Impacts of Urban Renewal
Richmond, Virginia

Urban renewal or “slum clearance” projects, largely funded by state & federal programs, altered the socio-spatial landscape of many US cities throughout the 20th Century. Richmond, Virginia utilized this funding and eminent domain in many of the older areas of the city at the expense of the mostly black communities living there. Overlaying outlines of the block configurations from 1924 Sanborn Insurance Maps over today’s infrastructure shows how much the urban landscape was changed.

1) Public Housing: Gilpin Court
- Built in 1942, expanded in 1957 and 1970
- Funded by United States Housing Act of 1937
- First public housing site in Richmond
- First instance of slum clearance in Richmond
- Displaced hundreds of black residents of former Apostle Town mixed-use community
- Altered street network

2) Highway Construction: Interstate 95-64
- Built in 1955
- Funded by Commonwealth of Virginia
- Displaced 10% of city’s black population at the time
- Physically split once-thriving black neighborhood Jackson Ward, known as “Harlem of the South”
- Destroyed dozens of mixed-use streets and completely disrupted street network
- Decentralized the city, incentivized white flight to the suburbs

3) Large Projects: Coliseum & Convention Center
- Both built to revitalize delapidated downtown
- Coliseum built in 1971, closed in 2018
- Convention Center built in 1986, expanded in 2003
- Displaced dozens of dwellings and stores
- Created ‘superblocks’ which disrupted the street network
- Became physical barriers between Jackson Ward neighborhood and City Center

Sources: 1924-1925 Sanborn Insurance Maps (Library of Virginia); vectors and aerials (City of Richmond GIS) | Emily Routman | 2021