, churches provided a space in which members could find camaraderie, guidance, and status. In the Lower Hill, recent migrants established new “storefront” churches to build connections and adjust to urban life. Older churches became middle-class churches, and newer ones became churches of the masses. By 1930 the Hill District contained over forty-five churches, the majority of which were new. Thus, in addition to physical separation from the middle class blacks of the Upper Hill the Lower Hill residents’ new churches further separated them from the older residents. These institutions served as middle class social spaces. While the Lower Hill’s social space consisted of its streets and informal bars, the Upper Hill’s was more private and “genteel” in accredited institutions. The Hill District’s middle class defined their status through their memberships to organizations and churches. This definition of class allowed Middle Hill and Upper Hill District residents that were not middle class by Pittsburgh elite white standards to establish a base of power in their neighborhood.

According to the papers of Robert L. Vann, who would found the Pittsburgh Courier shortly after, Hill District middle class African Americans were “a little black aristocracy.”

The middle class imagined itself as a hardworking and literate class capable of fulfilling the

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130 Buni, 32
131 Glasco, “Internally Divided...,” 226
132 Wiley Avenue Days
133 Glasco, “Internally Divided ...,: 227
134 Buni 32
American Dream. Because the Hill District’s identity in the eyes of the city depended greatly on white opinions of the area, the middle class strove to prove they upheld universal middle class values such as self-betterment and hard work. The middle class felt that the Great Migration’s “rawer Southern blacks led to the loss of status for all blacks,” as many were illiterate and employed in unskilled labor.135 Original Pittsburghers in the Middle and Upper Hill thought the Lower Hill’s black immigrants were “uncouth, set bad examples, overcrowded the areas where they settled, brought in totally unskilled labor, and forced the black community in upon itself.”136 The black middle class worked to create a “genteel” society that could reach out to the rest of the city and thus did not want to associate with the working and lower classes, which they believed tarnished African Americans’ image.137 When the URA decided to renew and redevelop the Lower Hill into a symbol of modernity through the construction of a civic center, the middle class did not object. One of the key tools the middle class used to separate from the working and lower classes was the creation of the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

**The *Pittsburgh Courier*: Paper of the Black Middle Class**

The *Pittsburgh Courier* began as a three-man operation and grew to be the most highly circulated black weekly in the nation. Robert L. Vann, the paper’s first editor, was also a lawyer and member of the city’s black middle class and had friends who belonged to the Pittsburgh black elite. However, in 1900 he was simply an educated, twenty-one year-old black migrant from Virginia. Vann worked hard, attended Virginia Union University,138 followed by the Western University of Pennsylvania at Pittsburgh, and then attended the university’s law school.

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135 Buni, 31
136 Ibid., 33
137 Ibid., 32
138 The mission of Virginia Union University was “to train leaders to teach, to preach and to guide and help men and women in the Negro race.” According to Buni, 33
to become a lawyer.\textsuperscript{139} Thus, he embodied the middle-class dream of self-betterment.\textsuperscript{140} Through his partnership with Ira F. Lewis, Vann developed the Courier from a four-page pamphlet developed in an "old pickle factory" into a renowned and respected black journalistic flagship.\textsuperscript{141} The \textit{Courier}'s history and Robert L. Vann's dedication to middle class values in his life are crucial to understanding the lens through which the Courier focused its news. As a paper catering to the middle class, the Courier did not convey a lower or working class voice as active or organic. Instead the \textit{Courier}'s sensationalist stories of poverty that cast the lower classes as helpless and dependent upon the middle classes. The Courier evolved into a vehicle that attempted to unite the scattered black middle class in Pittsburgh.

Appropriately, the Courier's office on 2620 Centre Avenue was in the upper region of the Middle Hill about five blocks from Herron Street, which marks the beginning of the Upper Hill.\textsuperscript{142} The office location from 1955 to 1959, the time of the majority of the Courier articles examined by this thesis, placed the paper a mile and a half away from Civic Center redevelopment in the Lower Hill and less than a mile from the top of the Upper Hill. This places the Courier in the heart of the Hill's middle class community, but also reveals the closeness of the Hill District's boundaries between divided class spaces. The flagship of the black middle class voice, and consequently middle class values, rested less than a mile from the heart of the working and lower class community. The distance the \textit{Courier}'s articles created between the middle and lower classes was not equal to the paper's physical distance from the lower class residents.

\textsuperscript{139} Buni 36
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 32
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 42
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, 1955-1959, City Edition
The Pittsburgh Courier worked under the "Negro Press Creed" which emphasized equality, progress, and activism. The Creed stated, "Hating no man, fearing no man, the Negro press strives to help everyman in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back," and thus united national black newspapers in a common goal of black advancement.\textsuperscript{143} The paper's stories encouraged black empowerment through avid coverage of local and national elections, probing articles concerning black economic welfare in Pittsburgh and in the South, and discussions of pressing issues in African countries. These topics ideally would unite Pittsburgh African Americans and develop a sense of community despite their geographic fragmentation. However, in reality this supposed universality in the content and mission of the \textit{Courier} in reality applied only to the middle class. This was apparent in the content and tone of its articles.

The \textit{Courier}'s content reflected African American middle class values through its documentation of social club events, coverage of social engagements and beauty competitions, and through its presentation of the working and lower classes. The structure of the \textit{Courier} from 1955 through 1959 consisted of front pages describing local crimes and pre-Civil Rights violence in the South, and then the rest of the paper covered issues of concern to the middle class. The middle class tried to put forth an image of financial stability that they did not in fact have to gain more distance from the lower classes. Advertisements for making money ranged from hiring an agent to gambling: "DO YOU NEED MONEY? Get Agents Sample Case," "How To Get Your Winning Number," "Books to Help You Win! Write For Catalog!"\textsuperscript{144} These ads transcended economic class, because money was not plentiful in any section of the Hill District.

While a sports section can transcend class lines, and the \textit{Courier}'s covered the local black baseball teams – the Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Greys – it also covered more

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, January 1, 1955, City Edition
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, May 16 1959
exclusive sports like bowling clubs and sailing. These latter activities were predominantly middle class leisure activities, for most Lower Hill residents did not have the financial means of leaving the Lower Hill to sail. While the paper contained multiple pages of sports coverage, the meat of the *Courier* was its coverage of societal events.

Every edition of the *Courier* contained reviews of the week’s fraternal and social events, as well as coverage of social contests. For example, the May 7, 1955 issue of the Pittsburgh Courier featured articles on social events such as: “Churchwomen’s Context Adds Bonus Prizes,” “10 Contestants Win Mother’s Day Corsages,” “Churchwomen in Tri-State Finale From All Fields,” “West View Girl in Contest at Town Celebration,” “Pittsburgh Beauticians in Brilliant Two-Day Confab,” “Hill District Teen Queen to Be Crowned Friday Night at Third Coronation Ball,” and a multiple page spread on the “Elks’ Big Testimonial at North Side Lodge May 11.” The preceding stories presented women’s contests and cultural events as an integral part of black society. These activities provided a means of gaining a respected reputation throughout isolated communities. Working class and lower class blacks, especially in the overcrowded Lower Hill, could not partake in such events. Thus, to be able to relate to the majority of the *Courier*’s content the reader had to be from the middle class.

The *Courier* also contained a Magazine section and a Junior section that catered to middle class women and children. The Magazine section contained weekly recipes and dress-designs for middle class women to experiment with in the kitchen and while sewing. This section appealed to stay at home moms and elite women who entertained frequently. Recipes with names such as “Entertaining Recipe” did not hide who was their intended audience. While women read through beauty news, recipes, and domestic activities, the Junior section of the *Courier*...
emphasized the importance of travel and higher education. Each edition of the Junior section asked the featured interviewed students their aims and goals. The section emphasized the importance of travel and exploration, luxuries that were not available to many lower class children. The *Courier* served middle class values of personal improvement and motivation, and this is reflected in its content.

Advertisements in the *Courier* frame its articles and emphasize middle class values. In 1959 the *Courier* ran a Pepsi ad in every issue that read, “Sociables prefer Pepsi,” underneath a full-page outline of a woman in a cocktail dress. Created to appeal to the middle class, this ad exemplified the ways in which advertisements appealed to the *Courier’s* readers. The middle class based its status on social engagements and societies, so by claiming Pepsi is for the “sociable” the advertisement transformed a can of Pepsi into an item representative of middle class society. Other ads that made constant appearances in the *Courier’s* pages were beauty products such as skin lighteners and hair straighteners, tailors for men’s suits, and ads by major corporations such as US Steel and Ford. None of the products advertised were basic necessities that any person, regardless of class, would need. Instead, the ads were for excessive beauty products or technologies that one could utilize to enhance and “whiten” a social image.

So, although the Courier successfully championed racial issues and the need for racial solidarity in order to overcome discrimination, the pages of the Pittsburgh Courier reflected Pittsburgh’s middle and upper class African American imagination of their identity and what issues impacted their communities. And while the Courier featured many columns and articles addressing needs which transcended class boundaries such as encouraging the black community

148 *Pittsburgh Courier*, Junior Section, 1959, City Edition
149 *Pittsburgh Courier* City ed., 1959, City Edition
150 *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1955 -1959, City Edition
to join the NAACP and the Urban League, and to strive for political empowerment, the paper lacked a true working or lower class voice.

**Redevelopment Responses in the Courier**

The responses to the Lower Hill Redevelopment by the *Courier* reflect the middle class’s desire to distance itself from the lower classes and to familiarize itself with the Pittsburgh redevelopment’s corporate elite. The *Courier* articles on the Lower Hill renewal adopt redevelopment discourse that described the Lower Hill as a slum, filthy, and blighted. Initially, articles on the redevelopment of the Lower Hill and Civic Center plans mainly focused on logistical details rather than social implications. Articles portrayed the redevelopment as a necessary step in order to revive the Lower Hill District. For example, the January 15, 1955 issue of the Courier described the future Lower Hill redevelopment and its new Housing Code in the article “200 New Homes Built for Negroes in 1954 Good Omen for Future:”

> [the] new Housing Code will help Urban Redevelopment and the operation of the new Housing Code will play an important part in shaping the demand for new homes within the next few years. The first demolition of homes in the path of the Lower Hill Redevelopment is expected to come in 1955, and to continue for the next three or four years as various stages of the gigantic reshaping of the 107-acre tract proceeds.

Jones glorified the Housing Code as “one of the best in the country.” He referred to Lower Hill structures as “shacks” whose demolition was necessary for the development of new housing. The frank diction and details of the article allowed the middle class readers to feel relief that the city government would relocate the lower class residents and demolish their decaying homes. In 1955 and 1956 the *Courier* depicted URA actions as beneficial and logical. These depictions reflect

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the middle class desire to separate from any association with the lower classes and desire to 
integrate into the city government by endorsing its actions.

During 1955 and 1956, Courier articles emphasized the importance and appeal of new 
housing. These stories and ads portrayed re-housing as a means to homeownership, and therefore 
embody the middle class ideal homeownership and housing as a means to an improved social 
status. “How to Become a Homeowner” encouraged homeownership over renting, which the 
majority of the lower classes did not have the financial ability to achieve.153 The May 7, 1955 
And the same edition contained an article stating “Admiral Homes Are Charming, Distinctive 
and Low-Priced...” and praised new low-income housing structures as “visible proof of excellent 
structures” with “special innovations.”155 The articles emphasized the affordability and the 
practicality of buying a new home; which reflected URA promises of improved and affordable 
housing for Hill District residents.156 The Courier’s flattery of the new structures represented the 
middle class desire to appear as what the city defined as “progressive.” An article went so far as 
to describe the urban renewal process as “enlightened:” “... the site location is one of the few 
disadvantages that the Negro faces in purchasing a new home ... each day a Negro is moving into 
a new homeland hoping that the city’s enlightenment will greatly improved [sic.] the 
neighborhood in which his home is located.”157 With no true political power, the black middle 
class tried to gain power by adopting the discourse of the URA, the most powerful organization 
in Pittsburgh.

153 "How to Become a Homeowner," Pittsburgh Courier, May 7, 1955, City Edition 
156 "Admiral Homes Are Charming, Distinctive and Low-Priced: Savings Galore in Personal-Touch Home," 
Pittsburgh Courier, May 7, 1955, City Edition 
157 "New Homes: Desires Being Fulfilled"
However, it was clear that the middle class voices in the Courier were not in favor of displacing their fellow African Americans without alternative housing options. For example, in John L. Clark’s “Wylie Avenue” he criticizes city officials’ decision to close the Lower Hill’s Crawford Street Bath House suddenly. Officials closed the building in order to pave the way for eventual Lower Hill redevelopment, however the city’s sudden and undiscussed closing of the Bath House “ignored the comforts and bathing needs of thousands of Negroes and whites in that section.”\textsuperscript{158} It is clear from this column that while in favor of redevelopment and progress, no resident of the Upper Hill or Lower Hill District would agree to a plan of urban renewal that does not first provide former residents with the housing and support needed in relocation.

The \textit{Courier}’s coverage of political events and urban renewal reflected the political concerns of the middle class. Political ads catered to working and upper class residents concerned with taxes and improving their community.\textsuperscript{159} Candidates advertised hopes for a better community awareness and political consciousness. In his political ad in the April 30, 1955 Pittsburgh Courier, James Goode revealed his platform to be in favor of working with city officials to modernize and “adjust our living conditions with the times,” to improve the District’s desirability in comparison with other black communities in Pittsburgh, to “make the citizens of the Fifth Ward [Upper Hill] community conscious,” and improve the community in general through business and service organization development.\textsuperscript{160} With backgrounds in business, candidates appealed to their middle and upper class peers -- the audience of the Courier.\textsuperscript{161} It is clear that the political voice permeating the Courier, and the Hill District, came from the middle and upper classes.

\textsuperscript{159} “Goode and Hill Ask ... Isn’t It a Shame?” Political Ad, Pittsburgh Courier, April 30 1955, City Edition
\textsuperscript{160} “Good and Hill Ask ... Isn’t it a Shame?” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, April 30, 1955, Ad, City Edition
\textsuperscript{161} “Lain Lee, Silas Knox Say: We’re Best Qualified Fifth Ward Candidates,” Pittsburgh Courier, April 30 1955, City Edition
The Courier’s articles investigated the ways through which the Lower Hill could develop into a modern business district and become a source of pride like the Upper Hill; they approached the Lower Hill as a challenge to advancement. Lower Hill residents and landmarks had to “bow” to progress.162 A faith existed that the city and URA would demolish the “eye-sores” and “shacks” as they constructed a “beautiful park.” A hope existed that the city’s new Housing Code would provide the means to beautify decaying structures and equip them with facilities to improve quality of living.163 And even though the Courier presented articles questioning the ability of the city to follow through with new housing sites for the displaced, most assumed that “Uncle Sam will keep the new owners under close scrutiny.”164

The discourse in the Courier’s coverage of the Lower Hill redevelopment reveals an inherent trust in the city’s promises of modernity and of the relocation of Lower Hill residents. Its articles also reveal the ways in which the middle-class latched onto redevelopment as a means to power. Determined to gain authority, the middle class adopted the URA rhetoric as its voice in regards to Lower Hill. Courier coverage of the redevelopment did not solely hinge on government action, as the majority of its articles revealed the social climate of the Lower Hill District. In the Courier’s articles, the Lower Hill residents’ identity spoke through a middle-class created voice: a voice that empowered the middle class and ultimately disenfranchised the Lower Hill.

163 Clark, John “Wylie Avenue,” Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1955, City Edition
164 “Word on Lower Hill...”
SECTION THREE:

The Courier’s Lower Hill: An Inorganic Voice

Criticized as apathetic and unmotivated, the Lower Hill District felt the greatest impact of Pittsburgh’s renewal programs. This Third Ward was one of Pittsburgh’s smallest and oldest wards.\(^{165}\) The city and the Pittsburgh Courier did not believe the 1.4 square mile neighborhood’s voice existed.\(^{166}\) The Lower Hill’s poverty and crumbling buildings did not emulate the black middle and upper classes’ ideals of progress, obtaining capital, and agency.\(^{167}\) Unflattering descriptions of the neighborhood plastered newspapers during the Redevelopment, and reflected city and neighborhood opinions of the Lower Hill. Pittsburgh’s fragmented black community had no unified voice as the middle and upper classes spoke through the Courier, and the lower and working classes struggled to achieve stability in a Lower Hill community that had little space to expand.

The Hill District’s working and lower classes did not fill the pages of the Courier in glamorous gowns or business suits as their middle and upper class neighbors did. Instead they appeared in depictions of Lower Hill residents that resided in filthy conditions and crime-ridden neighborhoods filled with helpless drunks. The voice of the Lower Hill did not appear as a strong call to action, but rather was nonexistent. The Lower Hill residents’ space in the Courier reflected their actual political space and social voice in the Hill District. Both were stifled by middle-class institutions of power: in the Courier the Lower Hill’s voices were only heard through a middle-class lens; and in the Hill District middle-class social organizations and

\(^{165}\) Reid, 25
\(^{166}\) Clemetson
\(^{167}\) Glasco, “Internally Divided...,” 227
prestigious churches excluded the working and lower classes from membership, without which they could not achieve higher status or power. The Courier’s representations of the Lower Hill community created an inorganic voice for its residents: the picture painted of the Lower Hill residents was one founded on articles documented crime, poor living conditions, and a lack of self-sufficiency. The Courier’s articles constructed a working class voice imposed from above, literally and socially, through an Upper Hill middle class lens.

The Lower Hill neighborhood appeared frequently in the Courier as a space for music, debauchery, and culture. Each edition of the Courier contained reviews of current jazz or comedy shows in prominent bars like the Crawford Grill on Wylie Avenue. The paper listed performance schedules of shows, images of glamorous showgirls, and features on internationally known jazz musicians who were coming to town such as Duke Ellington, Sigh Oliver, and James Moody. Articles and columns following these aspects of the Lower Hill did not form a voice or representation of the lower and working classes. Instead, these articles provided a map of cultural space in the Lower Hill that appealed to all classes: the nightlife and its associations. The Lower Hill’s history as a cultural stronghold entrenched with deep roots in jazz and drinking allowed it to remain attractive to neighbors of all classes looking to indulge outside of the familiarity of their communities. But this image transformed the Lower Hill public space into an exotic attraction rather than a neighborhood of real people.

The middle class and upper class Hill District residents saw the Lower Hill through their interactions in public spaces such as bars and clubs, and through the articles in the Courier. Because Upper Hill and Lower Hill interactions revolved around the Lower Hill’s bars and jazz clubs, images of those residents as drunks and dope fiends surrounded the Upper Hill residents in their limited personal contact and through the Courier. The only evidence that the classes

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168 Wiley Avenue Days
intermingled intentionally existed within the “Help Wanted” Ads. Ads mainly requested female help around houses for either board or monetary compensation. This complicated the Upper Hill identity of independence from the Lower Hill, for in reality the lower and working classes entered the middle class private space on a routine basis. The middle class used the Courier’s “Help Wanted” section to communicate to Hill District’s lower classes.

The Courier was an accessible resource for the middle and upper classes. However, for the working and lower classes the indulgent images of socialites held little value. For the latter groups, the more relatable sections of the paper were the extensive sports coverage, church memos, and articles about race issues. The Courier did not provide a space for lower class voices as defined by the lower and working class residents. Weekly suggestions on what books to read, which politicians to challenge, and when television shows aired fit snugly into a middle class lifestyle that prided itself on status. The middle class goals of gaining political power and social status were reflected in articles about politicians and luxury items like televisions. A section entitled “What Courier Readers Think” featured letters to the editor from middle class members throughout the country. Articles presented working class issues only as those of poor living conditions, troubles with alcohol and drugs, and a lack of a community political voice.

The “Cobblestone Jungle”

The representations of lower classes by the Courier lay within features on crumbling structures, gruesome crimes, and hopeless residents. Front-page headlines described murders, rapes, and robberies committed by unemployed working class and lower class African

\footnotesize


170 I was unable to obtain information on the residences of Courier columnists because they are in non-circulating files in the University of Pittsburgh archives. The residences of columnists would deepen understanding of how the Courier functioned, and especially of what class it employed as writers.

Americans. For example: “Grand Jury Indicts Teen-Ager’s Slayers,” which detailed the “tragic ghettom murder of a 16-year-old [Lower Hill District] youth, and “‘Wife’ Caught in Bedroom With Another Man Admits She Fatally Stabbed Mate…” which went into detailed description of a broken Lower Hill District marriage, and also “Thieves Have Field Day in Hill District” which covered five Hill District robberies in seven days. Front-page headlines placed Lower Hill chaos in the faces of middle class Hill District residents. The perceived constant instability and violence in the Lower Hill, as seen through these stories, presented the Lower Hill lower classes as different and irrational. These articles provided middle class Hill District residents with a Lower Hill identity that was not accurate, but instead sensationalized. Many articles focused on problems with the Lower Hill District youth in murders and drug deals, furthering middle class judgments of the Lower Hill as hopeless. The plethora of articles on crime adorning the front pages of the Courier was the main window through which the middle classes observed the Lower Hill. These news stories framed views of Lower Hill residents for the middle class.

Descriptions of “slum people” living in homes “unfit for human habitation” were the most common descriptions of the lower class neighborhood. Constant animalizing adjectives pervaded articles about the Lower Hill. The phrase “slum people” suggests an abnormality from the normal human being. A slum person was someone, or perhaps something, that resided in a shelter “unfit for human habitation.” If the shelter was unfit for human habitation, and these

172 “Grand Jury Indicts Teen-Ager’s Slayers,” Pittsburgh Courier, January 24 1959, City Edition
173 “‘Wife’ Caught in Bedroom With Another Man Admits She Fatally Stabbed Mate…” Pittsburgh Courier, February 21, 1959
174 “Thieves Have Field Day in Hill District,” Pittsburgh Courier, April 18 1959, City Edition
175 “4 Youths Beat, Cut, Rob Student, Then Threw Him Over University Drive Fence,” Pittsburgh Courier, Apr 4, 1959, City Edition
176 Wylie Avenue Days
177 “It’s Getting Okay on Oak Street: Now Haven is Wearing a Smile Because a Courageous Minister Has Done Wonderful Job in Helping Slum People…” Pittsburgh Courier, June 4 1955, City Edition; “Must Move... But Where?... Home Condemned .. ‘No Public Housing Available,’” Pittsburgh Courier, Jun 13 1959, City Edition
people were not human beings but instead "slum people," then this suggests these residents were closer to being animals than to being humans. These metaphors found in the Courier suggested a nonhuman quality within Lower Hill residents, and that because of this quality they could tolerate subhuman conditions – or redevelopment. The articles painted the Lower Hill District as a community of overcrowded residents, and varnished these descriptions with articles about criminals, drug dealers, and deterioration. Thus, through this discourse the Lower Hill became a crowded, dirty, jungle of poor nonhuman residents.

The Courier’s May 9, 1959 edition’s front page flashed the headline “Tenants Live In ‘Oversized Shed’ In Hill,” which exemplified a typical article about the lives and structures of the Lower Hill. Tenants lived in sub-standard housing conditions in a former pickle factory; “Miller St. residents complained to The Courier that some of the occupants of the building are the most unsavory characters and have turned the neighborhood into an extremely dangerous one.” This “oversized shed” housed both schoolchildren and bums, whom the article generalized as “unsavory,” living under “medieval conditions.”178 This article, like many others of its kind, weaves a story of hardship and woe as characterizing the lower classes of the Lower Hill. The narrator’s perspective is an outsider’s, observing the desperate conditions of those less fortunate. Discourse about the Lower Hill residents allowed the middle class to feel pity and repugnance towards the community. The descriptions of Lower Hill living conditions constantly leapt into a language of otherness and incivility before the Civic Arena construction began in 1955 and continued through the increasing displacement of Lower Hill residents in 1959.

The article “FILTH AND STENCH FOUND IN 3RD WARD [Lower Hill],” published in August 1959 on the second page of the Courier, is an example of the furthering of Upper Hill stereotypes and middle class distance from the Lower Hill District residents. The article cites

178 “Tenants Live in ‘Oversized Shed’ In Hill”, Pittsburgh Courier, May 9 1959, City Edition
irresponsible residents and maintenance services for the failure to maintain a livable standard of cleanliness in areas near the large “Dempsey Dumpsters” in the Lower Hill. The frequency of articles, such as these, depicting the filth and gloom of slum life reveal the middle and upper class representations of lower class life as a dirty and uncivilized space. Sensational descriptions of “filth,” “unfit to live,” “dangerous,” and “offensive” paint the Lower Hill as a lair of dirt, disease, and disaster.

These descriptions created a stereotype of Lower Hill residents in the eyes of middle class Upper and Middle Hill District residents in search of political power and social status. These descriptions in the Courier eerily resemble City Councilman George E. Evans’s argument that to “eliminate … disease ridden slums, where practically half the crime, juvenile delinquency, tuberculosis, police cases, syphilis (…survey shows 52 percent of all syphilis cases in the City originate in this area), would be impossible to estimate in dollars and cents.” Redevelopment’s imagination of the Hill as “completely worn out, like an old pair of shoes that has gone the last mile,” mirrored the Upper Hill’s imagination of the Lower Hill. Although all members of the Hill District lived in the same neighborhood and interacted with the same racial tensions that were inherent to the city’s relationship with African Americans, there was no sign of cohesion or kinship.

For example, Courier featured the story of a family evicted from slum housing. The article asks its readers

How would you feel if you were too ill to work and you and your wife and six children were going to be evicted from your home and had no place to

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179 “FILTH AND STENCH FOUND IN 3RD WARD,” Pittsburgh Courier, Aug 8, 1959, City Edition
180 “Sanitary Problems – Irresponsibility on the part of some residents,” Pittsburgh Courier, Aug 8, 1959, City Edition
181 “FILTH AND STENCH…”
182 Evans, George E, “Here is a Postwar Job for Pittsburgh … Transforming the Hill District,” Greater Pittsburgh, July-Aug 1943
go? And how would you feel if you had trudged from one agency to the another, trying to find suitable quarters, and for months had received nothing but what you believe was the old 'run-around!' Now the Health Department has condemned your home as unfit for human habitation, and you have been ordered to move, regardless. What would you do? This is the problem facing an ill and anguished father and mother of six children in the Hill District, this week. They plead for you help.

Cases of city government agencies, such as the Health Department, mistreating tenants and not providing adequate relocation facilities during the redevelopment process were common themes in the Courier. Accompanying this article were pictures of run down infrastructure in the Lower Hill with captions such as “YES, PEOPLE LIVE HERE,” or “UNFIT TO LIVE IN.” The language used in the portrayals of lower class residents invoked middle class pity. Built upon the animalizing metaphors used in Courier articles, the picture painted of helpless residents further encoded stereotypes of the Lower Hill. Lower class residents appeared as not only sub-human creatures living in filth, but as lacking agency or power. There is no sense of an existence of equality or solidarity amongst all Hill District residents. Pictures of children living in these buildings were captioned

WHAT’S HER FUTURE? -- You wonder just what future is in store for the youngster, child of one of the [evicted families] who is playing in the dirt, as her mother worries about just what the fate of her family will be because ‘We must move, but there is no place to go.

By imploring its readership for help by calling the Courier “...if you have a home for rent or know of anyone who does... [Because] the Tyler ‘residence’ is without a telephone,” the lower class family is presented as lacking agency. Redevelopment promised to relocate working and lower class families, such as the Tylers described above, to new low-income housing units in other integrated communities. These invocations of the future mirror hopes of redevelopment’s

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184 “Must Move ... But Where?... Home Condemned... ‘No Public Housing Available,’” Pittsburgh Courier, Jun 13 1959, City Edition
185 “Must Move ... But Where?...”, Pittsburgh Courier,
186 Ibid.
declared progressive future of a modern business district in the Lower Hill and or the redistribution of the working and lower classes to new housing rather than encroaching on the Upper Hill. Additionally, stories such as this one, in which a city organization takes advantage of a family barely surviving in the Lower Hill, present the lower classes as helpless and powerless.

As redevelopment progressed and the reality of the failures of URA relocation programs grew apparent, the Courier's documentation of life in the Lower Hill did not change tones. A prime example is seen on the front page of the November 25, 1961 Courier whose headline cried "'Help Us!' Urban Renewal 'DP's' [Displaced Persons] Plead." The article criticizes the city for not taking care of the Lower Hill District residents: "But what happens to these living leftovers in the parade of progress, and how their exploiters operate, is what the Courier intends to tell you in the following weeks as part of the story of the human side of Redevelopment."187 Consistent coverage of the problems and troubles befalling the Lower Hill's residents were sensationalist but mostly factually accurate, but did not reveal a voice other than one that cried for help. Again the dehumanization of Lower Hill residents appears in discourse such as "living leftovers." Even though the article sought to portray the "human side" of the renewal process, its metaphors and stereotyping of Lower Hill residents argue the opposite. This is not the voice of the Lower Hill but instead a middle class-constructed voice of otherness and hopelessness.

These articles construct an interdependent relationship between the lower classes and the middle classes. The lower classes need the middle classes' agency for protection and better opportunities and the middle classes thrive off the ability to maintain a powerful political voice within the black community. However, outside of the Hill District this black middle class held very little political power within the Pittsburgh government. Thus, the Courier articles on the misery and powerlessness of the poor were tools in increasing middle class activism and agency

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within the Hill District community. A working class voice was a call for help rather than an assertion of agency. The Courier presented this inorganic voice as a new tool for middle class power; the portrait of a helpless Lower Hill bolstered middle class distance and disassociation from those residents. The middle class’ self-image was one of motivation, power, and class – none of which appeared in descriptions of the lower classes. Therefore, no sense of kinship emerged in the Courier’s Lower Hill articles. The Second Section of the Courier housed the paper’s relatively small selection of working and lower class voices. Within this second section a more organic and legitimate version of a voice can be teased out from John L. Clark’s “Wylie Avenue” column and the weekly feature “Pittsburghers Speak Up.”188

“Pittsburghers Speak Up” was in the Second Section of the Courier, which generally contained less formal news such as women’s interests and recipes, sports, and local cultural news. The Second Section also contained the Junior section that contained stories and updates from local high school scholars and had an advice forum for kids. Each week “Pittsburghers Speak Up” raised questions that randomly selected residents answered. Responses ranged from one to three paragraphs, and the informant’s name, street address, and occupation preceded his or her answer. Questions ranged from moral issues such as birth control to the pros and cons of working moms. The majority of these issues were those of the middle and upper classes, and the majority of the responses were from mill workers, laborers, clerical workers, porters, and other stably employed black people. The placement of occupation before the informant’s response emphasized social status because these jobs were rare and difficult to obtain as a Pittsburgh African American. Through these responses, there is a less mediated conceptualization of how the middle classes viewed the working and lower classes.

188 Second Section, Pittsburgh Courier, 1955-1959, City Edition
The middle class distance from the working classes during the preliminary stages of redevelopment through the construction of the Civic Arena appeared in “Pittsburghers Speak Up.” On February 14, 1959 the Courier posed the question “Do you think Negro business places should have the right to operate in the Lower Hill after that section has been beautified?” As seen in the responses, middle class members re-imagined a redeveloped Lower Hill as an attractive and integrated business district. The middle class quest for power could utilize a Lower Hill that offered opportunities to gain financial assets, and the presence of white business could transform the Hill’s citywide image as a poor black slum to one of a progressive integrated neighborhood. These images of progress, as defined by the URA, subtly appeared in the responses of the informants. Middle class responses gravitated towards the main points that color should not matter; business is a citizen’s right; that the owner must know he or she has the proper funds before reopening a business in that area; and that, in the words of a welfare case-worker “Yes... the section will be a nice part of town for businesses. It is close to downtown and favorable not only to the Negro but to all others. A lot of people out-of-town will be coming to that section to shop.” This response’s emphasis on the Lower Hill’s desirable location suggests that the middle class hoped its soon-to-be increased value would bolster their business and employment opportunities.

The Hill District’s class was racialized through dialogues about “Negro business places” and the constant reminders that the Hill was a black neighborhood. However, the middle class’s interaction with this dialogue revealed more class than racial divisions. The class conceptions of the Courier’s readers and the Hill District residents are contingent upon this setting. To the greater city of Pittsburgh, the entire Hill District was a poor slum. But within the

189 “Pittsburghers Speak Up,” Pittsburgh Courier, February 14 1959, City Edition
190 “Pittsburghers Speak Up,” Pittsburgh Courier, February 14 1959, City Edition
191 Ibid.
context of the Hill District, the Lower Hill was a filthy ghetto while the Middle and Upper Hills were symbols of middle class prominence and superiority. In the responses to the question about "Negro businesses" middle class ideals are obvious, and the belief in promises made by redevelopers as well.\textsuperscript{192}

The hopes of turning the Lower Hill into a higher income area reflected opinions about the Lower Hill’s current residents.\textsuperscript{193} Suggestions that the Lower Hill would one day be beautiful and a "nice part of town for business"\textsuperscript{194} made it clear that the present state of the Lower Hill was not conducive to these descriptions. The reason people from outside the Hill and of Pittsburgh visited the Lower Hill was for the nightlife, not its business. This Lower Hill identity did not garner respect from Pittsburgh’s government or elite because Pittsburgh was a city built upon industry and business. Assertions that the Lower Hill would attract non-residents by its business exemplify the black middle class ideas of progress, and the shift toward Pittsburgh elite ideals and hopes for the Lower Hill redevelopment. A modern and beautified Lower Hill business district created by the city’s powerful URA could provide the middle class with the economic necessities it craved in order to gain political power in the city; as well as produce an identity for the Hill that the city would respect. However, this “Speak Up” section provided middle and upper class blacks a forum in which to voice their opinions -- not those of the lower classes. While this section reflected middle class opinions toward the lower classes, Clark’s “Wylie Avenue” was the closest column in the entire paper to providing a glimpse of the Lower Hill voice.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} “Pittsburghers Speak Up: Do you think that the city needs a fair housing ordinance?” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, June 21 1958, City Edition
\textsuperscript{194} “Pittsburghers Speak Up,” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, February 14 1959, City Edition
“Wylie Avenue” and the Importance of Lower Hill Street Life

Clark’s “Wylie Avenue” was a conglomeration of his personal opinions of Hill District events, gossip from the streets, and updates on prominent community members. Its location within the Courier was far from the front page, next to the forum “Pittsburghers Speak Up!” on the front page of the Second Section. It was the Courier’s most relatable section for working and lower classes because it discussed the issues of the Lower Hill’s street life, the working class’s public space. Clark discusses “believe it or not [stories] of the week.” In this column appeared everyday stories such as the sight of a man so desperate for the financial compensation he could receive from washing a stranger’s car that he used a pop bottle to store the washing water while he worked.195 His stories, anecdotes, and gossip contextualized Lower Hill life through reflections of humor, humanity, and agency. Thus the Lower Hill’s streets transformed from an entertainment space to an actual public space for human interaction and discussion. Concerning the increased youth crime in the region that the rest of the paper characterized through sensationalized tragic stories, Clark writes

A police officer tells of stopping a man with a long switch-blade knife. ‘What are you doing with that,’ asked the officer. Replied the man: ‘I would rather have you arrest me with this knife, than be without it in front of a teenager.’196

Through the description of encounters such as this one, this column allowed lower and working class residents to shed all animalistic metaphors and become human. His diction was conversational, and his stories transcended class relations. Clark frequently ranted about the high population of “dopers” and drunks in the Lower Hill.197 He befriended various bartenders and waitresses, and spoke with an authority that gave an illusion that he knew everyone in the Lower

Hill. His column featured conversations with local waitresses about minimum wage, local bartenders about pimps and prostitution, gamblers and bookies about the local baseball teams, police officers about dope dealers and crime rates, and local residents about neighborhood personalities.  

Unlike the rest of the Courier’s descriptions of Lower Hill life, Clark’s column “Wylie Avenue” interacted with residents in the streets, their public space. The Lower Hill’s spirit was in its streets and institutions, not in its crumbling infrastructure. Leisure time was not spent in deteriorating structures, but on the streets and in local bars. The residents interviewed and discussed in Clark’s column described day-to-day life rather than living conditions. Through these interactions Lower Hill residents and their voices were brought back to humanity. There were no metaphorically animalistic descriptions of the Lower Hill, nor were there sensational descriptions of filth and violence. By reporting normal residents’ business and street lives, the column was a reminder that the Lower Hill was not a “cobblestone jungle” but instead a neighborhood filled with people. This was the most intimate window into the Lower Hill the Courier provided, one column in the second section of the paper.

In addition, Clark’s column vocalized his offense to injustices. At the beginning of Lower Hill Redevelopment fervor in early 1954 and 1955, his column voiced concern about government reliability. In a July 1955 column, “Wylie Avenue” was skeptical about the URA’s ability to fulfill its promise of relocation: “At the recent hearing before City Council it was not admitted that the Urban Redevelopment Authority has not satisfied the Federal Government that all families eligible for low rent housing can be relocated.” Clark dedicated this entire July 16th

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199 Wylie Avenue Days
column to pre-redevelopment discussion in Pittsburgh. He criticized black civic organizations such as the Urban League, NAACP, and leaders of political parties for not obtaining accurate information on what redevelopment would mean for Lower Hill residents. He described "anxious" and "uncertain" residents whose homes would be part of a large-scale "clearing-out" process in a skeptical light. Clark voiced fears about the legitimacy of the city government's goals. The dedication of an entire column to this issue revealed that the issue of trust and relocation was important to the Lower Hill. His column's focus on day-to-day interactions and the discussions in the Lower Hill's streets means that there was discussion of Redevelopment fears in the Lower Hill, even though the front-page Courier articles did not cover these sentiments. The residents were not passive, but simply stifled by the middle class's quasi-slumming - quasi because the Upper Hill was a part of the Hill District slum. While Clark did not directly interview the poor or unemployed, he revealed glimpses into Lower Hill concerns and discussion. With his knowledge and apparent immersion, John Clark's column "Wiley Avenue" provided the middle and upper classes with a window into life in the Lower Hill.

In the Second Section's "Junior Courier" pages, many working class and lower class children wrote in to Florence C. Joyce's "What's Your Aim?" column for advice on their problems. Joyce was the Urban League of Pittsburgh's Guidance Specialist, and therefore presumed to be an advocate for an African American advancement that transcended class lines. One letter that best exemplified a working class voice was from a high school girl who wrote that her mother wanted her to quit school and work when she reached the age of sixteen in order to help support her five younger siblings. She mentioned that her family received public assistance, but that she wanted to remain in school and did not know which the best option was. Joyce

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ultimately recommended that the girl remain in school. The young girl’s question was an organic lower class voice. When utilized, though rarely, by the lower and working classes the Courier was a useful tool for voicing their concerns, opinions, and realities but not for adopting a discourse through which they could channel a form of agency. The advice to stay in school was clearly based in middle class values, but at the same time would ultimately benefit the girl who would earn a G.E.D. and be eligible for employment that requires more skill.

However, despite community coverage and interviews, the “What Courier Readers Think” section drew from international and national readers. The forum that was most accessible to asserting opinions and voices held very few responses from Pittsburgh residents. Those Pittsburghers that did write in did not mention the Hill District. Redevelopment’s destabilization of the Lower Hill destroyed its residents’ chances of cultivating a powerful political voice in their District and in the paper. The middle class did not want to associate with an unstable community that the city of Pittsburgh wanted to demolish in hopes that they could find a stable position in the city. But, as redevelopment threatened the middle and upper class residents and communities during the early 1960s, the Courier’s community function changed.

In 1963 redevelopment threatened to expand into the Upper Hill as Pittsburgh’s URA decided to rid downtown of its slums altogether. The Upper Hill discovered Pittsburgh’s harsh definition of the entire Hill District as a static slum whose presence would prevent the Civic Arena from reaching its full modernizing potential. The Courier called on its readership not as middle class members, but as African Americans. The aspect of Lower Hill coverage that can be seen as transformed was the addition of local racial issues in the articles. When the Courier championed a unified racial voice in an effort to unite fragmented black communities as the Civil

204 Mallet, 186
Rights Movement began to blossom, it fashioned a universal voice for the Hill District. This voice was against city-imposed redevelopment.

**Redevelopment Unites the Hill**

In 1961 Senator H.J. Heinz offered eight million dollars to construct a symphony hall within this “cultural Acropolis.” But, his offer was contingent upon the construction of a Center for the Arts near the Civic Arena, and the clearance of fifty blocks of the Upper Hill east of Crawford Street. Developers and investors felt that the clearance of the Upper Hill was crucial for the Acropolis’s success. In 1962 the URA issued an announcement of its future projects that stated that the Upper Hill project would require the clearance of 900 acres to redevelop into commercial, industrial, and residential areas. Adding to the developing arguments to clear the Upper Hill, the URA issued specific guidelines and suggestions for protecting their newly developed capital, Civic Arena and its surrounding area. These guidelines called for clearing an unspecified plot of land in the Upper Hill to create a public park; building a wall along the west side of Crawford Street to protect cultural center patrons from dangers of viewing and being in the presence of a slum; and constructing a new residential area whose buildings and recreational centers would obscure the Upper Hill backdrop and create space between the cultural center and the poorer housing of the Upper Hill. The URA and Mayor Lawrence reiterated the definition of the Hill District as a barrier to development to further justify another wave of redevelopment.

The city government defined the entire Hill District as a slum, not solely the Lower Hill. The racial context of class in the Hill District as a status derived from social actions rather than economic or political power was not compatible with the city’s definition of class as resting in

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205 Mallet, 185
207 Mallet, 184-185
job stability, economic resources, and elitism. The Upper Hill’s middle class contained less than one percent of Pittsburgh professionals. The city of Pittsburgh’s elite did not consist of porters and semi-skilled laborers. Corporate and industrial leaders such as Mayor Lawrence and Mellon composed the Pittsburgh elite. None of the elite’s members resided in the Hill District.

The inability of the black middle class to enter the city of Pittsburgh’s power structure was clear when the URA targeted the “slums” of the Upper Hill. Renewal threatened to expand into the Upper Hill District because, unlike middle class blacks, redevelopment rhetoric viewed the Hill District as a solid community, a black-nationhood, and the barrier to urban modernity.

In 1963, as the city published reform plans for the Upper Hill and the black middle and upper classes, the Hill District refused to allow any more business-influenced redevelopment. As the URA prepared to make Upper Hill reforms official, Hill District residents erected a billboard near the intersection of Crawford Street and Centre Avenue in the Middle Hill that read “Attention: City Hall and the URA, NO Redevelopment Beyond This Point.” From this intersection, renamed Freedom Corner, Hill District residents marched downtown despite death threats from white Pittsburghers and demanded that the redevelopment stop -- “not another inch!” The very name “Freedom Corner” reflected Civil Rights rhetoric and revealed the growing presence of black identity and unity within the Hill. This unity across class lines through a common racial bond strengthened the Hill District’s community power and influence over government redevelopment decisions. Suddenly the middle class was lobbying the city government to produce more low-income housing for the displaced Lower Hill residents.
shift in the Hill District’s residents’ attitudes permanently altered the city’s approach to redevelopment. The Hill District’s united community activism exposed their nearness to the seats of government, and forced city council to reevaluate its approach to urban redevelopment. City officials mistook the Lower Hill District’s trust in the Renaissance’s promises for apathy and passivity. However, as seen in the pages of the Pittsburgh Courier, the African American community of the Hill District was anything but passive.

**A New Voice of “Blackness”**

In 1963 Courier rhetoric and middle class concerns transformed. The ultimate goal of redevelopment was to makeover the entire Hill District into something less “black” and more “modern” in order to advance the Renaissance agenda.\(^\text{214}\) As the Hill District’s black middle class learned of URA plans to renew their neighborhood, the Courier began to push for race rights and criticize the white city government.\(^\text{215}\) The thought of losing their domain of community power to the dominating city forces motivated the middle class to break with the hegemony of the city’s ruling coalition and solidify with the lower and working classes to finally form a neighborhood with a common goal: equality and opportunity.\(^\text{216}\)

Courier articles in 1963 portrayed the Redevelopment as bureaucratic and forced upon the Hill District community as a whole. For example, in the April 20, 1963 Courier, an article described the city’s plan for the Hill District as a dramatic change to the face of the Hill District. Suddenly the positive lens through which the middle classes wanted to view redevelopment shattered as news that “the installation of the new pattern will call for a redevelopment, not a renewal of most of the Upper Hill District ... These are not proposals, the Courier was told, but

\(^{214}\) Mallet, 182

\(^{215}\) Glasco, “Double Burden...” 241

\(^{216}\) “Hill District Plan Outline!” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 19 1963, City Edition
rather concrete plans by professional planners." The definitions of renewal and redevelopment contain very different connotations. Renewal insinuates a refurbishment and restoration to a former primacy; but a redevelopment insinuates destruction and rebuilding such as that seen in the Lower Hill. It is not a coincidence that the establishment of Freedom Corner came in the midst of this discussion of redevelopment and renewal of the Upper Hill. The Courier ran articles focusing on national issues and black power rhetoric, and emphasized the need of black Americans to unite to claim their rights. Middle class rhetoric and thought receded into the background as the prescient issues applicable to all blacks emerged to the forefront of the Courier’s City Edition.

The poor management of the Lower Hill redevelopment by the city government failed to produce a “Cultural Acropolis” that would bring Pittsburgh into a new age of modernity. Instead, the Civic Arena stood alone atop the remnants of a once flourishing community. The disorder and homelessness left in the wake of this construction made redevelopment unappealing and repulsive to Upper Hill residents who now had to struggle with a shift in the physical and social constitutions in their neighborhood. Ironically, black solidarity was not achieved until outside pressures threatened the black middle class. The disenfranchisement of the Lower Hill residents did not appeal to the Hill District’s middle class who obviously did not want to relinquish their community power, as seen in their constant reaffirmations in the Courier and their physical separation from the working class community. To avoid the fate the Lower Hill faced, the middle classes had to loosen their clutch on status and power in their community, and open their newspapers and rhetoric to the working and lower classes. This compromise to solidarity was

217 "No more Wylie? ‘New Hill’ Will Erase Landmarks" Pittsburgh Courier, April 20 1963, City Edition
218 Buni, 326
necessary from the onset of the development of the Hill community in order to gain a clear political voice in Pittsburgh government.

CONCLUSION

The Hill’s Future

The initial government approach from 1955 through 1962 failed when it threatened the black middle class in the Hill District. After 1963 redevelopers developed a cooperative grassroots style project. The government worked with local Hill District organizations to tackle neighborhood problems and preserve the neighborhood rather than demolish it. Through the destruction of urban renewal, the Hill District found strength as a solid community. An identity of “blackness” united classes to fight for their neighborhood’s space within the city in the early 1960s. This construction of blackness extended beyond the city’s restrictions on residence that defined “black” before the 1960s, but to an organic need for power and assertion of rights.

Before 1963 the Hill District’s middle class distanced itself from the Lower Hill’s lower classes through newspapers, discourse and isolation in an attempt to gain power. However, when it was clear that the city would not accept the Hill District’s definition of class into its structure in 1963, the Hill District residents found a common identity of “blackness” and a common enemy in the city government attempting to demolish their community. This casts a new light on Pittsburgh Redevelopment as those government actions forced the recognition of black solidarity that the community actually required in order to gain power. The abundance of protesting and

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219 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh ..., 171
proclamations after this moment infinitely outweighed the few that occurred in the 1950s. The Lower, Middle, and Upper Hill always shared links; however it took the threat of the city government to forge this link into a solidarity.

Unity to Flames: The Hill's Riots and Decline

After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., residents of the remaining Lower Hill and Middle Hill set local businesses and homes ablaze. Along with buildings burnt, the hopes of revitalizing the Hill District as a stable and economically successful community served as a physical outlet to Hill District frustrations dating from the start of redevelopment that later intensified due to redevelopment's destructiveness and as a response to Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. After these riots, most middle class blacks fled the Hill to avoid the ruin and disparity left behind by the blazes. In an interview with Zola Hirsh, a former small business owner of the Hill District, scholar Ralph Lemuell asks

How would you view the Hill since '68?
'As a disaster area.'
Do you see any hope for its survival?
'If anything substantial takes place there, it would be a surprise to me...'

Mr. Hirsh's prediction was correct: the Hill District never recovered from this moment. The solidarity gained in the Hill District during the Civil Rights movement crumbled after these riots. Fires burned most of the Hill's business district to the ground, and drove merchants out of

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223 "An Assassin Walks Among All Black Men," Pittsburgh Courier, April 13 1968, City Edition; "Dr. King's Finest Hour: He Had A Dream!," Pittsburgh Courier, April 13 1968, City Edition
224 Lemuell, 161
225 Ibid., 160-161
business, and out of the Hill District.\textsuperscript{226} With no middle class left in the Hill, the lower classes were all that remained. After the 1960s, black communities in Pittsburgh became more segregated as white Pittsburghers moved out to suburbs, which meant there was less competition for jobs and less need for Civil Rights "tactics." The bond of "blackness" no longer meant a stronger community.\textsuperscript{227} Hill District residents moved to Homewood, Braddock, or Hazelwood to escape the neighborhood's lack of business. By 1990 only 15,000 people remained in the Hill.\textsuperscript{228}

Thus, the Pittsburgh Renaissance's promoters failed to fulfill their duplicitous promises. The promise to the city of Pittsburgh and its middle and upper classes converged with the promise of improving Hill District resident's quality of life. The construction of a cultural center and luxury apartments to accompany the Civic Arena failed as the black community refused to allow for further clearance of their Hill District neighborhood. As organizations such as the Citizens Committee for Hill District Renewal grew, a more grass roots and community-based approach to renewal began. The pages of the Pittsburgh Courier reflect the black community's reactions to the urban renewal programs as the URA's targeted zones spread from the Lower Hill where the lower-class African Americans crowded into decaying houses to the Upper Hill, or "Sugar Top," where the more affluent African American residents resided.

**Consol Energy and the Future of the Hill**

Today, the Urban Redevelopment Authority controls seventy percent of the Hill District's business artery. Older residents nostalgically refer to the Hill District "as it was" back in its

\textsuperscript{226} Glasco, "Civil Right..." 11  
\textsuperscript{227} Glasco, "Civil Rights..." 12  
\textsuperscript{228} Clemetson
Wylie Avenue Days prime.\(^{229}\) With a significantly lower population and no real business, the Hill is yet again watching the city of Pittsburgh construct a new hockey arena in the Lower Hill as the Civic Arena’s “old” condition offends many hockey fans.\(^{230}\)

Consol Energy, the sponsor of this new arena claims it will incorporate the Hill District into its agenda. As before, the hope is that the new arena will allow Pittsburgh to remain competitive in the nation as a city of innovation, in this instance by utilizing green architecture and design.\(^{231}\) But unlike the Pittsburgh Renaissance of the 1950s, this new arena is not looking to clear out an area standing in the way of “progress.” Nor is it an attempt to shake Pittsburgh of an image of a smoky static decay. Officials say, “We would also like to respect and celebrate the history of this area. All the culture that was here in the Lower Hill District at one time still exists in people’s minds and hearts.” The arena construction plan hopes to extend and rebuild Wylie Avenue and to build “low density [residential] development.”\(^{232}\) Ironically, the promises presented by the Consol Energy Center to the Hill District and the city of Pittsburgh parallel those of the Civic Arena in the 1950s, but also long for the very culture and low density development they already wiped out in the earlier period.

The city, URA and Mayor Luke Ravenstahl hope that building a new arena will create more jobs, more opportunities to construct luxury apartment complexes, and bring people back to the Hill District.\(^{233}\) There are also plans to erect a new hotel in the area.\(^{234}\) Mellon Arena, the current name of the Civic Arena, will be a parking lot. The Pittsburgh Office of Public Art


\(^{230}\) Belko, Mark “New Penguins arena design unveiled: The team’s design firm says the facility incorporates elements from nearly every major hockey venue in the nation.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 14 2007


\(^{233}\) Belko, Mark, “Hill group irked in delay in redevelopment hiring,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 09 2009

\(^{234}\) Belko, Mark, “Penguin group to erect hotel near arena,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 19 2009
erected local displays around the construction site to prove it will be a productive force in the area. However, unlike the in 1950s, the Hill District is a largely empty neighborhood. It is unlikely that a new arena will attract former residents who still remember the failures of the redevelopment movement sixty years ago. Thus, the future will hold either a new – and unlikely – successful form of "blended" development, or the gentrification and the creation of a new, affluent urban community displacing remaining residents, and another failed redevelopment scheme. The path to be followed remains to be chosen.

\[235\]Bauknecht, Sara, “Arena building site is canvas for creativity,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 09 2009
APPENDIX

**Figure 1:**
Map, “Pittsburgh in 1939”  
Source: Cramer, “Pittsburgh 250: Maps from 1759 to Almost Now”

**Figure 2:**

**Figure 3:**
Picture, Civic Arena Construction  
Source: White, “I’m From the Government, and I’m Here to Help,” Apr 7 2010

**Figure 4:**
Picture, Part of the Lower Hill Area Designated for Removal  
Source: Mallet, “Redevelopment of the Lower Hill,” 5
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