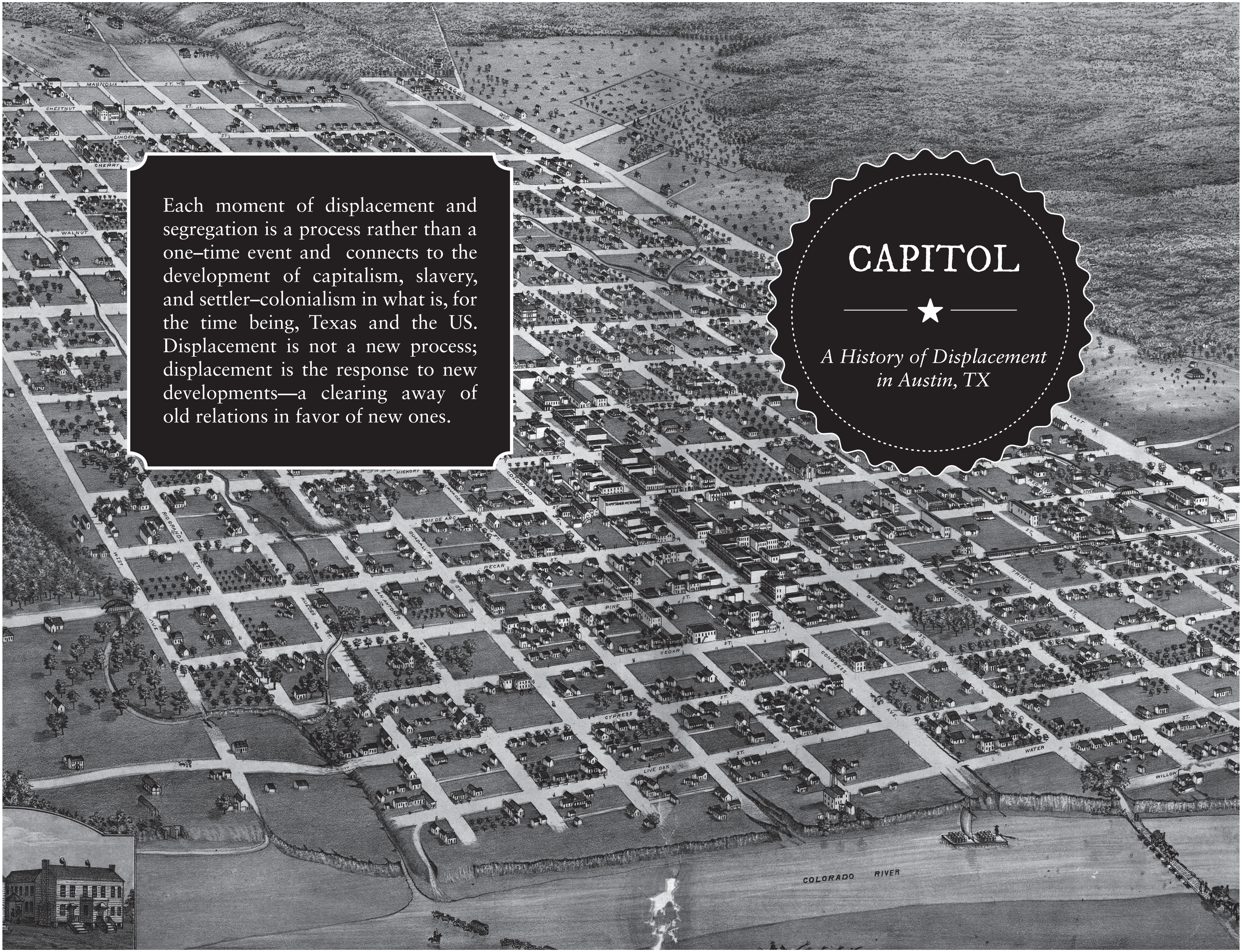
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SAN JACINTO
TRINITY ST.
RED RIVER
EAST AVE.
SABINE
SAMPSON & HENRICKS

CAPITOL

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A History of Displacement in Austin, TX

Each moment of displacement and segregation is a process rather than a one–time event and connects to the development of capitalism, slavery, and settler–colonialism in what is, for the time being, Texas and the US. Displacement is not a new process; displacement is the response to new developments—a clearing away of old relations in favor of new ones.

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CAPITOL

A History of Displacement in Austin, TX

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workers, some of whose ancestors were slaves, in remote ghettos. Economic segregation and the ordering of the city keep all workers transient. The most recent City Plan, titled "Imagine Austin," calls for two high density development zones: one through the central city along Interstate 35, and another far east of the "Crescent" along newly constructed toll road Highway 130. One can only imagine who will live amidst existing industrial and resource extraction sites by 2039, the City of Austin's bicentennial—the date Imagine Austin hopes to be completed.

In the beginning of this story, the Comanches tried to destroy the nascent city. The slaves tried to burn it down. Fixes based on repression and removal have appeared to restore order but replace old crises with new ones. Where will these new struggles emerge? Will we recognize Engels' warning that the relocation of working class districts is constant and will not end until the capitalist mode of production is abolished? It is clear that white supremacy creates specific types of displacement in the service of capitalism. As long as planning and policing determine the city's contours of relocation, we can expect nothing more from Austin.

— Scott Hoft, November 2015
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> *The growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value, instead of increasing it, because they no longer correspond to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with workers' houses which are situated centrally and whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected… The result is that the workers are forced out of the centre of the towns towards the outskirts; that workers' dwellings, and small dwellings in general, become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable, for under these circumstances the building industry, which is offered a much better field for speculation by more expensive houses, builds workers' dwellings only by way of exception.*

– Friedrich Engels, The Housing Question, 1872

AUSTIN IS BOOMING. ACCORDING TO THE CITY'S DEMOGRAPHERS, hundreds of people move here every day. Cranes flock on the skylines and suburbs extend in every direction. Through ups and downs the city has doubled in population every twenty years. It appears on dozens of top ten lists, including that for the most economically segregated city. This economic segregation closely maps onto segregation by race, the legacy of centuries.

Public discussion of Austin's segregated nature has peaked in recent years. The current debate usually starts with the moment of segregation, the Plan of 1928, and leaps to present–day gentrification. The question now is how to preserve as much of this cultural territory as possible. Missing is the before and after of 1928: how the city came to be in central Texas, by whom, and the usage of displacement throughout Austin's history. Each moment of displacement and segregation is a process rather than a one–time event and connects to the development of capitalism, slavery, and settler–colonialism in what is now Texas and the US. Displacement is not a new process; displacement is the response to new developments—a clearing away of old relations in favor of new ones.

I focus on the situations of Tribal peoples who lived here during colonization, Mexican people and Black people, with an emphasis on the latter. Austin was established as a slave society and bears the marks today. The exploitation of Black people provided the wealth with which the city was built and their continual displacement after emancipation shows the depth of the problem posed by free Black people. The city has long struggled to find a place for Black people in its economy, but has managed to keep them out of the way in peripheral ghettos. The Black population in Austin has decreased from around 30% shortly after Austin's establishment to around 7% in 2010 and is on the path to shrink even more.

In this brief paper, I hope to demonstrate Austin's continual remaking and evolving tools in the service of capital and white supremacy. This is in the interest of showing the hand of the city instead of the "invisible hand" of the market. The city's planning and policing clear the way and set the terms for the movement of capital while declaring, dividing and redistributing property to assert a certain social "peace."

An Act of War

Austin had not been established when the Republic of Texas was born. Texas was the colonial project of Spain and then Mexico, who had created several lasting settlements along with religious and trade networks, mainly to the south. Unable to occupy the rest of the state and left open to Indian attacks from the north, the Spanish and Mexican governments conscripted empresarios from the US to draw Anglo settlement as a buffer. While initially happy to be Mexican subjects, the settlers revolted and for a short time formed their own nation: Texas.

At that time, the government met in a wooden building in Houston, and the community sitting where Austin sits today was an unincorporated village named Waterloo, founded by Edward Burleson, land speculator and "Ole Indian Fighter." Future Texas President Mirabeau B. Lamar fought

to "Restore Rundberg," a largely working class POC community in North Austin. Restore Rundberg is the latest in a string of police-driven programs to clean up the neighborhood at the northern point of the Crescent. With a grant from the Department of Justice, the program brings together the Austin Police Department, the UT School of Social Work and neighborhood groups to create sustainable "crime solutions" for the area.

The DOJ grant comes from the Obama administration's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative to address "concentrated poverty" in cities across the US. This harkens back to "slum clearance," targeting areas by declaring them slums (though in more fashionable language). It identifies crime as an impediment to "redevelopment and economic growth." The city no longer has to clear entire neighborhoods, relying instead on the full array of public-private partnerships to transform social relationships that favor capital.

The Austin Question

> *This is a striking example of how the bourgeoisie solves the housing question in practice. The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also. As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist, it is folly to hope for an isolated solution of the housing question or of any other social question affecting the fate of the workers. The solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of life and labor by the working class itself.*
>
> *– Friedrich Engels, The Housing Question, 1872*

The city is still growing at a rapid clip and is polarizing at the same rate. The working poor population is expanding, at once an effect of proliferating low wage service jobs and a rapidly climbing area – wide cost of living, the highest in the state. Renting an average two bedroom apartment in the city requires a 111-hour work week at a minimum wage job. Where will these workers live?

Organizers must face these questions as the city grows. People at the historic sites of struggle have fought long and hard, but new struggles emerge every day. The city has developed an impressive array of tools to keep its from anonymous tip line callers. They are known to be a tool for developers who register complaints against whole city blocks to levy additional fines on residents of dilapidated housing.

Though some remain, many of the residents of the historically segregated zones in East Austin have relocated to the suburbs of Pfulgerville, Round Rock, Manor, and Elgin. This year a study showed the rapid decline in Austin's Black population, a statistical anomaly for a city of its size. While the city's population grew by 20.4, percent the black population shrank by 5.4 percent.

The police are responding to the changing face of Central East Austin. In 2012, APD implemented a plan to shut down "The Corner" at the intersection of 12th and Chicon. For 40 years "The Corner" was known as an open air drug market and hang out zone. In a single year APD shut it down with a Drug Market Intervention program, using mass arrests to apprehend everyone in the sweep, then connecting low level dealers with social service programs and high level dealers with prison time.

"Go East, My Friends"

While Austin's urban core has drawn successful investment, suburban growth has not ebbed. Over the course of the late '90s, '00s and '10s the suburbs have continued to expand. They have also gotten poorer. Austin made the lists again, boasting the second fastest growing rate of suburban poverty; this population grew by more than 140 percent between the 2000 and 2010 US Census Reports. The need for free and reduced cost school lunch programs and suburban food banks has increased anywhere from fifteen to twenty percent. The dispersal of poor people from the city has pushed social service centers to follow their clients into the suburbs. Two providers in Austin are relocating or opening new offices in northeast Austin. In 2013, Travis County increased its spending on social services by several million dollars, the first increase in a decade.

Police also recognize this reorganization. Even ten years ago, the police would often escort homeless people to the central East Side. Today the preferred drop points are far north or south, away from the city's core. The police chief is a strong advocate for moving homeless and social services out of the central city altogether, allying with downtown business interests who would like to see the city's homeless shelter moved. A new moniker describes the part of East Austin downtown has not absorbed: "the Eastern Crescent." The "Crescent" overlaps the former dividing line of Interstate 35 at two points, north and south, but is primarily concentrated around the highway that skirts what was the eastern edge of the city.

Within the Crescent, police and community activists are teaming up

other Texas politicians to place the capitol in Waterloo. Building the capitol in central Texas would project Anglo power westward into territory that had never been successfully colonized by the Spanish or the Mexican governments.

Lamar envisioned not only the capitol, but an accompanying barrier of western forts to protect the interior of Texas from Comanche Indian raids. These raids were ongoing in frontier communities and would continue for decades. According to some historians, the Comanches saw the establishment of Austin for the act of war it was. When Edwin Waller was commissioned in 1839 to plot the city, two of his surveyors were ambushed, scalped and killed by raiders; an act of resistance at the moment of Austin's birth.

Despite this, the land was mapped and contents, colonizers, and slaves were shipped in from Houston under the armed guard of the Texas Rangers to prevent further Indian attacks. Anglo laborers worked seven days a weeks with no holidays in order to get the new capitol ready for Texas's Fourth Congress. The layout included a 14-by-14 block grid with the Capitol campus situated to the north and land designated for a penitentiary at the southwest corner.

Anglo laborers and squatters hoping for first dibs on the best land slept in open camps or in tents. Word had gone out that the government would give squatters good terms for their chosen land, and the opportunity to make money on its fast increasing value and much needed goods and services drew many into town. In fact, land speculation in Austin was part of Lamar's plan to pay for its frontier defense.

Some of these goods were Black people—slaves who were hired out to the Texas government to build Austin and work on the cotton plantations of Central Texas.

Slavery & Vigilance

Slavery had been one of the tensions in the war for independence from Mexico. Settlers coming from the southern US into Stephen F. Austin's colony had brought their slaves with them. The Mexican government had forbidden slavery shortly after its own independence from Spain was granted, making a temporary exception for Texas. When the Mexican government halted the importation of slaves entirely, Anglo tempers flared and their immigration into Texas slowed considerably. To get around the ban slaveowners used many tactics, including forcing slaves to sign life contracts as indentured servants.

When the Texan war for independence began, some slaves fought for Mexico and the promise of freedom. Some took action independently against their masters and staged insurrections around the state. As Texas won, so did slavery, and its legislature made quick time to establish slave codes. They gave free Black people notice to leave the state and decreed that masters could not free their slaves without the direct consent of the Congress.

By January of 1840, 145 of Austin's 856 residents were Black, close to 17 percent. It had been three years since the Mexican ban on slavery had been lifted with Texas independence. By 1860 this number had risen to 28 percent.

Cotton plantations ringed the capitol. These were not vast as in the Deep South but employed enough to be worked by smaller groups of Black slaves. Austin was also a trading center for the region in the 19th century and well into the 20th. Bales were brought into town, then shipped to England for manufacture. Many of Austin's elites became rich through this trade, benefitting directly from slave labor.

Like in other urban centers, slaves in Austin took liberties that violated white concepts of race relations, gathering in public, drinking and living on their own outside of white surveillance. Many were allowed to buy their own time from their masters and kept their own houses, in violation of law. Restrictions on contact with other races were meant to keep Black slaves docile. Whites were especially worried about contact with Mexicans; as free people of color they threw into question the racial hierarchy.

Sitting in the middle of cotton country, whites feared Black insurrection and flight to freedom in Mexico. Austin passed its own slave codes and made several attempts to enforce these. Before 1850, the city relied only upon a City Marshall and his ad hoc deputies. In 1850, Austin created a city watch which had authority to mete out punishments without resorting to trials.

Fear of Black insurrection rolled through Austin several times before slavery ended and extralegal Vigilance Committees were organized as a response. Made up of city officials, traders, and farmers of upper, then middle, class, these committees investigated arsons along with other insurrectionary plots. The Vigilance Committees also addressed the "problem" of Mexicans and evicted them from town.

In the Wrong Place, All of the Time

As the Civil War ended and emancipation was declared, freedmen left the plantations in droves. Many settled nearby their former quarters, east, west, south and north. Some were given land by their former masters, some bought it, others squatted along creeks or in the woods.

The Freedmen's colonies were often just outside of town and provided relative autonomy though freedmen were integrated into the local economy

and the question of where to put all the people. In the '70s and '80s capital was searching the globe looking for investments, and wherever it could not fund production it funded speculation. In Austin this took the form of a series of bubbles as land prices rose steadily and fell rapidly.

Can't Stop Progress

This combination of population growth in the region and land speculation meant large scale building and development projects all around the city. Environmentalists tapping into a conservationist current in the city rallied to halt growth in environmentally-sensitive areas on the edges of town, mainly aquifers, creeks and farmland. This battle was fraught and full of losing battles as activists and city officials tried to put the reins on suburban development but were stymied by the State government.

In 1980, a new city plan was passed reflecting these concerns: the Austin Tomorrow Plan. The plan attempted to limit urban core growth and draw it away from environmentally-sensitive areas. To do this, planners used an aggressive annexation strategy to bring sensitive land under city control, to encourage development of undeveloped areas in the urban core, and to redevelop poorer areas of the city. Building on this, in the late '90s, Mayor Kirk Watson began to promote what he called "SMART Growth" in hopes to resolve the conflict between developers and environmentalists. A new breed of developers and larger changes in the organization of cities worldwide accompanied Watson. Finance, real estate, technology, and the service sectors replaced production in the inner city. The City Council prioritized this growth downtown, giving subsidies and tax breaks to companies who chose downtown over suburban areas on the aquifer.

Downtown increasingly meant East Austin. Maps included in the SMART Growth plans marked a large portion as desired-development zones. Environmental Justice organizers from Eastside group PODER (People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources) noticed that their push to remove industrial facilities from the neighborhood had found strange bedfellows—developers who pushed to move the facilities further into the Eastside along with their people. One former Brown Beret remarked that SMART stood for "Send Minorities Across the River Today."

Developers began to buy land cheaply on the Eastside as the city provided more and more infrastructure for development. A new rail system, renewal of roads in business corridors, bike lanes, public-private housing, and retail developments on city-owned land have been installed since the late '90s. Many longtime residents see the additions as improvements built for newcomers. Property taxes have been increased for longtime homeowners, and many have left. City Code Enforcement makes the rounds, taking notes been Black officers since the beginnings of the APD, they had only been allowed to police Black people. Even after this ended, Black officers worked beats on the Eastside. Several small uprisings in which East Austin residents fought off Austin Police Officers and the changing political climate of the '60s led the Police Department to try and address a legitimacy crisis. They began a campaign to attract more Black and Latino people to the force and desegregated its beats.

Mid 20th century Austin began to assume its modern form. Suburbs exploded out of the central city as the city boomed. From 1959 to 1969, the population of Travis County grew by 39 percent. In addition to the University of Texas, there was a military presence: an Air Force base in Southeast Austin, military research facilities in north Austin, a "castle" in West Austin that held a training school, and Camp Mabry, a camp for the Texas Volunteer Guard. This military presence is perhaps unsurprising given Austin's frontier beginnings and its location to project Anglo military power west.

The city took advantage of its academic and military connections to build its high-tech industry. LBJ orchestrated a deal in which The University of Texas absorbed the military's research facilities in north Austin. The University maintained this as a public research facility (Balcones Research Center) but endorsed several private companies and a committee to lure high-tech investment into Austin. Soon enough, research and production facilities surrounded Austin on cheaper suburban land with housing provided by FHA loans. New roads were built, including Highway 183 which linked research in Northwest Austin to production in far East Austin. Production facilities were built in the eastern industrial district to spur job creation, which frustrated many early environmental activists, but was promoted by Black councilman Charles Urdy who hoped jobs would go to Black East Austinites.

Into the '80s tech kept coming. The concerted effort of Texas politicians and capitalists brought the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation (MCC) to Austin in 1983. the University of Texas gave MCC land; $15 million in endowed faculty chairs for thirty new faculty in computer science and electrical engineering; $1 million each year for research; $750,000 for 75 graduate students; $5 million for new equipment; and a nominal cost for leasing parts of the Balcones Research Center.

The suburbs drew jobs and housing away from Central Austin; downtown hosted state workers and some commerce during the day but became a ghost town after dark. Offices and warehouses withdrew. As cars became more common, a glut of student-oriented apartments were built in Southeast Austin along Riverside Drive, far from the university. Never entirely abandoned, the emptying of the city provided room for future rounds of investment.

In the midst of all of this was the burgeoning struggle over development. With investment in high tech infrastructure came population growth

and subject to frequent harassment. The West Austin Freedman's Colony of Clarksville established a Confederate Veterans' Home where the city dumped its garbage.

The arrival of the railroad consolidated the cotton industry circa 1900. Small land owners needed cheaper labor to work industrial sized farms and were dispossessed. This was a period of intense urban migration, and Blacks and Mexicans moved to the city in droves. Many moved to East Austin where there was already a dense concentration of Black people.

Eventually, Austin's growth led to encroachment on these once peripheral communities, as in the case of Charles Clark's Clarksville. Clark was the former slave of Governor Elisha Pease, whose Greek revival estate still stands today in West Austin. A bridge over Shoal Creek in the 1920's sent development up 12th Street from the Capitol, and forest was cleared to make room. What is now Lamar Boulevard was also built as a highway to Dallas through the western end of the area. This was the beginning of the assaults on the colonies.

As the white central city expanded and a segregationist movement picked up nationwide, Austin's elites hopped on. The 1928 city plan reflected this, not only establishing Black and Mexican districts for city services but designating this area for industry as well. These districts, marked by East Avenue in the west (now Interstate 35), came to be known as "the Eastside," but segregation into these districts only came after decades of work by white elites.

The Dallas-based planning firm Koch and Fowler, writers of the 1928 plan, were restricted by a US Supreme Court ruling from advocating the direct seizure of property of Black and Mexican people. They acknowledge this themselves in the text of the plan. In line with the national segregationist movement, they advised a workaround: the segregation of city services.

Roads, electricity, water, and schools were all withheld. These were to be provided only in the segregated districts. Blacks and Mexicans remaining in West Austin would be denied them. The Wheatville school which served Black West Austin was closed. In addition to the pulls of city services, there were programs which served to push them out. Harassment continued as before. Ordinances which outlawed urban rearing of animals were passed and enforced. By these measures, almost all Black people were relocated to the Eastside by 1932.

In 1937, shortly after segregation, Lyndon Johnson, then US Senator from Texas, used a speech to expose Austin's slums. This opened up an intense city-wide debate about the slums' existence. The Chamber of Commerce had advocated against the movement of heavy industry to Austin. They reasoned, "heavy industry brought poverty and poverty promoted slums." If there was no heavy industry in Austin, how could there be slums?

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE CITY

Urban Renewal began in 1949. Title One of the Federal Housing Act (FHA) passed and encouraged slum clearance and redevelopment funded largely by the federal government, releasing large swaths of land to private developers to sell for a large profit. Shortly after Title One's passage, a private consulting firm designated 10 percent of the city as slums.

The FHA's most famous provision was available credit for home ownership, ostensibly resolving a housing crisis exacerbated by the return of veterans of World War II. Non-whites were frustrated in their attempts to gain access to this credit. (A map from 1937 shows a private bank's high-risk "redlined" areas, used to deny loans to people in several districts. One almost perfectly overlays the Negro District.) The FHA and the Veteran's Administration supported racial covenants around the country into the 1960s. At the same time the FHA encouraged the seizure and clearing of neighborhoods populated by non-white communities.

A 1953 city plan recognized that business leaders would make expansive decisions regarding the postwar economic surplus in the US. The city sought to redesign its geography in a way that would remove areas "that have become obsolete and fallen into disrepair" to attract business. Using a report by the Housing Authority of Austin and data from the 1950 census, the city made its case. This data was eventually used by the Austin Urban Renewal Agency founded in 1959. Many homes in East Austin had no bathroom. In the districts covered by the Plan, two thirds of crime occurred there even though they only contained 25 percent of the city's population. Likewise fires, delinquency, and tuberculosis were disproportionately high. A flyer promoting Slum Clearance attempted to address this disproportionate use of city tax dollars and the repopulation of higher income individuals as a way to equalize the city's tax burden.

Here, the designation of "slum" served as a way for the city government to segregate Austin in a "race-neutral" manner. The 1950 figures used in every annual report in the URA's existence justified extreme measures. City code determined houses to be substandard, and demands for repair fell on largely poor occupants, many of whom did not own their homes. Homes were condemned, then seized by the city en masse.

The slum districts were all eventually cleared and rebuilt. Notably, districts west of East Avenue were turned over to institutions. Hospitals, state buildings, and university buildings were all built on top of former Black and Mexican Neighborhoods. At the same time, in the late 50s and early 60s, Interstate 35 supplanted East Avenue, cementing the division.

Alongside slum clearance and Urban Renewal came struggles over public housing. Johnson made his speech in order to urge Austin to accept federal money for public housing and successfully built only three segregated units: one for whites, one for Blacks, and one for Mexicans. Texas Legislature barred future public housing from receiving funding from the state's Urban Renewal Agency. The local real estate board defeated a local ordinance because of public housing's perceived threat to private property rights.

The dispersal of people from the renewal zones was not tracked. The development only re-housed several people. In addition to public housing's "socialistic" nature, one city councilman's opposition to accepting federal funds was based on its failure to provide housing for the very poorest, as access would only be provided to those with a minimum income. The low-income housing crisis Urban Renewal's displacement spurred was not enough to get housing built on a large scale.

Non-whites posed challenges to legally segregated services, testing its weak points and gaining concessions from a city built on white supremacy. The UT Law School faced a high profile legal challenge by Hemann Sweatt, a Black man wishing to get a law degree and study the system of legal segregation. Students of Professor Bill Kirk at Tillotson College began in 1950 to challenge the local ordinances that were not upheld by state or federal law, at the library, the fire department and at Barton Springs Pool, wishing to uncover the thin line between law and custom. Other youth challenged segregation through sit-ins at movie theaters and restaurants.

Schools and neighborhoods became battlegrounds. Historically Black Anderson High school in Central East Austin closed and its students bussed to schools around the city. Predominantly white Northwest Austin opened a new school by the same name. For many, this was the beginning of the end of the historically black community in Central East Austin. Johnston High School opened further east with a majority Black and Latino student body. As school desegregation proceeded, racial tension grew hotter. Due to fights, classes were cancelled at noon on the first day of integrated classes at McCallum High School. In 1979, 300 students at the new Anderson High stormed an administrative building waving anti-busing signs and chanting, "Hell no! We Won't Go!"

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Many white residents left transitioning neighborhoods, and established newer de facto segregated communities. Austin High School moved further west, in part to be zoned for more white youth. Westlake High School opened in 1971 outside of Austin city limits in an area that had for many years used racial covenants to restrict residency to whites. Texas school desegregation lasted from its first challenge in 1955 to 1980 when the final suit was settled. After the settlement, enrollment in private schools rose sharply.

Desegregation also affected the police department. While there had