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Poverty, Planning, Policy and Race: Urban Design in St. Petersburg, Florida, since 1965

by

Philip Belcastro

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
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University Honors Program
University of South Florida St. Petersburg

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Honors Thesis

This is to certify that the Honors Thesis of

Philip Belcastro

has been approved by the Examining Committee on December 3, 2017
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PREFACE

The following chapters outline a view of the City of St. Petersburg through a different and unique lens that combines various elements across economic, geographical, political, and racial boundaries. In fact, these elements are examined as they have affected, and continue to affect, one another across historical and contemporary contexts. The goal of this piece is not to present a detailed history of St. Petersburg. For that, historians and authors like Raymond Arsenault and Jim Schnur are expertly qualified. Instead, this piece builds on the work of many others, Arsenault and Schnur included.

Through research, observation, articles, and anecdotes spanning the decades following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, an image of inequality in St. Petersburg begins to take shape. Of course, St. Petersburg is not an exception or an outlier, as much of the evidence examined here has its equivalent in other cities across the United States. Many other great researchers and urban historians like Raymond Mohl, and, of course, Thomas Sugrue in his book, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* have taken this approach to various cities and regions. Using government data, articles from local newspapers, including *The Tampa Bay Times*, and the books of Rosalie Peck and historian and journalist Jon Wilson, a more complete image of the city's history emerges, apart from sources that may focus on a single issue or single agenda.

Without underestimating the value of those whose research focuses primarily on race, economics, or urban planning separately, there are certainly those who do and have provided invaluable insight into this unified and accountable perspective. Authors like R. Bruce Stephenson, who has extensively studied one of St. Petersburg's earliest city planners, John Nolen, provide a unique singular approach that helps ground broadly stated research like this and provide context and a point of authority from which to pivot to the next. Dr. Rebecca Johns, Dr.

Barnali Dixon, and Chris McHan from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg have produced excellent research and data on the areas of St. Petersburg that lack equal access to healthy food, and help link ideas of health, transportation, poverty, and race in ways that often go overlooked.

Indeed, one of the biggest, oftentimes overwhelming, challenges of this project is its massive scope. Although limited to several decades' worth of analysis of St. Petersburg, a medium-sized city on Florida's Gulf Coast, the enormity and complexity of how economics, planning, politics, and race all combine to shape landscape and people is a massive undertaking. The use here of contemporary figures as well as important figures from St. Petersburg's history, like C. Bette Wimbish, helps to tell the story from a human perspective. Her legacy as Pinellas County's first African American female lawyer, and her election to St. Petersburg's City Council as the first African American member in 1969 continues to reverberate through local politics and policy today. Even as reforms in education and criminal justice are mentioned here, they are being updated, and reversed on the local and national levels. It is a complexity that continues to grow as more data is analyzed, presented, policies are changed or amended, buildings and roads are built or destroyed, and people move into or out of the city. The research here continues to advance at the pace of life, which is blistering.

By design, the proceeding information is not an exhaustive history of the city; it is a profile in narrative. This is a story in research form, about St. Petersburg, Florida, a city not unlike any other city in America where sociopolitical ideas and agendas converge and conspire to create the multi-faceted and exceedingly complex interaction between where people live and how they live. In part, this research carries with it tones of cultural or urban anthropology, and in others, a simple history lesson. Perhaps at times it even edges near that hoped-for narrative. In

any case, the tones are meant to be heard, or understood rather, simultaneously in a harmonious chord that resonates with the reader and creates something that maybe has not been considered before. Hopefully, any individual who might take an interest in one particular aspect analyzed here will work together with those individuals most interested in another.

PROLOGUE

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, and the establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, cities across the country have received new resources to integrate poor, typically African American communities into the larger context of urban living. However, the overall policies developed during the past fifty years have sometimes been harmful, either by mistake or by design. Data and examples of various urban renewal initiatives, when viewed together, portray a situation where decades of decisions and circumstances have collectively led to the current situation of persistent cross-generational poverty, higher crime rates, and a stigma attached to people and places that becomes self-perpetuating over time. Although national in scope, this legacy affects many local communities, including St. Petersburg, often called the "Sunshine City," on Florida's West Coast.

Understanding the challenges and investigating earlier research may suggest alternatives and solutions. Modern Interstates have been routed through the heart of African American populations, schools have been left to fail, and economies and people left to flounder: The links between these seemingly dissimilar threads are undeniable. While there has been much research on the African American communities in southern St. Petersburg by historian Raymond Arsenault, and journalist Jon Wilson, among others, questions remain unanswered. The effects of poverty, health, transportation, financial independence, and education deficits rarely combine all of these links and interpret them holistically as a profile, or narrative, of a city. By examining St. Petersburg through a new lens focused on the history of community develpment, one may better understand what types of policies have failed in the past and what alternatives may lead to a successful path forward.

Development and city planning practices within St. Petersburg since the mid-1960s mimic trends throughout the country. Profound links between poverty, education, and race that exist cannot be viewed categorically and entirely separate from one another. Residential patterns of social segregation before and after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the formation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965, have left cities across the United States to deal with issues related to the phenomenon known as "white flight," whereby typically white, more affluent, neighbors flee city centers and areas surrounding newly created public housing developments. The practices of "redlining" and "blockbusting" a neighborhood, or intentionally targeting white property owners fearful of racial integration while also decreasing the value of an area across racial lines, allowed real estate investors to play a role in the acceleration of white flight and profit from the re-segregation of neighborhoods as they changed from all-white to all-black.

Over time, wealthier residents moved elsewhere, helping to create "poverty pockets," or areas of predominately racial minority groups who live in government subsidized housing. Beginning as far back as the 1930s under the Federal Housing Administration, oftentimes residents lived in conditions varying from sub-par to deplorable as a result of regular underfunding and low priority. Racist mortgage lending practices, which continue today, prevented black families from moving into certain neighborhoods.

Finally, the controversial process of gentrification posed new challenges as investors escalated property values in ways that disrupted patterns shaped after years of neglect that began in the late twentieth century. Investors could develop condominiums, retail complexes, and art co-ops at significantly cheaper expense, oftentimes with tax and building incentives but also at the cost of outpricing and displacing the underprivileged people who already lived in these

racially segregated, impoverished areas. The result of shrinking funding and stock of federally subsidized housing is a clear indication of the problems linking extreme poverty and the displacement of people.

In addition to the challenges posed by these real estate practices, the legacy of educational inequality contributes to imbalance. In 2016, five of the fifteen worst elementary schools in Florida, as ranked by the state Department of Education, were in Pinellas County. Campbell Park Elementary lies just south of the I-175 extender, in the Thirteenth Street Heights area. On the western side of I-275, just south of Fifth Avenue South, lies Fairmount Park Elementary. In the Bayou Shores neighborhood, near where Fourth Street South becomes Sixth Street South, is Lakewood Elementary. Maximo Elementary serves the neighborhoods just east of the junction of I-275 and Fifty-Fourth Avenue South. And Melrose Elementary Serves the Childs Park area. Given the historically racial demographic and the levels of poverty in the areas surrounding these facilities, it is no coincidence that these schools are in predominantly black, segregated neighborhoods.

Over the years, St. Petersburg has been carved and reshaped by the development of interstates, urban renewal efforts that have disrupted and displaced entire neighborhoods to create a sports stadium, and the effective re-segregation of Pinellas County school districts under amended court decrees. The failure is county-and system-wide and not a simple issue of leadership, funding, or race-based politics alone. This essay addresses many of these issues, including affordable housing, transportation, education, poverty, wealth inequality, community initiatives, access to financial resources, food quality, and race. By examining each issue and how it affects the others in context, a story of St. Petersburg emerges that connects policies and people across generations and that continues to shape the city.

I

GENTRIFICATION AND COMMUNITY PRESERVATION

Long-held social traditions grounded in race within the City of St. Petersburg serve as a microcosm for challenges facing urban areas all over the United States. Policies and practices by public officials and private entities unfairly marginalized populations along racial and socioeconomic boundaries. Aside from the experiences of John Donaldson's family as the city's pioneering black family, most early African-American residents of lower Pinellas County experienced patterns of residential segregation not unlike areas of the Deep South (Schnur, thesis notes.).

By the 1930s, St. Petersburg's city charter instituted a practice of "red-lining," or forbidding blacks and whites from intermingling and doing business in each other's neighborhoods, which effectively forced black populations into defined pockets mostly south of Central Avenue. Municipal practices created predominantly black neighborhoods out of necessity, which still exist to this day (Wilson, *St. Petersburg's Historic 22nd …* 43). As noted urban historian Raymond Mohl wrote in his 1997 book, *The Making of Urban America*, the 1960s were a time rooted in attempting to cure the culture of cities, with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiative, the War on Poverty, and the Model Cities program. Despite interventions, the so-called "urban crisis," or deterioration of city centers, combined with tense racial violence in major cities, ravaged many urban areas in the United States (223).

St. Petersburg began to experience the first signs of integration in the 1960s as well, as racial covenants, patterns of residential and school segregation, and unconstitutional restrictions separating black customers from white-owned businesses came undone, and race-separated

facilities integrated. The city hired its first black bus driver in 1964. Once confined to beats in segregated neighborhoods, black police officers were allowed to patrol white neighborhoods and arrest white people in 1968. After years in state and federal courts, federal mandated court-ordered school busing began in 1971 in an effort to break up majority-minority schools (Peck, *St. Petersburg's Historic African American* … 18, 67).

Deeply ingrained prejudices persuaded the decision-making processes, sometimes unintentionally, especially when it came to the undeniable link between poverty, race, and neighborhood development. In 1968, Joe Savage, a black city sanitation worker, led a four-month long strike with 211 other men for better wage compensation. While many whites saw this as a nuisance and were critical, to the black community the strike was a battle for civil rights and fair economic treatment. By the end, their victory resulted not only in small concessions, but also in an increased racial dialogue in one of America's most tumultuous times (Wilson, *St. Petersburg's Historic 22nd* ... 13-16).

During this time, a new language in city planning appeared. The term, "second ghetto" refers to the postwar real estate practice of buying up cheap housing in neighborhoods and building slightly better public housing. The term "blockbusting," the selling or renting a home to a black family in order to drive prices lower, also came about from this process, although it was seen as a positive improvement of living conditions from some perspectives. To those who had been denied access to decent housing, the opening of formerly all-white neighborhoods was an improvement in quality of life. However, as neighborhoods succumbed to poverty and policy, the promise of a better life for African Americans was a stymied one (Goings, *The New African American*... 292). When white families returned to these areas, the process of gentrification

began. As new, more expensive homes and apartments were built in poorer areas, the people living there were being outpriced in their own neighborhoods.

Generational poverty is a cyclical curse put on America's black families, much like the educational policies that disproportionately put blacks at a disadvantage. Debt-ravaged and unable to acquire gainful employment, poor, black communities are some of the most stricken in America, and continue to live at the mercy of extenuating circumstances.

In a recent *ProPublica* article, Paul Kiel details how a medical emergency, or the unexpected loss of wages or hours at work, inordinately affect black families, causing potentially devastating and harsh punishments, including jail, utility shut-offs, and garnished wages. Kiel also argues the modern racial wealth gap can be traced to the housing boom in post-World War II America, when federal agencies would not loan to blacks, effectively alienating them from the greatest accumulation of wealth ever experienced in the nation. In fact, as recently as 2007, the NAACP filed a class action lawsuit against fourteen of the nation's biggest subprime lending companies; based on 2006 research from the Center for Responsible Lending, the lawsuit alleges that African Americans are more than 30 percent more likely to receive loans at higher interest rates than Caucasians even when creditworthiness and risk are the same ("The NAACP Filed an Historic..."). Additionally, the recent burst of the housing bubble and ensuing recession did, indeed, devastate minorities, leaving the median wealth of black households thirteen times less valuable than that of white households, marking the widest gap since 1989 ("Small Debt is Destroying Black Lives …").

Affordable housing and subsidized housing in the United States have been in a constant state of crisis for years. The Department of Housing and Urban Development regularly faces budget cuts and housing stock disappears without replacement, all among competing ideologies

regarding how best to serve a growing population that cannot afford a place to live ("HUD at 50…" 123-124). For example, affordable housing programs and fighting to end homelessness might be seen as a liberal agenda, while encouraging self-sufficiency and gainful employment could be seen as a conservative agenda.

In reality, affordable standards of living, the risk of homelessness, and economic equality and independence all work together in ways far more complex than simple two-party politics would assume. In 1993, under President Bill Clinton, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros declared that American cities were worse than they were in the 1960s, although the trend has since improved (Mohl, *The Making of Urban…* 224). Obviously, ideologies and political currents in the United States shift, but the fact remains that class-stratification remains a persistent problem that has yet to be effectively addressed.

The housing crash of 2008 and subsequent devastating economic recession left many people unable to afford a home (and the irony of abundant, perfectly good, empty homes in which no one could afford to live). According to the Urban Institute, there were 27 affordable and rental assistance units for every 100 extremely low income households in Pinellas County in 2000. Residents in these households earned roughly $14,250 each that year. This was below the national average of 37 units per 100 households. From 2005 to 2007, Pinellas continued to trail behind a declining national average with only 20 units per every 100 households, and 19 between 2011 and 2013 (urban.org).

Indeed, affordable housing stock is disappearing nationwide; however, Pinellas County's poorest residents are losing affordable places to live at a more alarming rate, with less than twenty percent sharing even the possibility of finding a place to live. A rise in unemployment rates and individuals receiving government assistance, combined with stagnant wages make it

seem as if these underprivileged communities were doomed to chase socioeconomic goals (Bureau of Labor and Statistics). Meanwhile, property value for some areas of southern St. Petersburg declined while other parts of the city boomed with economic investment and development.

Mark Funkhouser, publisher of *Governing* magazine, writes in the February 2015 issue that the number of poor people is increasing; in the ten years between 2000 and 2010, the number of Americans living in poverty increased by 36 percent. He argues that wage stagnation since the 1970s is the primary cause for increased poverty, and the continued weakening of labor laws at the political level are the reason for wage stagnation. Funkhouser confirms this by pointing to the drastic decline in employees who are required to be paid overtime (4).

A variety of policy mandates and regulations have complicated the lives of those in public housing. While public housing residents may be evicted at the discretion of local housing authorities for drug related infractions, the financial balancing act required to remain in a home is much trickier (Marah A. Curtis).

HUD income limits stipulate that an individual is no longer eligible once they go over the maximum allowed income. For 2015, a family of four qualifies as low-income if they make less than $47,200, or very low-income at less than $29,500 in the St. Petersburg area (HUD.gov). The median household income for the City of St. Petersburg was $45,483 between 2010 and 2014, measured in 2014 dollars (census.gov). This is a catch-22 for those who cannot afford a place to live, either due to unequal inflation of costs of living versus minimum wages, or to being priced out of neighborhoods that have seen a resurgence in popularity and investment by a younger, more affluent crowd. The latter scenario, gentrification, is happening all over the country in once segregated, poor neighborhoods with cheap land and little power to fight back against cities and

developers. As multi-million dollar high-rises grow, public housing projects are turned into market-rate condos and apartments, and bulldozers move in to make room for more; entire neighborhoods are torn down and reshaped.

Before the stadium currently known as Tropicana Field was built in the late 1980s the area where it and associated parking lots sits was known as St. Petersburg's Gas Plant district, an African American neighborhood comprised of mostly poorer folks living in substandard conditions. Named for the municipal natural gas plant and incinerator that loomed overhead for decades, the area was considered an environmental hazard and a blight by the 1980s and was earmarked for the site of a new industrial park meant to bring jobs to the city. This, of course, did not happen, but instead was replaced with a new plan for a major league sports stadium, again with promises of bringing jobs, wealth, and success to the strained area.

A gala groundbreaking for the Florida Suncoast Dome, as the stadium was originally known, then the Thunder Dome, began with the demolition of the entire Gas Plant neighborhood, and another, called Laurel Park, all under eminent domain without any real guarantee that baseball would come to the region at all. In fact, some would argue that major league sports organizations made promises of expansion teams as a bargaining tactic only to gouge more money from existing cities and franchises (Mauws). The stadium sat largely empty and unused for ten years until Major League Baseball granted an expansion team, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, to St. Petersburg in 1995 (Terry, 19-20).

Located one block north of the I-175 extender and in the crook of it and I-275, the former Gas Plant area has seen a fair amount of rezoning and demolition associated with urban renewal. Historian James Schnur argues that the city's ambitions to court Major League Baseball led to urban renewal efforts that leveled the Gas Plant neighborhood and removed what some saw as an

environmental eyesore, but also irreparably disrupted longstanding communities (*St. Petersburg* ... 6).

Even before the stadium, a longtime resident of the area north and east of it, called Methodist Town, Chester James Sr. was a vocal advocate for revitalizing the neighborhood. After his death in 1979, the area was renamed Jamestown in his honor (Olive B. McLin Community History Project). Unfortunately, today, as the Tampa Bay Rays continue to seek a way to break their contract with the city and search for a site for a new stadium in Hillsborough County across the bay, the originally estimated economic benefit to the city and the area is dubious. Tim Nickens, an editor at the *Tampa Bay Times* wrote about the decision to build the stadium in 1986, and again in 2016 referring to the Rays optioning to look for a new stadium site in Hillsborough County, expressing his opinion that the stadium did, in fact, help transform St. Petersburg into the thriving city it is today; he even quotes late New York Yankees and Tampa resident George Steinbrenner as having once said that St. Petersburg is, “nothing but a bunch of old folks over there and a rickety bridge to get there,” which is hardly the case today (Nickens, “How two bets on the future define a city”).

Conversely, the city’s historic black neighborhoods continue to revitalize at a slower pace. The renovated Manhattan Casino, a 22nd Street South landmark, has seen the famous Sylvia’s soul food restaurant come and go after significant financial troubles (Tomalin, “City’s response to Sylvia’s closing"), and is likely to be replaced by a Floribbean style restaurant which some view as a dismissal of the corridor’s African American heritage in favor of something trendy and upscale (Frago, “Manhattan casino choice...”).

It is true, however, that the area east of the stadium, the Grand Central District, is enjoying a revitalization of restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, and breweries. What was once a

notorious public housing development for mostly elderly and disabled residents, Graham-Rogal has been developed into an urban-chic apartment complex called Urban Style Flats, although this has not been without controversy either. Between 2008 and 2009, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority under the direction of Darrell Irions made the decision to sell the complex to private developers to build condominiums and evict and relocate all current residents. Between 1995 and 2008, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority sold off 70 percent of the city's public housing, and even successfully petitioned the Department of Housing and Urban Development to make an exemption for their rule requiring 150 apartment units to remain subsidized until 2017. Although evicted residents received relocation vouchers, the units themselves were not replaced. This, of course, only exacerbated the public housing shortfall seen not only in St. Petersburg, but nationwide.

There is no doubt that the Graham-Rogal complex needed significant repairs: $20 million by one estimate. However, the four acres near downtown and Tropicana field were becoming increasingly valuable and attractive to private investors (Pickett, "St. Pete to elderly: Get out!"). Since remodeling in 2010, developer Philip J. Farley III was indicted in 2015 for improper handling and removal of asbestos. Meanwhile, the city's housing authority hasn't lived up to its promise of using the sale to fund more subsidized housing around the city and replacing the 480 units that made up Graham-Rogal in an effort to avoid concentrated areas of poverty (Martin, "Two indicted for improper..."). How this is related to the perceived success of Tropicana Field though is debatable. In his 1998 article recalling the demolition of the Gas Plant and construction of the stadium, James Harper quotes Florida's then Secretary of Education, Doug Jamerson, as saying, "Obviously I do not think the promises made (when the Gas Plant was leveled) have been kept, and I think the failure to keep faith with the commitments made to the people has

been part of the underpinnings of the tension that has taken place in St. Petersburg" ("Around the Dome").

Some neighborhoods in St. Petersburg, which have improved after being left to languish economically, have seen a resurgence in recent years as the city has gained the reputation of a hip place for young professionals, students, and artists to thrive. The areas around Beach Drive, Central Avenue Downtown, Historic Kenwood, and the Grand Central District have all realized an influx of new businesses and trendy restaurants due to incentives by the city (Intown Redevelopment Plan), and the subsequent returning white populations that fled after desegregation in the 1960s.

Historic buildings are being scooped up by savvy real estate investors and quickly being turned into city landmarks. The Renaissance Vinoy Resort, originally built in 1925 and left to decay throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, was restored in 1992 to regain its iconic status. The Beechwood, The Detroit, The Tramor Cafeteria, The Alexander Hotel, and dozens more have been renovated and now breathe new life into the city. Unfortunately, this redevelopment has yet to affect any real and noticeable change in impoverished neighborhoods a few miles south, which still suffer from failing infrastructure, crime, and poverty.

Additionally, the increased development elsewhere in the city has led to escalating property value, home prices, and rent, and displaces residents who have lived in the areas for many years, not to mention the loss of sentimental and familial attachment to local establishments, schools, churches, and other municipal features. In a repetition of history, the areas of St. Petersburg where rich white people once lived in the booming 1920s after residential desegregation, became African American neighborhoods. Newly enfranchised black families occupied these areas by in the 1950s and 1960s. Now, they are being forced out by returning

wealthy white businesspeople in the new millennium who are buying buildings and land in neighborhoods cheapened by racially and economically motivated city planning over the course of decades. An example of this can be found in Roser Park.

Richard G. Fox writes in his 1977 book, *Urban Anthropology: Cities in their Cultural Settings*, that ethnic populations within cities can be looked at in two ways: as a reflection of external adaptations and as individuals, or institutions as middlemen between excluded populations and formal urban institutions, like emergency services (158). Fox's "overview" model of a population as a reflection of external adaptations might paint the neighborhoods of southern St. Petersburg as the weaker element of a binary power. If these same neighborhoods are examined as groups of individuals that belong to an excluded population, or the "underview," then their interaction within urban dynamics can be interpreted as a slow struggle for independence from an oppressive power scheme, and a long march toward equality.

White leaders and homeowners resist the encroachment of black society, while the African American community openly challenges injustice and prejudice (Goings, *The New African American…* 276). Although it is hard to ignore the stimulating benefits of gentrification on a city, one would have to search for moral justification and truth in its inevitability. By design, it would seem the neighborhoods of south St. Petersburg are being primed for drastic redevelopment that will again divide and displace people and families. While the impact of gentrification is argued by those most affected, new solutions are being sought at the municipal level.

In the spring of 2016, the City of St. Petersburg announced that a large area of the south side would be included in a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) and include a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) designation. This denotes an area that will use property taxes for the

next 30 years to fund and stimulate economic and entrepreneurial growth. The boundaries of the CRA encompass the neighborhoods south and west of USF St. Petersburg along 4th St. South, the 22nd Street corridor ("the Deuces"), and stretches along parts of Central Avenue west of Martin Luther King (formerly Ninth) Street.

Historically, the 22nd Street South neighborhood has been vibrant conduit of south St. Petersburg's African American community, filled with entertainment, businesses, and professionals, ever since being segregated away from the larger white community of downtown in the 1920s (Wilson, *The Golden Era …* 71). Some neighborhoods in this area like Jordan Park, and, further west between Thirty-Fourth Street and Forty-Ninth Street South, Childs Park, have been at the mercy of segregation tactics, failed and misguided planning and policies, and have generally not seen the boom that downtown, Beach Drive, and the Grand Central District have experienced in recent years.

A recent, Pulitzer Prize winning investigative series in the *Tampa Bay Times* (formerly the *St. Petersburg Times*) pinpointed five of the worst schools in Florida in Pinellas County; three of those five schools are in "South St. Pete." The area south of and around Tropicana Field has been under scrutiny for years as the Tampa Bay Rays franchise threaten to leave the city in an underperforming market for Major League Baseball and an outdated stadium (O'Donnell, "St. Pete, Rays…"). In short, the marked area could definitely benefit from some redevelopment, but such activities do not have to be destructive.

While some people were denied much of a voice during the original destruction of the Gas Plant, perhaps people in the surrounding neighborhoods today could be allowed active participation in the process deciding what might replace Tropicana Field. The area known as Midtown is defined between 2nd Avenue North and 30th Avenue South on its northern and

southern edges, and 4th Street and 34th Street on its eastern and western edges. Midtown has seen multiple attempts at rejuvenation by several mayoral administrations over the years, all of which have largely fallen flat. The city's current master plan retains the Interstate-175 extender, and some residents are worried that the plan aims to acknowledge Midtown's history, but won't ingrain the community, among fears of skyrocketing rent and property values once the project, whatever it may be, is completed (Murphy, "Where are the voices of Midtown..."). The city's southern neighborhoods can, and should, benefit from some healthy reinvestment without redefining the neighborhoods and the people who live there.

Gentrification, or what is sometimes called the "colonization" of poor, minority neighborhoods, is always a controversial subject that draws strong feelings and valid arguments from both sides of the matter. Immediately after World War II, middle-class and working-class white families all across America fled from cities into the suburbs and away from increasing poverty and racial diversity of the city centers (Mohl, *The Making of Urban…* 214). In fact, in 1979, a study found that between 1945 and 1980, nearly 2 million middle-income, mostly white people moved away from New York City while a similar number of low-income, mostly black and Hispanic people moved in (Mohl, *The Making of Urban…* 214).

Pinellas County is Florida's most densely populated county and reached built-out status in 2005, meaning less than 5 percent of land designated for housing was still undeveloped. Between 2000 and 2010, Florida's population increased more than 17 percent, or the equivalent of nearly 1000 new residents moving to the state every day. Overall, the county itself has become a city without boundaries, limited only by its peninsular nature and the four bridges that connect it to the rest of the state. St. Petersburg has become one of the region's most desirable city centers with a thriving and bustling downtown (Terry, 8-9, 25).

Raymond Mohl, noted historian of urban development writes, “A dramatic pattern of economic deindustrialization was occurring at the same time [between 1945 and 1980], as factories shut down or moved away. The combination of a declining tax base and higher welfare and service costs pushed some cities such as New York and Cleveland to the brink of bankruptcy in the 1970s; still others experienced fiscal dangers in the 1980s” (214-215) Meanwhile in Pinellas County, industrial leaders like Minneapolis-Honeywell, General Electric, and Sperry-Rand had been steady employers since the 1950s, providing jobs in electronics and aerospace for Florida’s growing population (Wilson, *The Golden Era...*, 79).

The Model Cities program initiated by President Johnson was an attempt to create self-sufficient neighborhoods and citizens, beginning with Atlanta as the first city to receive a grant. Between 1970 and 1975, the City of Tampa used almost $12 million to renovate more than 2,000 homes, construct a multi-purpose center for services, paving streets, refurbish and build parks and playgrounds, and to build a 1,648-unit housing complex for moderate-income families. All projects were mostly in black neighborhoods (Goldfield 166), and the richness of these unique communities is at risk when the demographic begins to change. Oftentimes, due to incentives like those proposed in the CRA, the price of homes and apartments, as well as retail space becomes more attractive to outsiders.

The common factor in gentrification all over the country is the influx and infusion of young, affluent professionals into cheaper parts of town. This begins to erode the culture, as well as the history of the landscape, while driving property prices and rents higher until the original residents can no longer afford to live in their own neighborhood. It seems, at times, that every poor neighborhood in America is just a cold-press juice bar, studio loft, art co-op, and farmer's market away from being the next best up-and-coming place for young professionals.

Unfortunately, in many places this becomes the trend, displacing the people who live in and grew up in neighborhoods "before they were cool."

Some cities have tried to combat this with innovative and adventurous proposals. The "live, work, play" theme of development has extended into public housing, resulting in elaborate mixed-use complexes. In a mixed-use complex, developers create spaces with combinations of homes and apartments, as well as retail and commercial availability, rather than letting each develop on its own organically. Street level commercial property with apartments above has also begun to come back in favor, after decades of strip malls being the norm. Where space is not limited, such as the suburban sprawls in Orlando, whole neighborhoods are built from scratch and developers have been including mixed-use retail space on-site and include accessibility to public transportation (DeLisle).

Ideas like these are a throwback to the urban culture of the depression era and pre-war generation, many of whom emigrated through big cities like New York to build new lives for themselves and their families. The economics and social benefits of a population with an invested interest in homes and businesses in their surroundings is tied to their own personal and financial success (Rosenthal). In a city such as St. Petersburg, where space for new development is limited, residential and commercial spaces can be seen mixing organically in areas like Downtown, and in the Grand Central District.

Ironically, American suburbs have been experiencing a decline of their own with higher crime, drug use, congestion, school overcrowding, shortsighted planning, damage to the environment, declining government revenue, and the ever-increasing cost of living (Mohl, *The Making of Urban…* 219). Certainly, the housing collapse of 2008 (and the much-speculated impending student loan debt collapse [Marino]) have done no favors to suburbanites either.

National trends show that homeownership among the millennial generation is declining, as more of them choose to be more mobile than previous generations, and owning a home is no longer seen as a life-goal. Even in St. Petersburg, young college-educated professionals are gravitating toward apartments and condos downtown, aiding revitalization efforts.

St. Petersburg mayor Rick Kriseman has made it his priority to guarantee that decisions are being made that ensure money from the TIF is not only used on municipal city infrastructure, but also in such a way as to benefit the community directly. By encouraging local banks to loan to residents and providing incentives to renovate and rebuild, the community will have a bigger role in defining the future of south St. Pete than is typical (Morrero). This move puts an unprecedented amount of control in the hands of residents going forward in areas marked for redevelopment.

Twice since 2005, Midtown's only grocery store has gone out of business: first a Sweetbay from 2005 to 2013, and then a Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, which closed in 2017. Although many factors contributed to the failure of one of the most basic needs of the area, including lack of oversight, and unfair lease agreements, one gross miscalculation by the administrations of Mayors Rick Baker, Bill Foster, and Rick Kriseman over the years has been the simple fact that the neighborhood is so mired in poverty that shoppers cannot support a grocery store. In fact, it was later discovered that no market research was ever even done for this location as has been done in other cities (Playford, Frago, Lash, "Chasing a Midtown Supermarket...").

Despite the city's efforts and hundreds of millions of dollars in investment, the average household income in the area has actually gone down since 1999, when adjusted for inflation. Property values have also dropped, and more people are spending the majority of their income

simply on housing. To be fair, crime rates are dropping and high school graduation rates are rising and keeping up with the county trend. Between 1999 and 2015, the City of St. Petersburg has injected more than $210 million in investment in Midtown: projects like the Gibbs High School, and Perkins Elementary reconstruction, construction of the Pinellas Job Corps Center, the land parcels that make up Commerce Park, and Tangerine Plaza where both Sweetbay and Wal-Mart failed (Lash, "$200 million later...).

These examples are evidence that no one singular approach is effective on its own. Dumping money and projects into an area is not going to solve deep-running problems that have systematically existed for generations. In St. Petersburg's historically black neighborhoods, the class-stratification is built on racial lines. It is not to say that the intentions behind the effort are not good, but rather that the results are simply not good enough.

Earlier redevelopment initiatives often overlooked the underlying needs of historically African-American neighborhoods by instead focusing on the most glamorous options. In the 1980s, the St. Petersburg City Council formed a partnership with two outside developers to form the Bay Plaza Company in an ill-fated and misguided attempt to revitalize downtown. Envisioning a radical and risky high-end supermall that would take up nine square waterfront blocks, the plan included the since demolished Bayfront Center arena. A preservation group, Save Our St. Petersburg (SOS), along with the *St. Petersburg Times,* became critical of the plan after Bay Plaza's refusal to include condos or apartments and cited the low-income nature of downtown without explaining how a low-income downtown would support high-end retail. Additionally, Bay Plaza pledged to incorporate the city's well-known Mediterranean Revival architecture, but still chose to implode the Soreno Hotel, a 1920s era landmark. By the early 1990s, after nearly all manner of retailers declined to come aboard the project, the Bay Plaza

plan had completely collapsed, leaving little more than a gaping, unused lot where the Soreno once stood and is now the Florencia (Stephenson 179-184).

The seemingly insatiable hunger for all things retro has preserved many historic buildings, and even saved some from destruction. Downtown, St. Petersburg Preservation Inc. is still trying to get the old YMCA building marked for historical status, as well as the entire block where the Detroit Hotel and Jannus Live sit, or “First Block,” as it is home to some of the city’s earliest buildings.

Earlier this year, the old Pheil Hotel, famous for it’s modern “cheese grater” sheet metal covering, was in the process of being rescued as well, before being lost to demolition, but the city has promised to revise the way buildings are marked for preservation in the future (“The 400 Block of Central Ave. …”). In a perfect example of what new life can be breathed into an old building, the former Tramor Cafeteria, a 1930s era dining hall, sat vacant for years until it was turned into the stunning Hofbrauhaus, a German biergarten (“Keep St. Petersburg Special”), in 2015.

Keeping historic significance intact, even if the cost to do so is more than knocking down and rebuilding, has become a priority and is viewed as added value and incentive to a neighborhood. St. Petersburg itself has a growing reputation for recycling both buildings and entire districts of the city. With places like the Manhattan Casino, a historic and cultural landmark in the city’s black community, being renovated and enjoying new life, it is not a stretch to imagine neighborhoods overcoming challenges and becoming fully restored with cultural and historical integrity (Wilson, *St. Petersburg’s Historic 22nd…* 104). The redevelopment of nearly everything in the city may seem like an unstoppable trend by this point.

Community initiatives can still be accomplished in southern St. Petersburg as well as it has been elsewhere in the city, but this does not necessarily have to mean the city must sacrifice the homes of long-standing residents and structures. Naturally, the concern is that encroaching boutiques and cafes will change not only the neighborhoods in Midtown and other targeted communities, but also the complexion. It is important to recognize and realize that many of these families have been a part of these communities for generations.

The cultural bond of the city's African-American community within the area is significant and the impact of redevelopment projects is not City Hall's alone to determine. The legacy of prominent black leaders in St. Petersburg, like C. Bette Wimbish, is a powerful reminder of the city's deep African-American roots and how important influence from within the community truly is. Pinellas County's first black female lawyer, and only the State of Florida's third, Wimbish went on to become the City of St. Petersburg's first African-American City Council member in 1969, and then vice mayor. During the years of segregation, Wimbish and her husband, physician Dr. Ralph Wimbish, allowed black athletes and entertainers traveling through St. Petersburg to stay in their home when hotels wouldn't have them. When local businesses refused to integrate, she and her husband challenged segregation at the Pasadena Golf Course, which resulted in its sale to a private company rather than integration. Taking a different approach, she ran for an at-large seat in the county school board in an attempt to desegregate the governing body and disrupt tradition. In 1960, she was the first African American to run for a countywide seat. She did not win the election, but considered it a moral victory as the results showed over 70 percent of votes for her came from white supporters (Jones, 16-18). Dr. Ralph Wimbish died in 1967. In 1968, Bette turned his office into her own attorney's office and fought alongside striking city sanitation workers. She ran unsuccessfully for state senate, and state

representative, but was appointed deputy secretary of commerce in 1973, becoming the second highest-ranking woman in state government. She had a passion for education and was proud of her own. She passed away in 2009, but remains as an example of community leadership in St. Petersburg (Meacham, "C. Bette Wimbish..."). Having struggled with racism within her own community as a student, fought for the working class as a lawyer, and served her community in some of the highest local offices, she experienced leadership developed organically from necessity.

Investment in a community comes from within. Other community leaders like former City Councilman Karl Nurse, who is personally and financially invested in the Midtown area as well, (Puente, "St. Petersburg council member…"), advocate for the ethical and fair treatment of some of the city's most disaffected neighborhoods. The train of progress ought to stop and reconsider where the rails are taking it.

II
TRANSPORTATION AND SEGREGATION

In the 1950s and 1960s, Dade County routed Miami's expressway system directly through black homes and business in Overtown, an area north and west of downtown Miami, destroying housing and displacing almost 10,000 people (Goings, *The New African American…* 271-273). The contractor behind this design, Wilbur Smith, would go on to work with Wilbur Jones at the Florida State Road Department on many other such interstate projects, including those in St. Petersburg (Hirsch, *Urban Policy*… 115). Raymond Mohl writes about Interstates cutting through Tampa, St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, and Orlando, dislocating African-American communities in every city, or walling them off from more affluent white neighborhoods. In St. Petersburg, I-275 caused the relocation of ten black churches (Hirsch, *Urban Policy*… 135). Herman Prothro writes in his 2002 book "*12 Lincoln Court*," about growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in his Gas Plant district neighborhood, now lost to redevelopment. He describes the locations and people of invaluable character that was seemingly not considered when the decision to raze the neighborhood in favor of stadiums and Interstates was made.

Pinellas historian James Schnur writes in his book, *St. Petersburg Through Time*, of the growth of St. Petersburg's predominately black neighborhoods, including Bartlett Park, Childs Park, Cromwell Heights, Highland Oaks, Lake Maggiore Shore, and Thirteenth Street Heights, after the 1950s and 1960s. Although they were once considered off-limits to African Americans due to redlining by realtors and long-held racism, new problems and persistent inequality still exists (5). Jim Crow laws in the early twentieth century, combined with municipal practices of the 1930s to segregate the city on official terms.

Even still, racial tensions caused an uproar after the Jordan Park public housing community was constructed in 1939 to provide decent housing for the expanding and crowded

African-American communities around Methodist Town and the Gas Plant district. At the time, Methodist town was barely much more than unpainted shacks (Arsenault). When the City of St. Petersburg was forced to integrate Spa Beach in 1957, the city closed the beach instead (Schnur, Historic Pinellas… 37).

A policy shift at the federal level toward the expansion of highways and automobile transportation left many city residents feeling abandoned as infrastructure crumbled around them (Mohl, The Making of Urban… 223). These policies, which began to shape what can be seen today in St. Petersburg, have been described by Mohl:

> Urban expressways tore through existing neighborhoods, destroyed housing, and left huge empty spaces. Federal mortgage policies, especially FHA (Federal Housing Administration) and VA (Veterans Affairs), made it possible for working-class urbanites to buy their dream house in the suburbs. A residential appraisal system initiated by the Home Owners Loan Corporation, another New Deal agency, resulted in the redlining and ultimate physical decay of many inner-city neighborhoods. Federal public housing programs promoted residential segregation of the races and encouraged the image of suburbia as a haven from the problems of the city (223).

Many in St. Petersburg's poorest communities do not even own a car. In a 2013 paper published in *The Florida Geographer*, St. Petersburg's African-American communities were found to be in so-called "food deserts," or areas without access to the types of quality food that are found in supermarkets. These neighborhoods rely on alternative food sources, such as convenience stores, which typically stock low-quality items at premium prices. The study found that between 25 percent to 50 percent of residents in these areas do not own a vehicle and rely on

walking or public transportation, which presents challenges when grocery shopping. Now with the closing of the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, this area has again been inflicted with a wound that goes deeper than poverty or race, but also does harm to accessibility and public health. Spatial and financial barriers to health include lack of access to gyms, parks, and healthy food, and also the ability to afford insurance, medical bills, or fresh produce (Johns, Dixon, McHan). The nature of the problem does not rest solely on whether or not there is a grocery store at all, but also with how people are getting to it and whether or not they can afford to shop there in the first place. The picture of systemic poverty along racial lines is becoming clearer.

The construction of Interstate highways contributed to marginalization. The original extension of Interstate-4 (later signed as Interstate-75) through Pinellas to the southern tip of St. Petersburg to connect Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Manatee was proposed and then adapted into the existing I-275. Alleviating the congestion along the southern section of U.S. Highway 19, Pinellas' only major north-to-south thoroughfare, which was completed in 1955 (Stephenson 120), the planning and process to create Interstate-275 that began in 1970 was finally realized and completed in 1988. The 60-mile roadway stretches from Pasco County in the north, across the Sunshine Skyway bridge to Manatee County in the south. (FLDOT Interchange Report). As early as 1977, residents accused St. Petersburg City Council of using the planned path of the interstate to wall off black neighborhoods. A *St. Petersburg Times* article from that year addresses the concerns of Betty Pendleton of Maximo Moorings, a resident of southern St. Petersburg, claiming the plan to "build a wall" was "no longer a secret." Although the City Council acknowledged that the Interstate would have an effect on black communities, public officials stated that the intent was not to divide and separate (*St. Petersburg Times*).

I-275 and its two extensions into downtown, I-375, and I-175, interrupted historically black neighborhoods with towering freeway overpasses, casting a literal shadow over them. While the 22nd Street South neighborhood had already past its prime by the time the Interstate crossed it, many still felt the construction was designed to split up the community (Wilson, *St. Petersburg's Historic 22nd Street …* 88). Jordan Park, an area to the south of the I-175 extender, and east of I-275 is one such community that was cut in half by the Interstate. Built in the late 1930s and early 1940s and surrounded in controversy over racial integration, the neighborhood caused white families to move further away from the area and sparked questions that continue today over housing projects, segregation, and the obvious value city planners put on entire neighborhoods (Schnur, St. Petersburg… 73). Interestingly, at the time, many whites condemned Jordan Park because they believed that the creation of improved facilities would encourage more African Americans to move to St. Petersburg.

Built in the 1930s on 24 acres donated by Elder Jordan Senior, Jordan Park had gained a reputation as a dilapidated place of concentrated poverty and crime, and was demolished and rebuilt between 2000 and 2001. The new units quickly fell into disrepair again among dispute and inaction between the St. Petersburg Housing Authority, who owns the land, and Jordan Park Development Partners, a development partnership group who owned the buildings and was responsible for managing them until the end of 2016 (Moore, "Rats and other woes infest..."). In March of 2017, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority bought back the 237 apartment units at Jordan Park for just $10 after an investigation into the developer's asking price of $400,000, which would have essentially meant the housing authority paid for the buildings twice: first to construct them, and then again to own them. The original agreement stated that developers keep 100 percent of rent paid by residents, federal subsidies, and benefited from tax credits, and now

they get to walk away from millions of dollars-worth of debt in the form of financing from HUD and the City of St. Petersburg. After being left to decline for 16 years under management by the Jordan Park Development Partners group, the St. Petersburg Housing Authority immediately began $2 million worth of renovations and repairs (Douglas, “You Paid For It: Jordan Park...”).

Still today, many St. Petersburg neighborhoods south of I-175 and east of I-275 suffer from excessive poverty and crime, as well as failing schools. As it exists today, I-375 creates a boundary west of Methodist Town and originally separated it from the white communities north of Fifth Avenue, and I-275 originally blocked off the Gas Plant, dooming it to urban renewal as the region pursued baseball on what is now the site of Tropicana Field.

A volatile concoction of poor education, few job prospects, and income inequality, combined with a reliance on subsidized housing and public transportation, ensures that these areas remain racially segregated into established poverty pockets. Bias against these neighborhoods has continued through the modern era in the way the Pinellas County School District has allowed schools to become less racially and economically diverse, resulting in some of the worst schools in the state.

Ever since the last trolley streetcar stopped running in 1949 in favor of more economical buses, all of Pinellas county has suffered from traffic congestion (Arsenault 310-311). In 1988, the Pinellas Metropolitan Planning Organization scrapped plans for a light-rail system (Stephenson 171). The Greenlight Pinellas project, which was struck down by voters on a ballot initiative in 2015, drew criticism for its planned bus and light-rail routes. To some in north county, it seemed that the plan did not make much sense, promising only to build more shopping around train stations. On the surface, the plan seemed to do more for urban commuters, including the many who already rely on public transportation to get to work and school. While the county-

wide plan was not centered around St. Petersburg, proponents failed to gather enough support throughout the suburban sprawls of Pinellas, which is still dominated by ever-expanding roadways.

There is no doubt that Pinellas County as a whole would benefit from a comprehensive transportation system, and one that includes light rail would be fantastic by most assessments (O'Donnell, "Greenlight Pinellas…"). As the City of St. Petersburg continues to eye solutions ranging from aerial cable cars to the possible reintroduction of streetcars on rails, it is clear that the area is still growing, and that includes the areas marked for CRA (McManus). In the future, collaboration between Hillsborough County and Pinellas County may see a more regional approach to transportation and congestion in the Bay Area.

A joint effort, however, would only increase the need for conversation between all stakeholders in the pursuit. Finding the right balance to please everyone in Florida's most densely populated county is a nearly impossible challenge, but getting everyone to recognize the value of serious public transportation reform and how important it is to the area's poorest communities would be the first hurdle to clear in the next adaptation.

III
EDUCATION AND INCARCERATION

Midtown, an area associated with several black neighborhoods, is bounded by Second Avenue North on its north side, Thirtieth Avenue South on its south side, and Fourth Street and Thirty-Fourth Street on its east and west borders. Recently, the area has benefited from several improving developments. When the Carter G. Woodson African American Museum was sold after the St. Petersburg Housing Authority could no longer afford to keep it in its portfolio, the city was forced to step up and make the purchase and keep it running after public outcry. Initially part of the new construction at Jordan Park, the museum was owned by the St. Petersburg Housing Authority. Attempts to sell the it to St. Petersburg College fell through before HUD officials made a surprise visit to the city and declared that the building must remain an African American museum, no matter who owns and operates it. Stressing the area's cultural legacy, before the city bought the building, then-St. Petersburg Housing Authority CEO Darrell Irions said, "We're not in the museum business, but we do want a museum to be there" (Stanley, "St. Petersburg announces plan..."). By comparison, St. Petersburg residents accepted a one-time tax increase without as much controversy in 2000 to help raise $2.6 million so the privately owned Sunken Gardens on 4th Street North could be bought by the city and remain open (Boatwright, "Nostalgia, subsidies keep...").

St. Petersburg College has also recently established the Cecil B. Keene Center for Achievement and a more than 11,000 square foot gymnasium near its Midtown campus on 22nd Street South with plans to renovate the buildings and turn them into classrooms as well as resources available to the community. The school will also be offering scholarships and computers to public housing residents for the next 30 years as part of its purchase agreement (Manning). Programs for younger children, like Head Start, show their value later as reforms that

attempt to make institutional changes at the basic level or correct long-standing social injustices, may take more than a generation to evaluate the effect (Tyack, 7). Midtown has struggled economically but has experienced some improvement.

Previous attempts to revitalize Midtown (like the Walmart Neighborhood Market that replaced a Sweetbay on 22nd Street South in 2005) have faced challenges, fallen flat, or run out of money. Unfortunately, many of the buildings and homes require extensive renovations. Both the museum and the SPC additions will benefit the community in far greater ways than Tropicana Field ever has, or than a light rail line ever could. The results will be measured in generations, not in the terms of elected officials.

In the case of the failure of two different grocery stores at the same Midtown location, three different mayoral administrations over the course of two decades have consistently failed to solve a relatively small area's single problem of having a place to buy quality food. It has been decades since the decisions were made that brought the Gas Plant district to the ground and in its place built a sports stadium and Interstate extenders. Yet, the problems of segregation and poverty still persist. Generational poverty combined with racial discrimination is possibly the cruelest, most heinous curse ever inflicted on America's most vulnerable people. It will almost certainly take more than any one administration's efforts to undo the damage done to these communities, in St. Petersburg, and nationwide.

A series of recent *Tampa Bay Times* articles, titled "Failure Factories," has detailed the consequences of a 2007 decision by the school board to end a decades-old integration policy. In 2006, Jon Wilson wrote that Jim-Crow lines of segregation still existed in the form of congressional redistricting in 2002, which combined St. Petersburg's largest black community with another district across the bay in Tampa, and school districts also followed these old lines

closely in order to bus black children into white schools where grades and overall test scores might improve (Wilson, *St. Petersburg's Historic 22nd …* 89-90). Of course, gerrymandering is nothing new, and as recently as 2015, the Florida State Legislature was caught creating voting districts based on race, age, and political party affiliation (Klas, "Data sleuths decoded...").

Before 2007, the school district would bus students around the county to ensure that schools would not become predominantly black and poor, a strategy that worked and seemed to boost average reading and math scores of both black and white students. In fact, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as Florida's population grew, the need for growth management became increasingly important while crowded schools and highways failed to meet the expectation that growth would pay for and develop itself (Stephenson 177).

In the 1950s, anticipating the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision to desegregate public schools, Pinellas County began an initiative to upgrade segregated schools. The subsequent creation of a segregated junior college at Gibbs High led to black students from neighboring counties without such facilities being bussed in, effectively enforcing segregation. A class action lawsuit, that began in 1964, against the dual school systems in Pinellas culminated in the 1971 federal court ordered mandate that schools desegregate countywide (Schnur, *Historic Pinellas…* 37). These efforts were largely led by James Sanderlin, who began working on the case in the 1960s and had become Pinellas County's first African American judge by the time schools became desegregated. After the ruling that no school in Pinellas could exceed thirty percent black student enrollment, the decision to bus students around the county was viewed as necessary, regardless of the additional financial cost. This created new challenges as neighborhoods changed throughout the following decades due to white-flight and integration. While some schools in southern St. Petersburg became increasingly African-American, some

officials suggested creating additional magnet programs to draw students from other neighborhoods (Schnur "Desegregation of Public Schools…"). Pinellas County's long history of unequal education opportunities continues in St. Petersburg today as neighborhood demographics continually shift.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 targets students from low-income families in an effort to prevent poverty from affecting education, meanwhile the end of segregation proved to be effective as well: in the South overall, the proportion of African Americans in nearly all-black schools decreased by almost half from 1968 to 1980, though many remained in majority-black schools due to neighborhood segregation. Across the entire country, almost a third of black high school students dropped out, but by 1989 this number also decreased by half, roughly equaling the same amount as white students (Tyack 27).

Historically, the education systems in America have never favored the poor, minorities, or those who live in rural areas, while the leaders and school boards were composed of wealthy, white men who based decisions on assumptions of their own correctness and cultural superiority. In the South, schools were legally allowed to separate students by race into distinctly unequal educational systems (Tyack 22). In the 1960s and 1970s, technocrats at the national level came up with complex and competing systems of accounting in an effort to solve all of the educational system's problems: Management by Objective (MBO), the Program Planning and Budgeting System (PPBS), and Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) all attempted to streamline and clarify goals and objectives for school districts, but educational objectives were hard to classify, unclear, and the results were difficult to measure (Tyack 116).

The result was a nationwide education system in the United States that operated on differing agendas with incompatible methods of measuring effectiveness, and a system that could

legally serve two different populations based on the color of their skin. In more recent years, the Trump administration, including Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has opposed the Obama-era Common Core State Standards Initiative. Designed at the federal level and incentivized to the states for adoption, Common Core was supposed to unify the United States' grade-level learning standards and outcome. Although the State of Florida has chosen to adopt these standards, states are not obligated to and some have opted out (*commoncorestandars.org*).

Soon after the busing program ended, and effective re-segregation in 2007, schools in poorer neighborhoods began to suffer from failing test scores and violence. Five southern St. Petersburg elementary schools -- the campuses of Campbell Park, Fairmount Park, Lakewood, Maximo (which were not all-black when built), and Melrose (which could have been considered a black-neighborhood school since it was built in the 1960s) rank in the Florida Department of Education's 15 worst performing schools in the state (*Tampa Bay Times*). In a few short years, these schools have all become F-rated schools and have gained a reputation for violence and high faculty turnover rates.

Though more recent efforts, including those following the scathing April, 2016 *Times* analysis, have attempted to rectify the damage done to these schools, this is only one aspect of an impression that governments and elected officials are simply uninterested in creating policies that advance poor and historically racially marginalized communities. While technology and computers in the classroom have been available for decades, schools in lower-income neighborhoods rarely have the same resources to utilize them in the classroom, and when they do, students are often using simple learning software to complete drills rather than exercise and develop critical thinking skills (Tyack 126). In addition, these schools often serve students whose

parents or guardians cannot afford the time to be actively involved in things like Parent Teacher Association or other activities that drive academic equality and excellence.

For years, one of Florida's most affluent counties had been harboring five of the worst elementary schools in the state, failing small children and setting them up for a lifelong struggle in education and behavioral problems, all within six square miles of each other. In the early 2000s, Campbell Park, Maximo, and Lakewood, district-wide magnet schools receiving grant funding, were forced to only accept students from nearby. During the following grant cycle, Sanderlin Elementary and Jamerson Elementary were allowed to accept students district-wide, and benefitted from the increased diversity, avoiding the same fate as the other schools, despite the fact they are all relatively close to one another. Additionally, incentive programs that benefitted high-poverty schools, like the University of Florida's Lastinger program, were discontinued by the school board when it felt the programs became too expensive or that the improvements made were good enough, resulting in cycles of abandonment and struggle and the perpetual need for improvement (Perez).

It should surprise no one that these areas have higher high school dropout rates, more people living below the federal poverty line, more people living in subsidized housing, and crime (City-Data). According to *Tampa Bay Times* writer, Nathaniel Lash's August, 2017 article about the continued dereliction of south St. Petersburg's poor black neighborhoods despite the investments made, the crime rate in Midtown and Child's Park, although decreasing overall, was still more than five times higher than that of the rest of the city in 2014 (Lash, "$200 million later...).

High crime areas and poorer neighborhoods have historically gone hand-in-hand, and have gained an inseparable reputation within the public psyche. In St. Petersburg, some of the

highest concentrations of both violent and nonviolent crime are in the south side, in the same neighborhoods where the failing schools are located, the same neighborhoods that Betty Pendleton suspected were being deliberately segregated nearly 40 years ago (raidsonline.com). Unlike some other nearby counties, the Pinellas school district still disciplines students with out-of-school suspension, along with other tactics that have proven to be less than effective, including the inability to makeup full credit for work missed while suspended (Fitzpatrick).

Following the criticism in “Failure Factories,” Pinellas County School District began offering Alternative Placement Programs that allow students to complete work under the watch of a teacher rather than be suspended out of school. However, participation has been less than desired or anticipated, and the general consensus is that transportation from an afterschool program is a major issue for many students.

A 2017 *Tampa Bay Times* article cites research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, saying that 40 percent of Florida’s children live in single-parent homes. The average 2-bedroom apartment in nearby Hillsborough County would take one person 90 hours a week at minimum wage to afford; that is more than two people working two full-time jobs. Stagnant wages and the steadily increasing cost of living around the country are hurting struggling single-parents and children more than most (Kumar, “Report: Florida ranks 40th...). Suddenly, it does not seem strange that parents cannot afford to pick their children up from afterschool activities, including the Alternative Placement Program, and so out of school suspension instantly becomes the more practical option.

Some studies suggest that there is a critical link between early childhood education and development, and the skills necessary to become successful in life. One study by the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research is building on information in its Human Development Project

that found links between the neural and immune systems that could lead to poor coping skills, poor self-esteem, low competence in cognitive functions, and social and psychological difficulties, all possibly rooted in a dysfunctional educational environment that has persisted for years.

The solution is not to blame the schools, but to realize that failing schools in tough neighborhoods are part of the larger community in society and these problems extend far beyond individuals and families (Fullan 42-43). Coincidentally, when declaring his war on poverty and his Great Society initiative, President Johnson said, "the answer to all our national problems comes down to a single word: education" (Tyack 2). Many would agree that education and learning spaces are the foundation for any community. Combined with the apparent excessive and disproportionate disciplining of black students not only countywide, but specifically in south side schools, the result is students who not only fail, but cannot see the value in education and who have lost faith and trust in the system. These are children who rely on the system and whose parents rely on school buses to pick them up in the mornings and drop them off in the afternoons while they work.

Parents of these children oftentimes are struggling as well, and cannot afford the time or money for extracurricular activities or outside-of-schedule disciplinary obligations. This helps to create a culture of dereliction that often leads to crime. Without any real hope or prospects of becoming a functioning, contributing member of society, without the educational background and preparedness to make critical decisions, violence and drug use become pervasive in these communities.

Further complicating the scenario is the difficult endeavor these individuals face when preparing to find a job. More often than not, the only jobs available to those who come from poor

communities are low-wage service positions, due to limitations of qualification and the stigma of poor schools. As if that is not bad enough, many have limited transportation and rely on public buses, the same as they likely relied on school buses as children. This further limits the prospects to low-wage jobs mostly along public transportation routes.

When entire communities are all competing for a relatively small pool of open positions, the result is higher unemployment rates (City-Data). Although Pinellas County's overall unemployment rate has steadily been declining, it has been argued that poverty persists simply because some jobs are not paying a modern livable wage (Florida Department of Economic Opportunity). According to MIT's Living Wage Calculator, a single individual living in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater area would need to make $10.99 an hour working full-time; a single parent with one child would need to make $24.00; and a family with two parents working full-time and two children would need to make $15.78 (Living Wage Calculator). In many of St. Petersburg's most challenged areas where jobs and transportation are limited, these wages are simply unobtainable.

The area recently referred to as Midtown now includes racially segregated communities in a different way than when they were considered high-end white neighborhoods of the 1950s (*St. Petersburg…* 5). With little else to hope for, a poor, under-educated, unemployed individual with no faith in the system might look for alternative ways to create a lifestyle for themselves outside of the system. Raymond Mohl writes that employment in city centers suffers because low-skill workers who often lack professional training or skills required for technology and information jobs find themselves in low-skill, low-wage service jobs. Because of this, older cities suffer from chronic underemployment, unemployment, and poverty (220). Theft and drug

dealing might seem like an alternative to struggling relentlessly to make an honest living in a high poverty area, therefore raising the crime rates simultaneously.

The State of Florida has some of the harshest juvenile drug laws in the United States. Under Florida law, juvenile drug offenses are treated the same as those of adults. In Florida, juvenile drug charges can follow a person throughout their entire life, especially if the individual is found guilty of intending to sell. Certain charges can prevent someone from ever being eligible to receive student loan or grant money, can get that person's license suspended, and permanently bar individuals from holding certain types of jobs. In the State of Florida, where medical marijuana has only recently become legal, possession of 20 grams or less could cost a person, potentially a even a child, the maximum of $1000 and a year in jail (*norml.org*).

Meanwhile, Florida is making efforts to end mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent offenses, which often include drug related charges. Instead of mandatory minimum sentences, which fill prisons with non-violent offenders and costs taxpayers untold millions of dollars to incarcerate them, the move is being made toward diversion programs, including a bill sponsored by St. Petersburg's Darryl Rouson in the Florida State Senate (Klas, "In major Tallahassee reversal..."). In Pinellas County, Sheriff Bob Gualtieri's diversion program, which aims to avoid arrests and a clogged criminal justice system altogether, has been wildly successful and has become a model for the rest of the state. The program in Pinellas doesn't even require offenders to pay court fees, citing Gualtieri's belief that "the criminal justice system should not be pay to play," and that charging a person poor enough to steal food is counterproductive (Puente, "Pinellas Sheriff Bob Gualtieri...").

What in other states might result in probation or community service for what is viewed as a poor decision by an immature youngster, in Florida could result in far reaching consequences

that prevent an individual from ever successfully getting their life on track. Following harsh punishment at school, even more severe punishment by the courts, and the dysfunction of being either unable or ineligible to obtain gainful employment builds upon the stereotypes associated with people from low-income, racial minority areas like southern St. Petersburg.

Faced with the odds stacked out of favor, an environment of generational poverty persists and follows families unable to escape the system that, by some accounts, would seem designed to keep the poorest, most segregated communities of St. Petersburg behind a wall. For families who suffer in poverty for generations, the wall is a barrier between them and education, justice, enterprise, and can often be a barrier between them and a roof over their heads.

There is little argument that some parts of the city could benefit from an economic boost, and the new CRA designations are certainly a positive step in the right direction. What continues to concern residents is the ability of distinct communities to retain their as orders are handed down from the city and county. When considering redevelopment, the question that needs to be asked is, who is the redevelopment for? Who is really benefitting? Infusing neighborhoods with new investors and their money and agendas won't necessarily benefit the existing culture and community.

Initiatives from within the community by active members and community leaders, and like those from the Mayor's office and City Council that directly benefit residents, the progress SPC is making and promising at its Midtown campus, and the continued efforts to reorganize public housing and public transit are evidence that redeveloping can be done in a way that does not destroy a community's cultural integrity. Thankfully, decision makers have an opportunity to learn from earlier errors before a new project is proposed. The newest efforts to include the community are egalitarian and should continue. It should be everyone's priority to consider the

needs and interests of existing residents when planning to revitalize, redevelop, or remap any area in the city.

CONCLUSION

St. Petersburg's development since the mid-1960s is a microcosm of trends seen throughout the United States that link poverty, education, and race as factors intertwined and linked inseparably. The Civil Rights Act and the formation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development after 1965 has seen cities across the United States dealing with white populations fleeing downtown metropolitan areas and those that are nearby public housing developments. These newly created areas of concentrated poverty often include mostly racial minority groups, often black, living in subsidized housing in poor conditions due to underfunding and low government priority. Gentrification, the controversial return of wealthy real estate investors to decaying downtown centers and neighborhoods instills new economic life into the city but at the expense of raising the costs of living for existing communities. Million dollar condos, like Urban Style Flats, replace affordable housing while consignment boutiques, and galleries begin to spring up in formerly impoverished areas. The initial expense to build or do business in these areas is cheaper but progress slowly drives the price back up, further marginalizing underprivileged people already living in racially segregated areas. Shrinking housing stock and federal funding for affordable housing further links problems of extreme poverty and the displacement of people. Competing ideologies in city planning and development still debate whether these decisions hurt or help cities. The debate between redevelopment and preservation continues, as seen in St. Petersburg with the loss of the Soreno Hotel to the ultimately ill-fated Bay Plaza. Using the battle between Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs that resulted in his famous scenic parkways of New York and her victorious salvation of Greenwich Village from destruction under one of his expressways, the argument could also be made that expressways make places like more accessible and affordable, unlike Greenwich Village. The

battle is one of community preservation and progress (Winny, “How Activist Jane Jacobs...”). In the public education system, south St. Petersburg is responsible for five of the worst elementary schools in Florida. After the effective re-segregation of Pinellas County School district, these schools became what *The Tampa Bay Times* called “Failure Factories.” Decades after the efforts of James Sanderlin and C. Bette Wimbish, St. Petersburg’s black schools still struggle disproportionately. The school system that fails these kids is only an introduction to the economy and the criminal justice system that will fail these neighborhoods over and over again, ensuring generational poverty and building a wall around poor black people. Hope remains that good, proven ideas like diversion programs and the abolition of mandatory minimum sentences will prevail.

St. Petersburg has been bisected and cross-sectioned by the development of interstates and stadiums. Neighborhoods like the Gas Plant have been erased from the map and replaced with parking lots and hip apartment redevelopments, while Beach Drive continues to raise skyscrapers to attract the wealthy and businesses. The systemic failure is not a simple issue of one city’s leadership, school district, or planning, or funding, or race alone. In the mid-1990s, racially motivated riots erupted in Midtown after the acquittal of a white St. Petersburg Police Department officer in the killing of a black man (Decker, “Violence Returns to St. Pete...”). While this may seem like a distant memory to some or only a historical footnote, the relevance 20 years later is clear: the 24-hour news cycle reports all too frequently about unlawful shootings by police in poor black neighborhoods all across the United States. The Black Lives Matter movement continues to pick up momentum across racial lines, as does the Fight for $15 minimum wage movement across economic divides. It would appear that the tide is turning toward recognizing the stratification of America’s population and addressing them head-on. The

goal of this paper is not to address any one issue in particular but to identify the links between many and create a lateral viewpoint. The lack of any solution presented here is deliberate. There are many proposed solutions; the challenge is getting all of them to work together in unison to create lasting change. To borrow a musical metaphor from earlier, there is no one "right" note in a chord: they must all work together to build something beautiful. And like songs in music, city plans and policies will not please everyone. The efforts of community leaders and policy makers going forward are not likely to get any easier. This city's narrative is one of people, families, communities, housing, transportation, education, poverty, wealth inequality, and race. In context, every single issue affects one another and tells the story of St. Petersburg, connecting policies to people across generations, communities to neighborhoods, and towns to cities. The relationship between policy and opportunity extends beyond municipal and political boundaries on a map, but in the most basic form

relies on people doing what has proven to be best for one another and human principles of equality and fairness.

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