

**We Shall Not Be Moved: A History of Anti-Expressway Organizing by the
Crest Street Community in Durham, North Carolina**

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INTRODUCTION

The Highway: American Creator and Destroyer

In 1959, a four-lane expressway made its way through the heart of Durham, North Carolina.¹ Riding on the coattails of the 1956 Interstate Highway Act and adopting city revitalization techniques pioneered by urban renewal leaders a decade earlier, the East-West Expressway triggered 30 years of business- and automobile-oriented redevelopment throughout Durham, fragmenting the city and leaving a path of destruction in its wake. Set directly in the expressway's path were several working-class black communities; communities that would pay the ultimate price in the name of economic growth and prosperity. Some communities, however, took note of the relocation and displacement occurring in neighborhoods impacted by the highway and mobilized against the expressway in an effort to keep their communities intact. Crest Street was such a community.

This thesis seeks to examine Crest Street as a case study of community organizing, specifically evaluating the role of community identity and informal cultural institutions as vital organizing platforms in the community's success in maintaining Crest Street as a unified neighborhood. Through analyzing the function of community institutions such as the Crest Street Community Council and the New Bethel Baptist Church, this thesis will assess the role of Crest Street community members and their motivations. Relying on interviews with Crest Street activists, primary documents and archives, and secondary academic works this thesis will also place Crest Street in the context of the national transportation and housing policies and overarching social conditions of white supremacy that shaped Crest Street into the community it was before and after the battle for its survival. Finally, this thesis will discuss the future of Crest Street and its collective

¹ Laura D. Bachle, Laura Hill, and Tim Nifong, "Profile of a Successful Negotiation: The Crest Street Experience," *Carolina Planning* 12, no.1 (1986): 6.

identity as a “family community,” as the neighborhood becomes increasingly diversified and integrated with greater Durham.

This thesis is the product of an oral history archive two years in the making called the Crest Street Community History Project, a community oral history collection housed in the University of North Carolina’s Southern Oral History Program (SOHP). Seeking to expand upon the limited existing literature on Crest Street, the Crest Street Community History Project is intended to document and interpret the history of the Crest Street community through the lens of community history and resident experiences. Using oral histories as the medium to both preserve and understand the history of Crest Street, the Crest Street Community History Project is designed to be iterative; constantly expanding and growing as new stories and experiences are added to the archive.

All of the interviews, documents, and oral histories collected as a result of the Crest Street Community History Project are permanently located on the Southern Oral History Program’s website. The oral histories and corresponding digital exhibition on the Crest Street community can be accessed at <https://sohp.org/crest-street/>.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO HICKSTOWN

Settled during the 1860s, Hickstown, present-day Crest Street community, was an agricultural settlement for former slaves on the outskirts of Durham.² Located in the western part of Durham, the small community was bound on the north by Crest Street and on the west by Bass Street. The area surrounding Hickstown was known as Pin Hook. Well known for its vices, Pin Hook was home to numerous liquor stores, taverns, and brothels.³ By 1871, the reputation of Pin Hook had been well established, with the Hillsborough *Recorder* proclaiming “there is a place called Pin Hook in this county and it is remarkable for a race that was run there many years ago by a man and a woman. They wore no clothes and ran for a quart of liquor.”⁴ Given its peripheral location within Durham and proximity to the Pin Hook area, Hickstown was most likely settled due to its inexpensive land and general undesirability. The community received the name Hickstown from Hawkins Hicks the common-law wife of Jefferson Browning, the property owner of the Hickstown area.⁵ Following Browning’s death in 1863, all of Browning’s properties were left to his and Hicks’ three sons. On the pretenses of her dower, Hicks sued and won full property rights of the approximately fifteen-acre tract.⁶

Relatively isolated from the rest of Durham, Hickstown residents were predominately subsistence farmers working on tracts of land throughout the community. Hickstown only began to show outward signs of unity in 1879 with the establishment of the New Bethel Baptist Church by

² This paper will refer to the Crest Street community as Hickstown when discussing the community before its relocation due to the extension of the East-West Expressway. The community was known as Hickstown until its renaming to Crest Street in 1975.

³ Jean Bradley Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011): 94.

⁴ The details and origins of the Pin Hook name are unclear. While ‘pinhooking’ is a tobacco industry practice relating to the purchase of a young leaf for later sale, Anderson in *Durham County*, notes that the Durham tobacco industry was barely existent when the Pin Hook area was first mentioned in the Hillsborough *Recorder*, 27 September 1871 (477). Additionally, the Pin Hook area throughout its history was never associated with the tobacco industry.

⁵ Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 136.

⁶ Elizabeth D. Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, (Durham, NC: Center for the Study of the Family and the State at Duke University, 1978): 5.

Reverend John Scales.⁷ The church was born from a Sunday School that had started two years prior in the home of local resident Rebecca Lyon.⁸ The church was located on land donated by Jerry Walker in the northern part of the community. The second black church ever built in Durham, New Bethel Baptist Church served as both a religious and social institution, providing much needed communal support for the small and isolated Hickstown community.

Hickstown was officially incorporated in 1887, the same year Durham reversed its stance against prohibition and began actively prosecuting illegal alcohol manufacturers and retailers.⁹ In an attempt to insulate itself from the ‘drying’ of Durham, the incorporation of Hickstown triggered growth throughout the community as stores and saloons flocked to the area, making Hickstown a major source for alcohol.¹⁰ While growing the community, the new residents of Hickstown did little to improve its seedy reputation. Two years following its incorporation a group of residents from neighboring Caswell Heights, led by Richard D. Blackwell, J.W. Brooks, and J.W. Swift, protested Hickstown’s incorporation to the legislature.¹¹ Citing the increasing rowdiness of the newly incorporated town, the more affluent West Durham residents sought to revoke Hickstown’s incorporation. Despite these efforts, Hickstown continued to grow. Erwin Cotton Mills began operations in 1893 under the direction of Benjamin Duke and others of the Duke family in partnership with William A. Erwin.¹² Operating on several tracts of land in West Durham, the property housed a two-story high brick factory complete with adjacent rows of houses for factory workers, who already numbered 375 after just two years of operations.¹³

By 1921, a frame schoolhouse, known as the Hickstown School, was built on Crest Street

⁷ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 245.

¹⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 180.

¹³ Ibid.

overtop the site of an older and smaller schoolhouse dating back to the settlement of the community. The construction of the new school building was, at least partially funded, like numerous other black schools in Durham, by the Rosenwald Fund.¹⁴ A few years following the construction of the Hickstown School, in the late 1920s the New Bethel Baptist Church moved from its original location in the northern part of the community to a location on Crest Street directly east of the Hickstown school on land purchased from J.K. Mason.¹⁵ Coinciding with these developments in the community was overall growth in Durham, especially West Durham, as Trinity College began the process of expanding to present day Duke University under the Duke Endowment in 1924.

Duke University and its surrounding medical campus during the 1920s and 1930s generated many jobs, and residents were able to gain steady and secure employment, albeit within the strictures of Jim Crow. During this period Hickstown grew dramatically as black workers flocked to the community from as far away as South Carolina to take advantage of the new employment created by the construction of Duke University's West Campus and medical campus. A significant portion of the new arrivals working on Duke's expansion settled in Hickstown purchasing small plots of land and moving their families to the community. Older residents in the Hickstown opened their homes and ran boarding houses for the new arrivals, while some women in the community would prepare food and bring it to the men working on Duke construction sites.¹⁶ For those not employed by Duke University, many found steady employment in the Veterans Administration Hospital, Burlington Industries, formerly Erwin Cotton Mill, and the business district at Broad and 9th Street.

¹⁴ The Rosenwald Fund was established by Sears, Roebuck and Company president and chairperson Julius Rosenwald in 1917. Anderson in *Durham County* documents the critical role the fund played in supporting the construction and development of black schools and healthcare services in Durham throughout the early twentieth century (274, 306).

¹⁵ Gary Kueber, "Hickstown/Crest Street," Open Durham, last modified October 22, 2015, <http://www.opendurham.org/buildings/hickstown-crest-street>.

¹⁶ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 5.

Continuing with Hickstown's legacy as an agricultural community, many residents farmed the large open parcels of land adjacent to the community, growing vegetables and raising chickens and hogs in a wooded area north of Crest Street. These agricultural practices allowed Hickstown residents to supplement their income and achieve a higher standard of living than their wages may have afforded.

In addition to filling the need for unskilled labor, some Hickstown residents were also skilled workers, particularly, in stone masonry crafts. Craftsmen such as Walter McKinney, Monk McCollough, and W.R. Brown were highly skilled stone masons. All residing in the Hickstown community, Walter McKinney and W.R. Brown both worked on the construction of Duke University's chapel, and according to community lore, both are attributed to laying the cornerstones of the chapel.¹⁷ The Hickstown community was also abundant with entrepreneurs, a fact most likely born from the isolating self-sufficiency created by segregation. Small grocery stores existed throughout the community. Tom Jackson owned and operated a small grocery store on Mulberry Street, present-day West Main Street.¹⁸ Ida Neal operated a community grocery store on the corner of Shirley and Fulton streets.¹⁹ W. M. Mayberry and his wife operated and owned a small grocery store located on the corner of West Pettigrew and Barnum streets.²⁰ Other businesses serving the needs of the community existed, often providing critical social spaces. Oscar Nunn owned several houses and operated a pool hall and convenience store on the corner of Crest and Fulton streets. Nunn's convenience store and pool hall was a major fixture in Hickstown serving as a community hangout, especially for Hickstown youth.²¹ While working as a professional stone mason, Walter

¹⁷ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, (Duke University 1998): 26. See Figure 3 for image of Nunn's Store.

McKinney, also operated a barber shop, which he typically operated in the evenings after he returned home from work and all day on Saturdays. Two shoeshine parlors also operated in the community with Joe Freeland operating a parlor on Clyde Street and Willie Martin operating another parlor and convenience store adjacent to McKinney's home and barber shop. The women of Hickstown were also important entrepreneurs often operating business relating to education, and child and elder care. For example, Annie B. Jones was the property owner and operator of a daycare center and rest home for the elderly on Crest Street with elderly clientele being her primary focus.²² Lastly, Hickstown was home to a café that never had a particular name, transitioning through numerous owners dating back to 1875.²³ The café was often the central gathering place for much of the community for socializing and entertainment in the form of a jukebox and food. While much of Hickstown was still dependent on the outside Durham community for employment opportunities, with over 60% of residents employed solely by Duke University in the 1970s, these small businesses provided critical convenience, livelihood, and social space for residents.²⁴

The New Bethel Baptist Church continued to thrive and expand throughout the first half of the twentieth century, as the oldest and largest institution in the community. Standing at 2508 Crest Street, New Bethel was more than the focal point of religious life in Hickstown, the church provided many social, political, and community services, serving as the community's social safety net in the absence of city and state social services and programs. For example, from 1965 to 1977, a daycare center funded by Head Start was located in the church.^{25,26} The New Bethel church also provided

²² Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 6.

²⁵ *The Carolina Times*, "Operation Breakthrough Holds Annual Meet; Elects Officers," December 4, 1965.

²⁶ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 7. Head Start is a federal program run by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services providing early childhood education and services for low-income families. Head Start launched in 1965. The daycare program operating in the Hickstown neighborhood gave way in 1978 to a centralized citywide center where children were bused outside the community. The closure of the program was precipitated by plans for the construction of the expressway.

numerous programs to aid the elderly, predating by decades the creation of a citywide program.²⁷

Among the programs were senior citizens association meetings and the development of a missionary department which attended to the needs of elderly residents, regardless of their membership in the church.²⁸

Committed to supporting the community, rather than just church members, New Bethel Baptist also ran two charitable organizations to support the community.²⁹ The first fund was for major crises in the community such as illness, job loss, or fire. The second fund was devoted to routine needs by distributing clothing, food, and medicine for those in the community that needed such aid. These funds have continued to be active in the community and still operate today.

The church's commitment to supporting the larger Hickstown community was part of the key network of supports that allowed Hickstown to operate largely without government aid or city support despite 40% of residents living below the poverty line.³⁰ The church was highly attuned to the needs of its constituents and community by implementing timely programs that addressed the needs of the Hickstown community. The church's role as a political power and mediator between the City of Durham and Hickstown was critical long before the expansion of the East-West Expressway. The church played a vital role in advocating for the provision of water and sewage services to the community, in addition to infrastructure improvements like street lights and road maintenance.³¹ Beyond advocacy for basic services, the church also served as a leading voice for the civil rights and social needs of Hickstown. The church played a prominent role in advocating for the redevelopment of the Hickstown School in 1957 to Crest Street Elementary School and later

²⁷ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 7.

²⁸ *The Carolina Times*, "A Potpourri of Recent Events," May 11, 1974.

²⁹ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 7.

³⁰ NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT), City of Durham and Crest Street Community Council (CSCC), *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC* (2000): 5.

³¹ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 8.

supported the unsuccessful fight to keep Crest Street Elementary open when Durham's desegregation efforts led to the closure of the school.³² New Bethel also served as a critical center for voter registration during the civil rights movement.

Hickstown was also home to a number of educators who had lasting impacts on the community and its residents. Many of Hickstown's most prominent educators worked for the Durham public school system often teaching at the Hickstown School later known as Crest Street Elementary School after the original school building was demolished and replaced with a new structure in 1957. Such residents of Hickstown and prominent educators were Rosetta B. Webb, Hester Williams, Ruth McCowan, and Marie Knight. Rosetta B. Webb taught elementary education in the Durham public school system for 45 years, 35 of which were spent at the Hickstown School and Crest Street Elementary School. Committed to both education and the community, Webb also played a vital role in organizing Hickstown residents, many of whom she had taught, against the East-West Expressway expansion. Her organizing efforts later won her an award of service from the Crest Street Community Council for her lifetime of work in the community. Beyond educating the youth of Hickstown, many of these educators played a vital role in establishing Hickstown as a cohesive and engaged community, creating a community where neighbors were family members, friends, teachers, and activists.

The high degree of self-reliance, community self-help, and steady employment from both within and outside Hickstown translated into a community with longevity. By the 1970s, the average length of residence was approximately 37 years and 44% of the community worked within a mile of Hickstown.³³ The Hickstown community was comprised of majority detached, one story homes or duplex units with a few multiple unit buildings on West Main, Pratt, and Nassau streets.³⁴ Built

³² *The Carolina Times*, "Desegregation Plans of City Board to Change Four Schools," July 4, 1970.

³³ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

within this community was a tight neighborhood network of extended family members, with many residents calling Hickstown a “family community” as over 65% of residents reported in 1978 having relatives living in other households in the community.³⁵ Beyond the emotional and familial connections, “the kinship network” was critical for the economic survival of many households where the children of working parents, as well as the disabled or elderly, were often cared for by retired relatives living near-by.³⁶ Many of those in the community were able to age in place, creating an adaptive and multi-generational community. These informal support networks also created employment opportunities within the community for residents who may not otherwise be able to find employment beyond Hickstown. While over half the households in Hickstown did not own a car, many residents were still able to access with relative ease grocery stores and employment due to the insular and self-sufficient nature of Hickstown and its geographic proximity to many West Durham industries and employers.³⁷ All of these characteristics allowed Hickstown to be a highly autonomous and self-sustaining community in spite of the community’s low external wealth.³⁸

Despite the high social capital and cohesive nature of the community, by the 1960s much of the infrastructure in the then almost one-hundred-year-old community was in desperate need of repair and upgrading; Hickstown had only one paved road, no sidewalks, and many homes lacked indoor plumbing. An issue of *The Carolina Times* printed in May of 1959 features a headline proclaiming “Hickstown- Durham’s Forgotten Section,” detailing the “lack of recreational facilities, paved streets, sidewalks, streetlights, water and sewer lines, and regular garbage collection as some of the deplorable conditions of the community.”³⁹ The article goes on to call for the larger black

³⁵ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 10-11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁸ In Friedman’s *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement* from 1978, 66% of households reported a monthly income of under \$400, yet, only approximately 14% of the community relied on welfare payments as a source of income (15).

³⁹ *The Carolina Times* was first published as *The Standard Advertiser* in 1921 by Charles Arrant. In 1927, Louis E. Austin purchased the paper, renaming it *The Carolina Times* and transforming it into the preeminent news source and voice for

Durham community, particularly the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs, to support the improvement of the neighborhood stating “there are too many fine citizens in the Hickstown section of the city for them to be denied...modern facilities.”⁴⁰ The neighborhood, surrounded by un-improved dirt roads and open tracts of land, appeared to be the remnants of another era. The result of what many community leaders believed to be racist disregard by the city, the deterioration of Hickstown was only further compounded when plans for the East-West Expressway were approved.⁴¹ With the impending highway construction, many of the neighborhood businesses and enterprises relocated for fear that the highway construction spelled imminent destruction to the community. Local municipalities, mortgage firms, and surrounding businesses, long disengaged, began to actively disinvest and write-off the area as undesirable leaving the community vulnerable.

Racism, Urban Renewal, and the 1956 Interstate Highway Act

Although the systemic disinvestment in Hickstown became apparent during the construction of the East-West Expressway, the very formation of Hickstown was largely a product of racism. Located outside the city limits of Durham in the 1860s, the location of Hickstown in the Pin Hook section of West Durham was part of a larger effort to house and isolate freed slaves from the city center where predominantly white and affluent homeowners lived.⁴² The cheapest available land was outside Durham’s urban core and led to a neighborhood development pattern in Durham of alternating and separate poor white and black communities radiating from the mostly white and

black communities in Durham and surrounding areas. Austin used the paper to highlight racial injustice and the fight for racial equality in North Carolina. The paper remains in publication to this day.

⁴⁰ *The Carolina Times*, “Hickstown- Durham’s Forgotten Section,” May 2, 1959. The Durham Committee on Negro Affairs (DCNA) was established in 1935 under the direction of C.C. Spaulding, president of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. At the time of its founding, DCNA was predominately focused on voter registration and the election of black politicians to local office. DCNA is still active to this day, operating as the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People.

⁴¹ *The Carolina Times*, “Residents Say: Human Needs Should Come First,” February 19, 1977.

⁴² Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2008): 39.

more expensive city center.⁴³ With little political power, infrastructure development or financial resources many of the black communities outside Durham were in a constant state of disrepair, dilapidation, and poverty. In Pauli Murray's *Proud Shoes*, she reflected on her childhood in such conditions:

Shacks for factory workers mushroomed in the lowlands between the graded streets. The little communities, which clung precariously to the banks of streams or sat crazily on washed out gullies and were held together by cow-paths or rutted wagon tracks, were called the Bottoms. It was as if the town had swallowed more than it could hold and had regurgitated, for the Bottoms was an odorous conglomeration of trash piles, garbage dumps, cow stalls, pigpens and crowded humanity.⁴⁴

The creation of black districts occurred throughout Durham County and was emblematic of the racial hierarchy that was being translated into housing and urban development policy throughout the rest of the country. Such patterns of explicit and implicit racism continued throughout the 19th and 20th century. These prejudices informed policies at the local, state, and federal level, shaping development practices that perpetuated marginalization and isolation, and ultimately led to the creation of 'blighted' black communities.⁴⁵

The federal government, starting under Depression-era housing policy, played a major role in the shaping of many American cities and black communities. The aims of federal housing policy were twofold. The first component responded to the patch-like mortgage financing of the 1920s and fears of wide-spread foreclosures through the creation of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation

⁴³ Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 94.

⁴⁴ As referenced in Anderson's *Durham County*: Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999): 26).

⁴⁵ In *The Folklore of the Freeway* (2014), Avila notes that urban planning documents from the mid-20th century "explicitly noted the racial character of certain urban neighborhoods... recognizing the city's mix of race, ethnicity, and poverty as 'blight'" (40). The term blight in both housing and transportation policies was reserved to describe working class communities of color, making racial composition a marker for subsequent redevelopment and resource appropriation decisions.

(HOLC) in 1933, and just a year later, the extensive National Housing Act of 1934, establishing the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), now known as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The founding of HOLC and the National Housing Act of 1934 created the long-term, fixed-rate, government-backed and re-financeable mortgage— an initiative that dramatically and irrevocably altered the American home-buying process.⁴⁶ Such mortgage and homeownership programs enabled many middle-class white families to purchase homes and begin the process of cumulating long-term generational wealth and investments.⁴⁷ While intended to expand homeownership to many Americans, the newly established federal policies were designed under the *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of “separate but equal,” and through processes such as redlining, local policy, and open discrimination many black families were unable to take advantage of the new housing opportunities and were, in fact, often disadvantaged by many such policies.⁴⁸ Areas home to predominately black families were frequently ‘redlined’ or designated under FHA mortgage underwriting guidelines, as “fourth grade or D rated” areas coded with the color red on HOLC maps that were deemed too risky for FHA-guaranteed loans often due solely to the presence of black families in a neighborhood.⁴⁹ In the HOLC authored “Residential Security Map” of Durham from 1937 this national trend is seen in the Hickstown community with the whole community bounded by Crest Street in the north-west and Erwin Road to the south-east coded in red with a D4 grade (Figure 2).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Desmond King, *Separate and Unequal: Black Americans and the US Federal Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 190.

⁴⁷ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005): 163.

⁴⁸ King, *Separate and Unequal: Black Americans and the US Federal Government*, 190. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1896 upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws for public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were ‘equal in quality.’

⁴⁹ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 53.

⁵⁰ *Residential Security Map*. Home Owners’ Loan Corporation. From Southern Redlining Collection, *North Carolina Maps*. <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ncmaps/id/9591> (Accessed March 11, 2018). See Figure 2 for map.

The second component of federal policy was the establishment of federally funded public housing dwellings. While first introduced under the National Housing Act of 1934, federal public housing developments would dramatically expand during the 1940s and 1950s, coinciding with slum clearance urban renewal programs.⁵¹ Initiated by the Housing Act of 1949, the aim of urban renewal was to revive cities through large-scale slum clearance, creating Le Corbusier-style public housing complexes and redeveloping downtown areas for the creation of central business districts and areas of commerce, rather than housing.⁵² While urban renewal policies were not designed to be explicitly racist, they reflected the prevailing biases of whites in power at the local, state, and national level and often undermined the very urban communities they were purported to be helping. ‘Slums’ slated for urban renewal were often working-class communities home to people of color, in particular, African Americans.⁵³ Coined by W.E.B. Dubois as the “Negro Removal Act,” the Housing Act of 1949 bolstered the creation of cities divided by race with predominantly black communities built upon legacies of disenfranchisement and marginalization.⁵⁴

The concurrence of urban renewal programs and the rise of federal highway investments and suburbanization had disastrous effects for many minority communities throughout the United States. The 1956 Interstate Highway Act was undertaken as both an economic prosperity and defense program designed to ferry goods and in times of war, arms, across the country over a national network of expansive freeways cutting directly through America’s urban fabric with the intention of aiding cities by limiting automobile congestion and supporting urban development

⁵¹ King, *Separate and Unequal: Black Americans and the US Federal Government*, 190.

⁵² Robert Fishman, “The American Metropolis at Century’s End: Past and Future Influences,” *Housing Policy Debate*. (2000): 201. Le Corbusier was a prolific early twentieth-century Swiss-French architect and urban planner known for pioneering the modern high-rise housing complex as a means of curing ‘social ills’ such as poverty and filth through structures that exemplified rationality and orderliness. His designs for social improvement served as models for many public housing units created after the Housing Act of 1949 under the pretense that through uniform, compact, and clean housing low-income residents could experience social mobility.

⁵³ Fishman, “The American Metropolis at Century’s End: Past and Future Influences,” 204.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South*, 13.

through high-speed and long-distance highways.⁵⁵ However these mega highways, 41,000 miles in total, ultimately proved to compound and facilitate ever-growing urban traffic congestion and the destruction of urban neighborhoods. As couriers of traffic from the city to newly constructed suburbs, the new highways aided white flight from city centers enforcing a stratification of class and race between urban and suburban cores.⁵⁶ Between 1956 and 1966, highway construction demolished on average 37,000 housing units per year, displacing hundreds of thousands of urban residents every year.⁵⁷ The free flow of federal funds for the construction of highways and implementation of urban renewal projects created a perfect storm of racially driven destruction of middle and working-class communities of color.

The construction of the East-West Expressway in 1959 stemmed directly from the establishment of the Interstate Highway Act just three years prior. The East-West Expressway was intended to connect the Durham central business district, major nearby manufacturers, and the Duke University medical facilities with the areas surrounding Durham, streamlining traffic to the economic hub of the Research Triangle Park (RTP). During this period, numerous urban renewal programs occurred in conjunction with the East-West Expressway, concentrating mostly on older communities of color in the proposed East-West Corridor. One of the most notable and telling cases of the destructive combination of urban renewal and highway construction in Durham was the total dismantling of Hayti in the early 1960s, a notable and prosperous African-American community, to make room for the expressway.

⁵⁵ Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 51.

⁵⁶ According to Kevin Kuswa in “Suburbification, Segregation, and the Consolidation of the Highway Machine” (2002) during the wake of desegregation, many white middle-class urbanites saw suburban communities on the periphery of major cities as the pinnacle of privacy and personal mobility, and as a means of separation from ‘blighted’ and racially diverse urban cores due to the restrictive and exclusive housing ordinances of most suburban neighborhoods.

⁵⁷ Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*, 26.

Hayti was established similarly to Crest Street as a settlement for freed slaves outside Durham's city limits during the 1860s. Settled on the southeastern part of Durham due to the area's proximity to railroad tracks leading into town, Hayti was able to experience relative growth and prosperity providing a steady supply of workers to the nearby tobacco factories and related industries.⁵⁸ Centered around Fayetteville Street and Parrish Street, Hayti's prosperity continued for much of the early half of the twentieth century, due to the establishment of a prominent central black business district known as "Black Wall Street," a section of Hayti home to hundreds of black-owned businesses namely the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, the largest black insurance company in the world, Mechanics & Farmers' Bank, the oldest black-owned bank in North Carolina, and Lincoln Hospital, a prominent black hospital.⁵⁹ The harsh reality of segregation in Durham inadvertently aided the creation of a flourishing black economy, supporting an active and growing black middle class in the Hayti community. The prosperity occurring in Durham during the early twentieth century, especially within the Hayti neighborhood, caught the attention of black leaders and scholars such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois saw Hayti as a symbol of black prosperity and solidarity, a place where a black man could "earn his living working for colored men, be sick in a colored hospital, and buried in a colored church; and the Negro insurance society will pay his widow enough to keep his children in a colored school."⁶⁰

Despite Hayti's prominence in the early twentieth century as one of the most successful black communities in the South, by the 1950s the neighborhood began to decline after it was knocked two heavy blows as a result of Durham's stagnating manufacturing industry in the 1930s and tobacco industry in the 1960s. Coupled with the impacts of desegregation and the new breed of

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 132.

⁵⁹ M. Ruth Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks: The Middle-Class Neighborhoods That Jim Crow Built in Early-Twentieth-Century North Carolina," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 7, no. 1 (1997): 276.

⁶⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Upbuilding of Black Durham: The Success of the Negroes and their Value to a Tolerant and Helpful Southern City," *World's Work* 23, no. 1 (January 1912): 338.

color-blind capitalism sweeping America, Hayti no longer held the same status with much of its infrastructure predating Durham's integration and many of its businesses unable to compete with Durham's larger, white-owned businesses. Due to Hayti's convenient central location and rising federal incentives for automobile intensive infrastructure and urban renewal projects, the community was swiftly put on the chopping block for redevelopment. Seen as an impediment to Durham's growth as a regional commerce and transit hub, the community was identified in 1959 as the site for the construction of the East-West Expressway. Cutting directly through the middle of the community, homes, businesses, and daily life, the road disproportionately disrupted Hayti. Roads serving much of Hayti's business were obstructed for months at a time— in total 502 businesses and 4,057 households were forced to relocate, often into public housing developments scattered throughout the city.⁶¹ The project took in total 14 years to complete leaving the formerly prosperous black community home to empty lots and nationally owned storefronts.

⁶¹ Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina*, 344.

CHAPTER 2: THE FIGHT FOR CREST STREET

The destruction of Hayti sent shock waves throughout the black communities of Durham. If Hayti, the former pinnacle of black prosperity and success in Durham, was susceptible to utter destruction and dismantling, no other black community was safe from a similar fate. History was set to repeat itself when, in 1973, the East-West Expressway was slated for expansion. There, sitting in the path of ‘progress’ was the small community of Crest Street.⁶² This time, however, Durham residents understood the serious implications of the highway expansion plans. Recognizing the disastrous fallout of highway construction for Hayti, Crest Street mobilized. Drawing on their tight-knit and strong community ties, residents were able to develop political alliances with sympathetic groups and activist communities. Making the most of shifts in political awareness surrounding the rise of environmentalism and the gains from the civil rights movement, Crest Street residents began to conduct their own political and legal campaigns against the expressway, commencing a ten-year negotiation process with North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the City of Durham.⁶³

The Rise of Expressway Opposition

While opposition towards the expressway had been growing since the mid-1960s, it came to a head in 1973 when Ecos (Environmentally Conscious Organization of Students), an activist group comprised primarily of Duke University law students, filed a successful lawsuit in Durham district court to halt construction of the expressway until the completion of an environmental impact statement.⁶⁴ Following the pause in expressway construction pending the findings of the

⁶² By the 1970s there was a formal push by community leaders to rename the Hickstown community to Crest Street and by 1975 the community had formally changed its name to Crest Street. For these reasons, I will refer to the community as Crest Street when discussing it subsequent to the 1970s.

⁶³ NCDOT, City of Durham and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 6.

⁶⁴ Bachle, Hill, and Nifong, “Profile of a Successful Negotiation: The Crest Street Experience,” 8. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970 requires all federal agency projects to complete an Environmental Impact Statement if the “proposed major federal action is determined to significantly affect the quality of the human environment.”

environmental impact statement, the Crest Street community began to organize at the epicenter of its communal life: the New Bethel Baptist Church.⁶⁵ The pastor, L.W. Reid, and recently retired air force veteran Willie Patterson worked together to mobilize fellow parishioners to form the Save Our Church and Community Committee, which would later evolve into the Crest Street Community Council (CSCC).⁶⁶ Comprised of five community members elected annually to the council by neighborhood residents, CSCC played a critical role in organizing and advocating for the needs of the Crest Street community.⁶⁷

In 1977, while the environmental impact statement was being drafted, the city of Durham, NCDOT, and FHWA finalized the relocation plan for Crest Street, which called for residents to be dispersed throughout Durham. Incited by the plans, CSCC sought out legal service through the North Central Legal Assistance Program where the council was assigned two legal aid staff attorneys, Michael Calhoun and Alice Ratliff, both recent graduates of UNC's School of Law.⁶⁸ In addition to the legal support, the community commissioned Robert L. Morris, a traffic engineering consultant, to provide vital technical analyses and testimony before the city council, countering the proposed NCDOT plan.⁶⁹ In 1978, the council also recruited a Duke University anthropologist, Elizabeth Friedman, to conduct a sociological survey of the community, documenting the social stability and cohesiveness of Crest Street. Friedman's findings, while initially disputed by NCDOT, were eventually confirmed through a steering committee survey commissioned in 1980, and

⁶⁵ William M. Rohe and Scott Mouw, "The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 59.

⁶⁶ Rohe and Mouw, "The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community," 59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Both Michael Calhoun and Alice Ratliff went on to have great professional success in careers devoted to fighting injustice. Calhoun is currently the president of the Center for Responsible Lending, a financial and consumer advocacy non-profit, and Ratliff is a Clinical Professor of Law, Emerita at UNC Chapel Hill Law School specializing in housing law and civil lawyering process.

⁶⁹ *The Durham East-West Expressway: A Report on Critical Issues to the Durham City Council, 1979, Crest Street Neighborhood Materials Related to Expressway Extension (1979-1980)*, Durham County Library - North Carolina Collection, Durham, North Carolina.

ultimately proved vital for conveying the importance of maintaining Crest Street as a unified community.⁷⁰

During this period the council was also developing political alliances with the broader Durham community, namely by aligning with the People's Alliance (PA), a progressive political action group based in Durham that was conducting its own campaign against the expressway. PA activists were especially concerned with the expressway's role in facilitating suburbanization, preferring a mass transit system over the expressway.⁷¹ Uniting behind a singular goal, PA served as the driving force in establishing a city-wide coalition of other Durham neighborhoods and activist groups opposed to the expressway. The coalition represented a broad range of Durham groups, uniting organizations, such as the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People (DCABP) with other progressive groups interested in civil rights, environmentalism, and in some cases, just motivated citizens that did not want the expressway near their homes.⁷² Despite the varying motivations behind the coalition, it ultimately proved to be successful in unifying political opposition against the expressway. The coalition was able to collect around 6,000 signatures against the expressway, sufficient evidence to persuade the city council to vote against extending the expressway in February 1979.

This major success was fleeting, however, as the business community, perceiving the anti-expressway movement as a threat to Durham's long-term prosperity and growth, launched its own campaign efforts to save the expressway. During the city council elections of mid-1979, Durham's business interests conducted a successful campaign to elect council members supportive of the expressway, leading to a vote in late December of 1979 reversing the council's prior decision to vote

⁷⁰ NCDOT, City of Durham and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 7.

⁷¹ Paul Luebke, "Activists and Asphalt: A Successful Anti-Expressway Movement in a "New South City," *Human Organization* 40, no. 3 (1981): 256.

⁷² Rohe and Mouw, "The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community," 60.

against the expressway construction. The state also looked favorably on the expressway project with democratic Governor James B. Hunt Jr. releasing public statements in support of the expressway.

Although the Governor was sympathetic to the Crest Street cause, he ultimately believed that “if we don’t have these Interstate quality highways, we can’t attract the high-quality industries,” a viewpoint shared by many other North Carolina leaders at the time.⁷³

Despite the political setbacks, CSCC continued to explore legal alternatives with the support of their legal aid attorneys. In September of 1978, the council had filed an administrative Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act complaint with the U.S. DOT alleging the planning of the East-West Expressway was racially motivated having both a prejudiced intent and impact.⁷⁴ The CSCC also charged NCDOT with failure to plan for use of last resort housing funds provided under the Uniform Relocation Act.⁷⁵ In February 1980, the U.S. DOT Director of Civil Rights, Ellen Feingold, wrote to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Tom Bradshaw:

The proposed alignment which shows an interchange displacing virtually the entire black community along Crest Street would entail extremely adverse and disproportionate impacts on blacks as compared with Whites in the surrounding area in terms of displacement, relocation, and general community disruption.⁷⁶

A major victory for the community, Feingold confirmed that the proposed expressway violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Addressing the civil rights complaint and acting on the advice of the U.S. DOT, the NCDOT established an East-West Expressway steering committee to serve as the platform for future negotiations between the community and the local, state, and federal

⁷³ *The Winston-Salem Chronicle*, “Q & A with Gov. James B. Hunt Jr.,” August 12, 1978.

⁷⁴ Rohe and Mouw, “The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community,” 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid. The Uniform Relocation Act (1970) established minimum standards for federally funded projects that require the acquisition of real estate or displace persons from their homes, businesses, or farms. The Housing of Last Resort section of the act “requires that comparable decent, safe, and sanitary replacement housing within a person’s financial means be made available before that person may be displaced.”

⁷⁶ Crest Street papers, 1970s-1980s, Billy Brown Olive Papers, 1950-2001., Southern Historical Collection, UNC Chapel Hill Wilson Library Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. See Figure 16 for complete letter.

governing bodies. In total, the steering committee was comprised of members from NCDOT, FHWA, City of Durham, Durham County, Duke University, Crest Street Community Council, Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, and People's Alliance.⁷⁷ One of the first and only successful actions of the original iteration of the steering committee was to commission a UNC city planning class taught by Professor Chester Hartman to survey the community. The survey confirmed the findings of Elizabeth Friedman's 1978 study, finding that Crest Street was a productive and socially cohesive community.⁷⁸ However, negotiations quickly broke down due to a dispute between CSCC and the city council relating to a rezoning request to allow for a hotel to be built on the edge of the Crest Street community. The dispute led to an eleven-month long pause in negotiations where the CSCC withdrew from negotiations citing the city's rezoning attempts as a sign of bad will, revealing the underlying difficulty in maintaining a steering committee of such size and diverse political motivations.

The city eventually withdrew the rezoning plans and negotiations resumed in October 1981 with three new major developments. The first entailed a restructuring of the steering committee to a smaller task force comprised of just immediate actors in the expressway dispute: NCDOT, FHWA, City of Durham, Duke, and CSCC. Peripheral parties, such as the People's Alliance and Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, did not participate in the second iteration of the steering committee, greatly depoliticizing and simplifying negotiations.⁷⁹ The small task force also began meeting in the basement of the New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. Following the CSCC's display of will during the first negotiations and the successful U.S. DOT administrative complaint, the CSCC held a new-found legitimacy and status in the committee. The new meeting location at New Bethel was critical as it helped humanize and contextualize Crest Street for the city, state, and

⁷⁷ NCDOT, City of Durham and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 7.

⁷⁸ Rohe and Mouw, "The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community," 61.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

federal representatives, who in some cases had never before stepped foot in the community. These changes led to a transformation in the committees' atmosphere of defensiveness and anger into a work environment of cooperation and mutual respect.⁸⁰ The final development was the NCDOT determination that there was sufficient land available in the Crest Street community and in an adjacent undeveloped parcel to accommodate both the expressway and the Crest Street community. A conclusion that the CSCC played a major role in facilitating through the expert testimony by traffic engineer, Robert L. Morris, who was highly critical of the proposed land-intensive expressway plans. By lessening the land needed to construct the expressway, the city was able to reduce its right-of-way costs and put the remaining funds towards building the new Crest Street community.⁸¹

Resolution: Crest Street's Redevelopment

In March of 1983, after a three year-long stop and start negotiation process, a \$10 million comprehensive relocation and site development plan was agreed upon by the steering committee. The plan divided into community into three parts: (1) the right-of-way expressway corridor; (2) West Fulton, the new location for the Crest Street community; and (3) East Fulton, a small parcel of land for the city to sell at a later of date.⁸² The creation of the West Fulton area involved a comprehensive restructuring of the Crest Street community. The original, "Old Hickstown" neighborhood was to be replicated in the West Fulton parcel, a little over a block from its original plot, importantly allowing the then 104-year-old New Bethel Missionary Church to stay in place.⁸³ The community had successfully argued that replacement housing should be provided in order to sustain Crest Street's tight-knit social network. This agreement allowed the community to be treated

⁸⁰ Rohe and Mouw, "The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community," 61.

⁸¹ Ibid. Typically, cities must acquire a share of the right-of-way for a major state roadway within its bounds. However, due to the conservative land use of the new plans, the NCDOT was able to use last resort housing funds, which allowed it to waive the right-of-way requirement for Durham.

⁸² Ibid., 62. By dividing the site into three areas, the city and NCDOT were able to split the costs of acquisition, demolition, relocation, and construction.

⁸³ See Figure 11 and Figure 12 for visualizations of the community's redevelopment from NCDOT.

as a collective whole, even those in the community not directly in the path of the expressway. Many homes were significantly upgraded— given new interiors and basic amenities like indoor plumbing and central heating. In total sixty-five houses were moved from the old community to the West Fulton parcel.⁸⁴ In addition, several new single-family homes were added to the ‘new’ Crest Street. Existing homes on the West Fulton parcel were similarly rehabilitated, along with existing municipal properties. The former Crest Street Elementary School building, which had laid vacant since the integration of Durham public schools in the 1960s, was converted into a retirement community for the elderly. Affordable housing apartment units were also built for those in the community unable to purchase homes. The community infrastructure was also dramatically improved with new water, sewer, power lines, paved streets, and sidewalks installed in the neighborhood.⁸⁵

The CSCC also took critical measures to improve the lives of community members in ways other than physical uplift. Before the relocation of Crest Street, only twenty-two percent of the households in the community owned their homes. To encourage homeownership, the City of Durham, HUD, NCDOT, and FHWA arranged for subsidies to be offered to residents for purchasing a home in the community, an effort that proved fruitful as at the project’s completion in 1986 fifty-six percent of Crest Street’s residents were homeowners.⁸⁶

In the years following the completion of the relocation project, the council was able to maintain its active leadership in the community. In 1994, when the owner of the multifamily rental properties went bankrupt, CSCC was able also to step up and take an active role in controlling and investing in the housing stock of the community. With the support of the City of Durham, the

⁸⁴ NCDOT, City of Durham and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 10.

⁸⁵ Rohe and Mouw, “The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community,” 61.

⁸⁶ NCDOT, City of Durham and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 10. The community was able to create housing through HUD Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Program, which allowed the CSCC to become the owner of several rental units. HUD Section 202 grants were used for the conversion of the old Crest Street school to housing for elderly community members.

CSCC was able to acquire the title to the affordable housing rental units.⁸⁷ After purchasing, the council rehabilitated the units and established itself as management to the units, a role the council still holds to this day.

In 1979, *Black Ink*, the student paper of UNC Chapel Hill's black Student Movement covered the Crest Street story. When describing the seemingly insurmountable task ahead of the Crest Street organizers the paper reads "you have to admire the gumption of this little community of only 244 households for facing squarely the imposing bureaucracy of the State DOT and firmly proclaiming their right to be. Too often blacks have been at the mercy of technological values which support massive highways or awe-inspiring buildings, yet so often have proved to disrupt rather than to make some meaningful contributions to our lives."⁸⁸ The article hits at the core of the expressway conflict—a small, working-class black community claiming its right to exist in the face of powers that do not yield to such a constituency. However, Crest Street did not act alone. The community members, recognizing their lack of economic means and political power, drew on the rapidly expanding progressive organizing network in Durham. Identifying the numerous stakeholders in the expressway conflict, Crest Street community leaders cast a strategically wide, multi-issue and multi-cultural net, aligning themselves with diverse issue groups that extended beyond Crest Street's natural allies in Durham's black community. The leaders of Crest Street were also quick to understand that social organizing alone would not save the community—legal interventions would also be required for Crest Street to seriously engage with the NC Department of Transportation and the City of Durham. Armed with local political power and the legal means to defend their civil rights, the community fought and ultimately won, preserving their right to exist as a cohesive and whole community. Through ten years of fierce protest, savvy legal maneuvering, and

⁸⁷ The community received a \$400,000 loan from City of Durham—its second Deed of Trust—to establish the Crestview Housing Corporation.

⁸⁸ *Black Ink*, "Expressway Threatens Durham Community," August 20, 1979.

a healthy openness to compromise, the community was able to fully advocate for their needs and preserve that which made the neighborhood so special: its sense of collectiveness and community. As one resident put it “[Crest Street] was a family community and they had to keep us together.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 43.

CHAPTER 3: THE POWER BEHIND CREST STREET

In February of 1979, an editorial in *The Carolina Times* explained “if the expressway is built, bulldozers would destroy the 100-year-old Crest Street community— one of Durham’s more stable neighborhoods. Families living there would have to be displaced, disrupting social and economic ties in the neighborhood.” The article goes on to make a call to the larger black community, “we hope that where there is a threat of injury to blacks anywhere in the city, that all of us would realize that it is a threat of injury to the entire community.”⁹⁰ This call to action did not go unheard, as Durham’s larger black and white progressive communities both found a stake in the expressway construction threatening Crest Street. While the external support Crest Street received was critical to its eventual success, the power of Crest Street was present in the homes of its 244 houses— it was the people who gave power to the movement.

The ‘Rock’ of the Movement: The New Bethel Baptist Church

Having been at the helm of the New Bethel Baptist Church since 1945, Rev. Dr. Lowery Wilson “L. W.” Reid was one of the first to respond to the plans for the extension of the East-West Expressway.⁹¹⁹² Through his role as pastor, Rev. Reid was instrumental in spearheading the creation of the first organizing group for Crest Street, which he and church members called the Save Our Church and Community Committee.⁹³ Recognizing that the expansion of the East-West Expressway through Crest Street would lead to the demolition of the church and the fragmentation of the surrounding Crest Street community, it was quite logical for the church to be the initial mobilization point, serving as the social and political epicenter of Crest Street. Holding meetings at

⁹⁰ *The Carolina Times*, “The Fate of Crest Street,” February 10, 1979.

⁹¹ Andre D. Vann, *African Americans of Durham County*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing 2017): 38. The New Bethel Baptist Church is now named the New Bethel Baptist Missionary Church, however as the name changed happened in the past twenty years, the church will be referred to using the name it had during the expressway conflict.

⁹² The first person to call for organizing against the expressway is disputed amongst community members. Willie Patterson and other community leaders claim that it was Rev. L. W. Reid who made the first call to action. Whereas other community members, namely Josephine Booth, the daughter of Mildred Booth, claim that it was, in fact, her mother, Mildred Booth, who first called for anti-expressway organizing.

⁹³ Rohe and Mouw, “The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community,” 59.

the church, Dr. Reid, joined by Willie Patterson, an Air Force veteran who returned to the neighborhood of his birth and quickly became one of its most vocal leaders, mobilized internally with parishioners and connected with surrounding politically progressive organizations for support and political power.⁹⁴ Although the Save Our Church and Community Committee became, in 1975, the Crest Street Community Council (CSCC), the roots and home base of the movement remained centered in New Bethel.⁹⁵ From New Bethel, Dr. Reid and Willie Patterson led Crest Street residents to city hall where they protested through song, prayer, and testimony.⁹⁶ Residents wrote and sang songs, such as “We Shall Not Be Moved (From the Crest Street Community)” and children of the community also participated writing and singing their own song “We Don’t Want a Highway.”⁹⁷ The verses for both songs hit at the core of the Crest Street movement; a fight to save a deeply connected ‘family community’:

“We Shall Not be Moved (From the Crest Street Community)”

We shall not, we shall not be moved
 We shall not, we shall not be moved
 (refrain)

Just like a tree, standin’ by the water
 We shall not be moved
 (refrain)

1. We’ll fight that old expressway
 (we shall not be moved)

We’ll fight that old expressway
 (we shall not be moved)
 (refrain)

2. We’ll fight the City Council
 (refrain)

3. We’re fighting for our neighborhood

4. We’re fighting for our Church

5. We’re fighting for our Playground

“We Don’t Want a Highway”
 (Sung to the tune of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”)

1st Verse:

I looked out my window
 and what did I see
 A highway coming my way
 I said to myself, go back highway
 We want to keep our homes

2nd Verse:

We all got together
 and said to each other
 We don’t want a highway
 So we’re gonna fight till this
 thing is over
 We don’t want a highway

Chorus:

We don’t want a highway

⁹⁴ NCDOT, City of Durham, and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 9.

⁹⁵ Rohe and Mouw, “The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community,” 59.

⁹⁶ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 36, 95.

⁹⁷ Report of the Crest Street Neighborhood Policy Committee, 1979, North Carolina Collection, UNC Chapel Hill Wilson Library Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. See Figure 15 for copy of original document including the songs “We Shall Not Be Moved (From the Crest Street Community)” and “We Don’t Want a Highway.”

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 6. We're fighting for our Baseball Field | We want a place to stay |
| 7. We're fighting for our Basketball Court | We don't want a highway |
| 8. We'll [sic] fighting for Uncle Bill's Place | We want some place to play |
| 9. We'll [sic] fighting for better houses | |
| 10. We'll [sic] fighting for pave [sic] streets | |
| 11. We're fighting for our children | |
| 12. We're fighting for our future | |
| 13. We're fighting for our freedom | |

Betty Johnson, a native of Crest Street, secretary of CSCC, and a pivotal figure in mobilizing the community, later described the role of prayer and song as being “the glue that kept us all together,” explaining that “being descended from slaves [we] knew that [our] prayer and [our] song was a means of communication and power.”⁹⁸ Additionally, Crest Street residents annually elected the five representatives and organizers to serve on CSCC, leading to a diversity of leadership not always recognized by outsiders to the movement. Although committee membership would vary from year to year, there were two consistent characteristics about CSCC: (1) CSCC representatives were always residents of the community and (2) the leadership of the Revered Reid, Willie Patterson, serving as the president of CSCC, and Betty Johnson.⁹⁹ The success of CSCC could be largely attributed to these characteristics of the committee.

New Bethel's presence on CSCC was also instrumental in facilitating and ensuring the stability of the agreements that came out of the NCDOT and Crest Street negotiations. CSCC, without imposing dues on its members, finances all of its operations, which includes the critical role of management and ownership of the multifamily units and senior homes built in the newly relocated Crest Street neighborhood.¹⁰⁰ By assuming this role, CSCC has ensured that community ownership and investment will continue and that community members have direct say and voting power on the direction of critical housing stock in their own community. This ownership has also

⁹⁸ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

⁹⁹ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ NCDOT, City of Durham, and CSCC, *East-West Expressway Environmental Impact Statement, Durham, NC*, 12. The CSCC was funded primarily through church donations.

ensured that the sense of togetherness that made Crest Street unique remains. As one resident put it New Bethel is “that old rock, that solid rock” that has always kept the community grounded and unified.¹⁰¹

Despite the grueling hours and tiresome work, the community organizers maintained their spirits and motivation, constantly reminded of the community they were fighting for. At its core a place where as Willie Patterson later put it “everyone...was their brother’s keeper. The widows, when they lost their husband, when a husband lost his wife, they helped one another. [I] had never seen or experienced any unity like that in all of my life.”¹⁰² For Willie Patterson, these attributes made Crest Street superior to any other community, even those with better infrastructure or larger homes. When he moved back to Durham following twenty-two years of service in the Air Force, he chose to live in Crest Street even though he could afford to live in a more expensive neighborhood, he “decided that if I was going to get myself involved in Crest Street that I needed to be a part of the community, not run, but to stay and fight it out.”¹⁰³ Shortly after moving back to the community in 1975, Patterson became deeply involved, through his relationship with Rev. Reid, in the growing fight to save Crest Street, and would later serve as the president of CSCC throughout the conflict. Acting as a community representative and liaison, he worked extensively with Crest Street attorneys Michael Calhoun and Alice Ratliff. During the beginning of their work together, Patterson was a student at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) studying for a bachelor’s degrees in political science; an area of study that greatly supported his work. As Patterson explained he “started doing some research work on my own over there at Central... I spent a lot of time in the library trying to figure out how many highways had been built across the United States through black neighborhoods

¹⁰¹ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 63.

¹⁰² Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, July 25, 2017.

¹⁰³ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

where the people themselves were displaced.”¹⁰⁴ Through his own research and his close partnership with the Crest Street attorneys, Patterson directly informed the community’s pursuit of legal action alleging racial discrimination. Patterson also worked as a critical organizer within the community, organizing rallies, and taking a trip to Washington D.C. to meet with officials of U.S. DOT regarding the Title VI administrative action, and leading a march from Fulton Street to Erwin Road in protest of the expressway.¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶ Beyond his role as an organizer, Patterson worked as an effective leader for the community during the negotiations with NCDOT, FHWA, and the City of Durham. Patterson and fellow community leaders held the meetings in the basement of the New Bethel Baptist Church, a strategic decision that Patterson later explained as an attempt “to make them, the council members, feel that they were in the same situation that we were in: this is our home.”¹⁰⁷

The Women of Crest Street

While much emphasis and recognition are focused on Rev. Reid, Willie Patterson, and other male leaders within Crest Street, women also played an integral role in the fight to save the neighborhood. As major constituents and critical actors in much of the New Bethel Baptist Church’s outreach and community support programs, “women were the backbone of the church,” as Betty and Maedell stated, having played a vital, but often overlooked role in Crest Street and the mobilization of Crest Street against the East-West Expressway.¹⁰⁸ The unrecognized position of women in the Crest Street movement is not unlike other struggles for racial and social justice where

¹⁰⁴ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 96.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Crest Street Neighborhood Policy Committee, 1979, North Carolina Collection, UNC Chapel Hill Wilson Library Special Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Betty Johnson, Tony Booth, Robert Pratt, Rev. Reid, Mike Calhoun and Alice Ratliff accompanied Willie Patterson on the trip to Washington D.C. In a community newsletter following the trip, it was reported that “we feel assured by this meeting that our rights and our Community will be protected by the Office of Civil Rights... the main advice [the Office of Civil Rights] gave at this time was not to move or sell any property.” See Figure 14 for the complete newsletter.

¹⁰⁷ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, July 25, 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

the role of women was often overshadowed by male compatriots.¹⁰⁹ In some movements, especially movements for racial justice, the recognition of gender was lost altogether in the face of overwhelming racism and patriarchal hierarchies both within the movement and in the larger reporting and documenting of the movement.¹¹⁰ Betty Johnson explained that “due to the social conditions of the times, women didn’t have much of a voice, but in the background, we were the ones that were creating a lot.”¹¹¹ Although their roles have gone largely unrecognized, female residents were making significant contributions and sacrifices for the movement to save Crest Street.

Similar to the Civil Rights movement, the movement to save Crest Street was largely seen as a movement of a few key men and an even fewer number of women.¹¹² And while both men and women from the Crest Street community participated, it would be a disservice to the movement and to the organizers within the movement for it to be discussed without an analysis of the composition of the movement’s leadership and the way the movement has been remembered in historical records and analyses.

Despite their underrepresentation in most historical records of Crest Street, women played a fundamental role in the movement to relocate the community.¹¹³ As elected committee members to CSCC, participants in city council meetings, active members and leaders in the New Bethel Baptist Church, mothers, caretakers, and community organizers, the women of Crest Street served as both the mantle and kindling that fueled and sustained the fire of the Crest Street movement. Women

¹⁰⁹ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010): 11. McGuire discusses the gender-biased recognition male leaders during the civil rights movement of the 1960s received over female counterparts.

¹¹⁰ Chana Kai Lee, “Anger, Memory, and Personal Power: Fannie Lou Hamer and Civil Rights Leadership,” in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin (New York: NYU Press, 2001): 140.

¹¹¹ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹¹² McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 105-6.

¹¹³ The role of women in the community is never explicitly mentioned or discussed in any academic works on Crest Street. Historical records also often fail to discuss the roles of women in the community. Apart from two articles in *The Carolina Times* announcing service awards for Mildred Booth and Betty Johnson, there are no other records on the role of women. See *The Carolina Times*, “Youth Day Celebrated at New Bethel,” June 16, 1979., and “Appreciation at New Bethel,” June 30, 1979.

such as R.B. Webb, who was a teacher and in her 90s during the time of the Crest Street movement. Alice Ratliff recalled, Webb had “taught most people who lived in the community,” and had a “great moral sway” on the rest of community.¹¹⁴ Her position as an elder and teacher elevated her to a status of authority in the community that helped to bridge generational divides. While a cohesive community, young Crest Street residents often held back from organizing, citing that much of the movement was difficult to follow and often inaccessible with lengthy meetings or events that would interfere with school.¹¹⁵ However, using her position as a teacher, Webb educated and built awareness around the effort to save Crest Street, eliciting salience and engagement from people not often seen at community meetings.¹¹⁶ Webb also used her authority as a teacher to mobilize young people and their parents, furthering engagement across community and family lines.

In ways that many of the male leaders of the community appeared unable, women, especially older women from the community, were particularly adept at mobilizing community members regardless of age. All generations came when called upon by older matriarchs of the community. Mildred “Ma” Booth was “a stalwart” in the effort along with her adult children, attending meetings, addressing the local congregation at church, and ensuring community members were aware of how the fight for Crest Street was progressing.¹¹⁷ Notorious for knocking on doors or calling after extended absences from meetings, Booth would put anyone on notice for not participating in efforts to save the community. Even outside the community, Booth was a fearless leader. Armed with her famous saying “you need to get that streetlight off the agenda and put it on this pole,” Booth earned quite a name for herself with her public and biting critiques of many city officials.¹¹⁸ Born to a sharecropping family in eastern North Carolina during the 1930s, Booth was no stranger to adversity

¹¹⁴ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹¹⁵ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

and the struggle for civil rights, working for local voter registration efforts since the 1950s. Like many of the women in the Crest Street community, Booth played a variety of roles in the community; volunteering as a Sunday school teacher at New Bethel, a tutor for a Crest Street college preparedness program, a treasurer for the Durham High Parent-Teacher, a secretary for the Lincoln Hill Center, and a member Durham's Mental Health Board. All the while she worked full-time as an advanced patient care assistant at Duke University's medical center—a job she held for over thirty years during which she missed only two days.¹¹⁹ For many of the community, especially other women, Booth was Crest Street's untitled and unofficial leader.

However, elderly women did not define the bulk of the movement's female activist figures, as some of the most pivotal female leaders were often middle-aged women working full time jobs. Such a woman was Betty Johnson. Second only to CSCC President Willie Patterson (who also happens to be her uncle), Johnson was "the single most important person in Crest Street" according to attorney Alice Ratliff.¹²⁰ Serving largely as a liaison and representative of the Crest Street community, Johnson was the CSCC secretary and a skilled civil rights activist with previous experience working to register black residents of Durham to vote during the 1960s. Frequently working together, Patterson and Johnson's first method of protest was to survey the community, which Johnson later rationalized as "when you're getting ready to fight... you have to arm yourself with ammunition."¹²¹ However, the survey only begins to describe Patterson and Johnson's work. They hired legal aids, led community meetings at New Bethel, met with Durham city council members, negotiated with NCDOT, and filed and won federal complaints on civil rights grounds. While direct negotiations and federal complaints were handled by the CSCC's legal team, made up of Alice Ratliff and Michael Calhoun, Patterson and Johnson were in contact with the legal team at all

¹¹⁹ *The Carolina Times*. "Ma' Booth: A Tradition at Duke," November 15, 1975.

¹²⁰ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹²¹ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 105.

times throughout the process, and ultimately were the deciding voices in all negotiations. Furthermore, while the legal team was critical in waging the legal battle within the courtroom, Johnson and Patterson remained the consistent and unwavering community voices in city, state, and national meetings, and served as the faces and representatives of the community— even traveling to Washington D.C. to meet and file an official civil rights violation complaint with Ellen Feingold, the head at the time of the office for civil rights at the US Department of Transportation.

Johnson’s organizing tactics were not restricted to just the legal and political realm. She and other women of the community were pivotal in inviting city council members, Department of Transportation representatives, and other leaders in the larger community on tours of Crest Street. These tours that allowed outsiders to see “the people of Crest Street as real live people, not just numbers.”¹²² Johnson later explained the rationale for this effort as “people tend to think that because you live in a dilapidated area that you keep your home in such conditions, however, you should have seen the looks on the faces of city officials when they saw the clean and neat conditions of the homes.”¹²³ Using the incentive of home cooking and the good optics of public appearances, Johnson was able to bring elected officials from both local and state levels to visit Crest Street and challenged them to look beyond its reputation as blighted. As Johnson herself was not a resident of Crest Street at the time, it was other women in the community who offered their time and opened their doors to these outsiders, a tactic that was critical in paving the way for productive conversations and compelling leaders in the city and state to view Crest Street as a community not that different from their own. The relationships formed through these often informal and highly personal visits were critical to the success of the movement, providing community members’ leverage when negotiating redevelopment appropriation funds and services. In fact, these informal

¹²² Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹²³ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

tours and conversations were vital in creating an open line of communication between NCDOT and the residents of Crest Street as “it built mutual trust and respect for both parties,” explained Betty and Maedell.¹²⁴

Johnson and fellow female organizers were also pivotal in organizing “foot patrols,” which involved “going to individual homes to tell others what was happening and what the CSCC was proposing to do.”¹²⁵ These foot patrols ensured that even the most uninvolved residents were abreast of happenings in the community and were able to pinpoint leaders in the community who could be resources for accurate information on expressway updates or if “someone wanted to join the cause.”¹²⁶ Additionally, foot patrols were the primary method for getting community representation at city council meetings, as the patrols would walk around gathering people from their homes and collectively take local buses to the council meetings.¹²⁷ The women of Crest Street ensured that this was a communal effort, not the effort of a few actors.

However, despite Johnson’s critical role within the community, the press and subsequent literature on Crest Street mostly overlooked her role as a leader and activist in the community. Stated best by Crest Street attorney Alice Ratliff, “Betty didn’t get the credit she deserved,” with her voice and role missing from most academic, historical, and news articles from the ten-year struggle to save Crest Street.¹²⁸ Her exclusion, Ratliff believes, is likely due to the devaluation of women’s voices at the time, especially black women’s voices. Ratliff’s fellow Crest Street attorney, Michael Calhoun, also made similar observations. He noted that “there was a lot of strong women” in the community “although they tended not to get the leadership positions,” a factor he attributed to the

¹²⁴ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. During the height of the anti-expressway movement, rumors and inaccurate information ran rampant causing community leaders to send out messages to residents warning them not to speak to strangers about the community. See Figure 13 for an example of such a message.

¹²⁷ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹²⁸ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

“typical” social organization of civil rights groups of the time.¹²⁹ This is a phenomenon that Johnson has also observed stating that “we, as [black] women, do not get the credit or mentions in history,” which she attributes to a combination of systemic racism and sexism as “years ago [black] women were not only slaves, but they had to raise their children and their master’s children” creating a system where black women’s work was ignored and their families suffered.¹³⁰ Fitting within this context, Johnson’s name is rarely featured in the mainstream press, even largely excluded from local black papers such as *The Carolina Times*. Nonetheless, the lack of external recognition did not stop Johnson from working within the community. Following the successful outcomes of Crest Street, Johnson continued her community work by creating a community-tutoring program for college preparedness and literacy for Crest Street children, called the Crest Street Tutorial Project. Providing afterschool and summer programming for local students and partnering students with Duke University undergraduate tutors, the project is an ongoing fixture in the community. Amidst accolades praise from Duke students, city officials, Crest Street residents and children alike in 2010, Willie Patterson put it best when he said “[I] cannot describe how valuable Ms. Betty is to us and to the neighborhood, and how blessed these kids are to be in a neighborhood like this, where people care.”¹³¹

When looking back on what made Crest Street a successful movement, Willie Patterson reflected that “[community members] supported each other. Their sorrow was everybody’s sorrows. And their joy was the whole community’s joy.” The community, despite its economic hardships and political struggles, had a cohesive network of committed neighbors that supported each other through thick and thin. The defining feature of Crest Street was the community’s ability to mobilize

¹²⁹ Michael Calhoun, Personal Interview, July 18, 2017.

¹³⁰ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹³¹ “Ms. Betty’s Reading Corner Opens with Duke Support,” Office of Durham and Regional Affairs, Duke University, posted May 24, 2010, <https://community.duke.edu/ms-bettys-reading-corner-opens-with-duke-support/>.

around a singular point: the New Bethel Baptist Church. Coalescing around New Bethel provided more than a physical space to congregate. It provided a value system and the embedded social capital needed to mount such a long and tedious fight. New Bethel served as a platform to engage a majority of Crest Street residents, even secular ones, as the church provided far more than just religious uplift; it worked for comprehensive community support and engagement. Furthermore, it served as a space to bridge identities along race, gender, and class lines as they intersected in the movement to save Crest Street. With a predominantly female following and an almost exclusively female volunteer base, New Bethel provided an inclusive setting for the women of the community to engage on an equal footing with their male counterparts.¹³² It was a place where women and men alike were welcomed and where one's ability to work and commitment to the community transcended gender and class.¹³³ For New Bethel community organizers, "so long as you could work and was willing to contribute something to the movement, even if it was just prayer, you were welcomed."¹³⁴ Additionally, New Bethel was open to the larger Durham community beyond Crest Street. It was not unusual to find university students of all races visiting the church and being received as if they were lifelong members.¹³⁵ Regardless of one's economic position, race or gender, one's work was always welcomed and valued in the name of community success and sustainability at New Bethel Baptist Church.

While New Bethel operated under a model of inclusivity and comprehensive community uplift, the role of women in the fight for the survival of Crest Street reached far beyond the church doors. The kinship ties experienced in Crest Street were critical for many women's ability to find affordable childcare and maintain full-time employment. Frequently relying on retired relatives for

¹³² Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

¹³³ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Alice Ratliff, Personal Interview, April 12, 2016.

childcare, working mothers were able to work long and grueling shifts at one of the medical complexes with the peace of mind that their children were safe and close to home. This communal support extends beyond just kin, as “the mothers of the community shared the burden of raising children,” and were a consistent means of support for women who often found themselves working 3 shifts- that of paid employment, that of unpaid child-rearing, and that of caring for elderly relatives.¹³⁶ Additionally, Crest Street’s close proximity (under a mile) to the university and medical complexes, allowed community members to be free from the financial burden of owning and maintaining a car, as they walked to work, took buses into town, and shopped at neighborhood grocery stores.¹³⁷ As caregivers for both children and elderly relatives, breadwinners and core supporters of their families and community, the women of Crest Street had a serious stake in the impending destruction of their neighborhood.

The construction of the expressway would have destroyed places vital to the welfare and prosperity of families and children, further dividing the city into neighborhoods wedded to their cars, and facilitating the growth of suburban neighborhoods further confining women to domestic spaces and historically racist environments.¹³⁸ The increasing auto dependency facilitated by the highway put an undue pressure on the women of Crest Street, in particular, as “if there was a car in a household the husband took it” and the women were left to get to work, shop for the family, and care for children without.¹³⁹ Before the proposal of the highway, means of transportation were already a point of conflict and struggle for Crest Street women and the impending fracture of their community would only exacerbate this. Furthermore, the housing alternative facilitated by highway

¹³⁶ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016. The ‘third shift’ is an extension of sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild’s use of the “second shift” to describe the domestic, family, and community labor that women engage in when they return home from their paying jobs. As discussed in Ruth Rosen, “The Care Crisis,” *The Nation*, February 27, 2007.; the third shift describes the additional labor of women caring for an aging parent, in addition to working a paying job and raising children.

¹³⁷ Friedman, *Crest Street: A Family/Community Impact Statement*, 11.

¹³⁸ Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*, 64.

¹³⁹ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

construction, suburban communities, were often exclusive to only white people and would lead to the destruction of the community ties and self-reliance that made Crest Street such an autonomous and productive community despite being predominately low-income and regularly ignored by governmental aid and services.¹⁴⁰

The women of Crest Street had the most to lose and took quick note. Mobilizing support from their families and their community, women served as the backbone of the Crest Street movement. From preparing meals to announcing community meetings, to hosting city and state officials, and to knocking on doors—the women of Crest Street ensured that their community and their families, would not be lost in the face of racialized policies and callous construction. Despite lack of public, and even to a certain extent private recognition with “many of the things called trivial or taken for granted, yet necessary for the community to operate being done by women,” they continued to work.¹⁴¹ Working to save their communities, and in the process, their families, the women of Crest Street “were some of the first to recognize that elected officials’ did not have the plight of black people on their agendas,” and were fast to act upon this.¹⁴²

While the fight to save Crest Street was a long battle with many unsung heroes and heroines, fraught with external conflict, pressure and limited resources, the savvy and strategic Crest Street community members were able to position their battle into one of economic empowerment and physical uplift. With the creation of the Crest Street Community Council, Crest Street residents were able to give voice to political advocacy and empowerment. CSCC still operates today and owns a majority of the housing stock in Crest Street and continues to provide residents control over the internal affairs of their community. Beyond the creation of CSCC, the movement to save Crest Street led to unparalleled civic pride and engagement, bolstering community ties and creating new

¹⁴⁰ Rohe and Mouw, “The Politics of Relocation: The Moving of the Crest Street Community,” 59.

¹⁴¹ Betty Johnson and Maedell Gattis, Personal Interview, May 2, 2016.

¹⁴² Ibid.

alliances beyond Crest Street. Now, more than forty years since the negotiations for Crest Street ended, it is up to those remaining in the community to ensure a new generation 'the community family' that has sustained Crest Street will continue.

CONCLUSION

With Willie Patterson stepping down from his role as president of the Crest Street Community Council after forty-two years of service, the community is entering a new era. Apart from the expansion of the retirement homes to include some additional ten units and the construction of a new playground in Crest Street Park, the neighborhood looks as it did after the redevelopment. However, the demographic composition of the area has changed dramatically. Since the 1990s, the community has experienced a steadily increasing influx of new, often non-black, residents. The arrival of the new inhabitants has coincided with the aging of the historic Crest Street residents and the outward movement of their children and grandchildren from the neighborhood, creating new dynamics within the community. Such shifting dynamics are not isolated to Crest Street and are reflective of the new urban forces that are occurring all over Durham as the city becomes more populous and developed. Yet, despite recent changes to residency patterns and the ongoing evolution of the community, the spiritual core continues on with steadfast faith in the power of the New Bethel Baptist Church and other neighborhood institutions that maintain Crest Street as a unified community and a thriving example of residential empowerment in the face of seemingly unstoppable urban forces.

Communal Identity in the Face of Crisis

Prior to the redevelopment, Crest Street was a homogeneous, highly cohesive black community. Brought together by familial association, segregation, and institutionalized racism, the neighborhood represented far more than a space of geographically proximate people. As a “family community,” residents drew from Crest Street an identity that extended beyond the self.¹⁴³ This identity was born from the collective struggle and near constant state of deprivation that the community experienced at the hands, or rather the absence, of local and state agencies in the Jim

¹⁴³ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 43.

Crow south. Mildred Booth's daughter, Antoinette Booth, described this legacy in 1978 to *The Carolina Times* explaining that it is "not Social Services" providing for the community but rather "it is the people," a phenomenon that had been occurring since the settlement of the community.¹⁴⁴ Through cultural establishments such as the New Bethel Baptist Church and informal institutions like Annie B. Jones' daycare and elderly rest home, this Southern, working-class, black community was built from a model of communal self-help.

When the community was forced to re-establish itself in the shadow of the expressway, many of the existing social networks and practices were formalized. The leaders of the New Bethel Baptist Church created the Crest Street Community Council to serve as the advocacy arm of the community. The legacy of care for elders was preserved with the creation of retirement homes in the former Crest Street school building. Open spaces in the community that once hosted pick up baseball games and community gardens became basketball courts and a public park. Responding to the inflow of funds from the City of Durham and NCDOT, the community had the means to formalize many of the institutions that were born from practices of neighborly self-help. The expressway conflict called into action many of the social networks that had stabilized and supported the community for decades. As resident Marie Winston described, the conflict unified the community, as "the [residents] prayed and stuck together and they became one family ... it weren't this family or that family, but they became one together, they became a unit."¹⁴⁵

The flood of resources and infrastructure from the redevelopment of Crest Street significantly improved the physical conditions of the community— even leading some residents to later remark that they were grateful for the expressway conflict. Community member, Nathaniel Pratt, experienced this change of outlook when he reflected on the expressway explaining that "I

¹⁴⁴ *The Carolina Times*, "Controversy of East-West Expressway Continues," December 16, 1978.

¹⁴⁵ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 15.

was against it because I knew it would tear up the community, but...now I'm glad of it because then I didn't have no home. I was renting. Now I have my own home."¹⁴⁶ While the threat of the expressway struck fear in the hearts of many Crest Street residents, the eventual outcomes are seen by residents as worthwhile with many finding themselves in improved living conditions and with the opportunity to own a home, a vital component of long-term wealth accumulation.

However, the provision of sound infrastructure and higher quality housing supply has led to some unintended consequences, namely the creation of a neighborhood that appeals to the broader, non-black community, particularly for workers at the nearby medical complexes. While CSCC owns some of the housing stock in the community, it is not enough to stem the flow of incoming residents. As newcomers enter the community, Crest Street's internal dynamics, identity, and politics have changed. Willie Patterson, through his role as president of CSCC, has acutely noticed the community's changing identity.¹⁴⁷ For him the most profound change has been the loss of engagement and connectivity, he explained that "every house that was in the neighborhood had a porch and people loved to just sit on the porch... you could almost hear people, hollering back and forth to each other, communicating with each other. That type of a thing was a good thing. You don't have that anymore."¹⁴⁸ The new arrivals have brought changes in the everyday politics of the neighborhood. No longer is the community exclusively black; Crest Street is now home to a mix of Hispanic, white, and black residents. Not having experienced the conflict over the expressway nor the familial ties that united many historic Crest Street residents, these new inhabitants do not share the same narrative or identity associations with the community. Patterson views the lack of

¹⁴⁶ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 31.

¹⁴⁷ Willie Patterson officially retired from the Crest Street Community Council in November 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

exposure to the hardships rooted in Crest Street as being the primary reason “that togetherness doesn’t appeal to the influx of people today as it did then.”¹⁴⁹

Much of Crest Street’s identity formation and community preservation efforts were born from conflict, first from systemic racism and disenfranchisement for most of the twentieth century, and second during the community’s fight against the expressway. Both experiences posed imminent threats to Crest Street residents’ physical and political autonomy. However, Crest Street is no longer in conflict, raising concerns on how the community will maintain its previous cohesion. For many residents, the answer to this problem falls to Crest Street’s long-standing cultural epicenter: the New Bethel Baptist Church. Community member Anita Yarborough reflected on preserving the community, saying “as I look back, one of the best things is that [Crest Street] is still centered and rooted by New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. I still feel like it has always been- from slavery until now. The church should always be our source and our strength.”¹⁵⁰ To this day, the 139-year-old church is the bedrock of the community. Offering a tutorial program for college preparedness, a community fund for residents in need, a community watch program for neighborhood safety, and a yearly neighborhood clean-up day, the church and its members continue to have an active and committed stake in Crest Street. Notwithstanding uncertain outcomes, church leaders and members are continuing the legacy of community engagement and preservation.

The Legacy of Crest Street

Although the uproar that the expressway created during its twenty-five years of construction has faded and the Crest Street community is no longer in the headlines, Crest Street remains a thriving example of residential empowerment and a model for both community organizing and community-driven development. Its quiet success speaks volumes about the vision of its leaders.

¹⁴⁹ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Center for Documentary Studies, *Crest Street Community Stories*, 60.

Throughout Willie Patterson’s tenure as president of CSCC, leaders from black communities throughout Durham and the greater Triangle area have sought his advice on issues of displacement in their communities. As recently as February of 2018, neighborhood leaders in Durham have contacted Patterson for advice on how to approach the most pressing issue currently facing minority neighborhoods: the lack of affordable housing. As Durham has become an increasingly popular location for affluent residents, housing prices have risen, sometimes leading to the displacement of long-term residents. For many working-class black communities, the rise of gentrification in Durham spells displacement—a fate not so dissimilar from that almost experienced by Crest Street. Recently, Patterson has been advising an aging, working-class black community near Grant Street in South Durham that has been facing increasing property taxes and pressures from developers as downtown Durham expands further southward. Patterson has been advising the community “to get themselves organized” as “they’re the ones that are going to be affected” by the new developments and rising property taxes.¹⁵¹ Using both his personal experiences and relationships from serving as an advocate for the Crest Street community, Patterson provides critical expertise for black communities experiencing damaging urban forces. Patterson views “[Crest Street] as an example” for other black communities in Durham to organize and advocate for their needs and rights.¹⁵²

In spite of the uncertainty and change occurring in Crest Street, Willie Patterson remains optimistic about the neighborhood’s ability to remain interconnected. Although Patterson stepped down from his role as president last fall, he remains involved with the council and in the community, explaining that “we [the older generation of leaders] are still here and our footprints are being made.”¹⁵³ Through Crest Street’s new-found role as an organizing model for other communities in Durham, its legacy of triumph and unity still holds strong, especially for those who

¹⁵¹ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

were there to witness it. For individuals like Willie Patterson, living and fighting for Crest Street was a defining feature of their lives, with Patterson reflecting, “I wouldn't have traded my life experience coming up in this neighborhood and with the people that surrounded me in this neighborhood. I wouldn't exchange it for nothing in the world.”¹⁵⁴

Despite the lack of media attention and academic recognition, Crest Street still holds a significant place in Durham as a community that, against all odds, would not be stopped nor intimidated from advocating for its needs and people. Its legacy still bears witness to the power of community and collective action, serving as a model of community resilience and perseverance that still holds great relevance for communities in Durham to this day.

¹⁵⁴ Willie Patterson, Personal Interview, February 23, 2018.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1 – Aerial photograph of the Hickstown community from the 1950s.

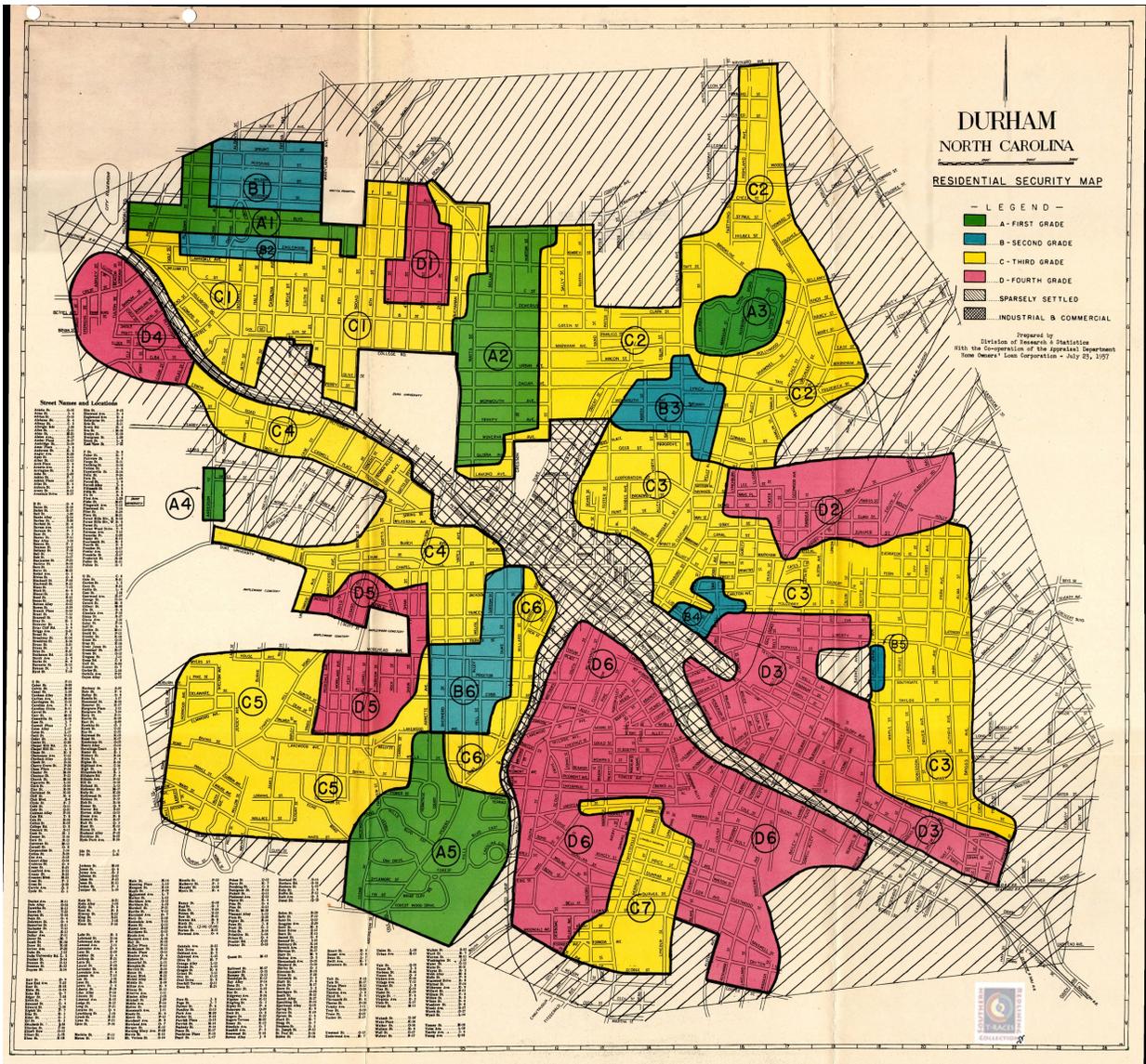


Figure 2 – A Residential Security Map on Durham, North Carolina created by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation dated July 23, 1937. The Hickstovn community can be seen in the top right corner marked in red as D4.



Figure 3 – Oscar Nunn’s pool hall and convenience store on the corner of Crest and Fulton streets, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 4 – 106 Neal Street, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 5 – Intersection of Neal Street and Shirley Street, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 6 – 2401 W. Pettigrew Street, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 7 – 201 Beacon Street, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 8 – 306 Fulton Street, Hickstown, 1979.



Figure 9 – 2402 Crest Street, Hickstown, 1979.

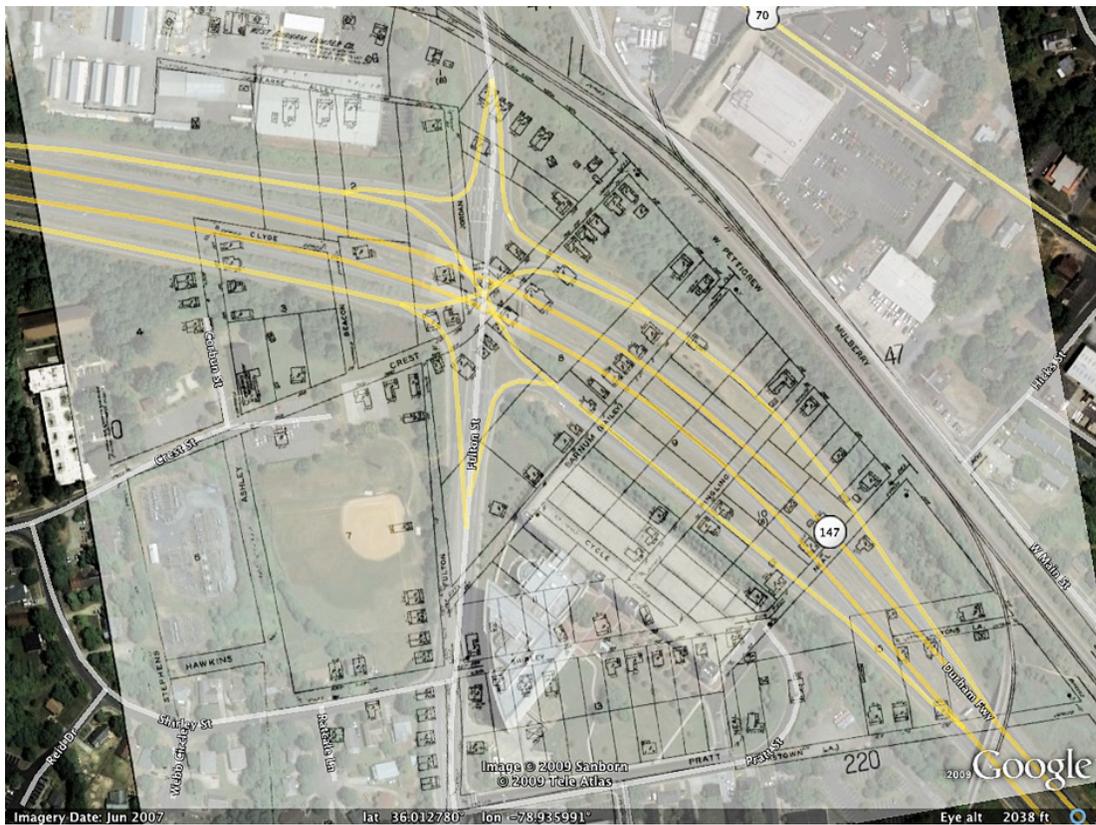


Figure 10 – Satellite imagery from Google Maps overlaid with a map of Hickstown from 1937.

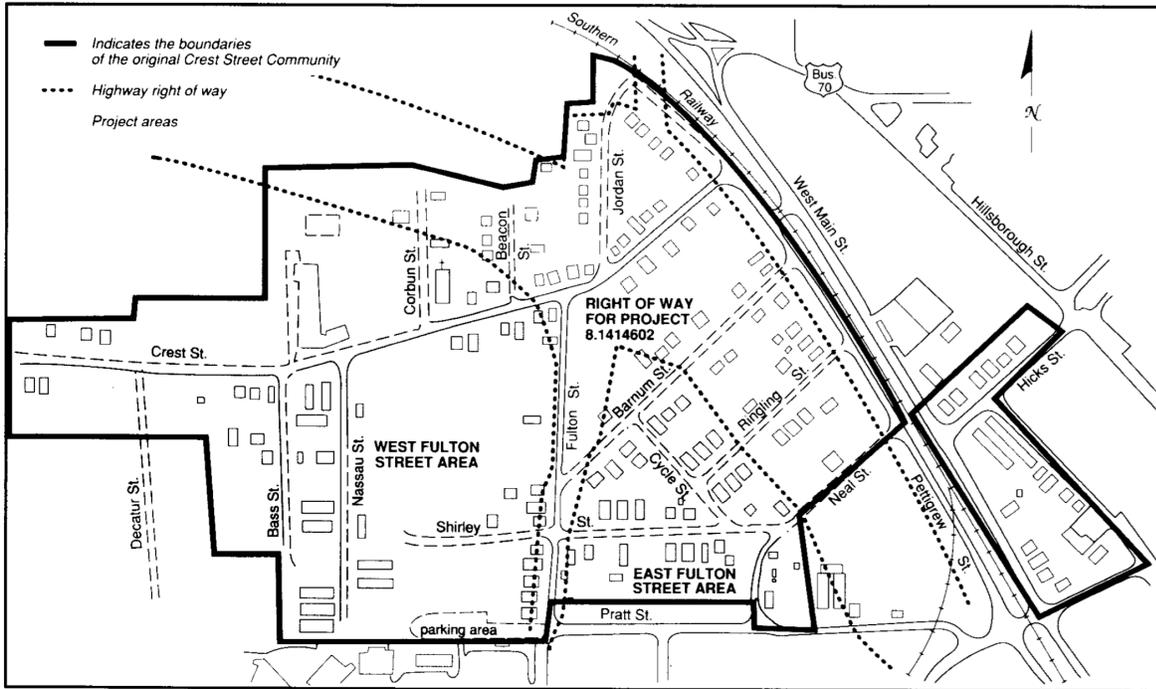


Figure 11 – Map of the original Crest Street/Hicktown community and the project areas defined by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

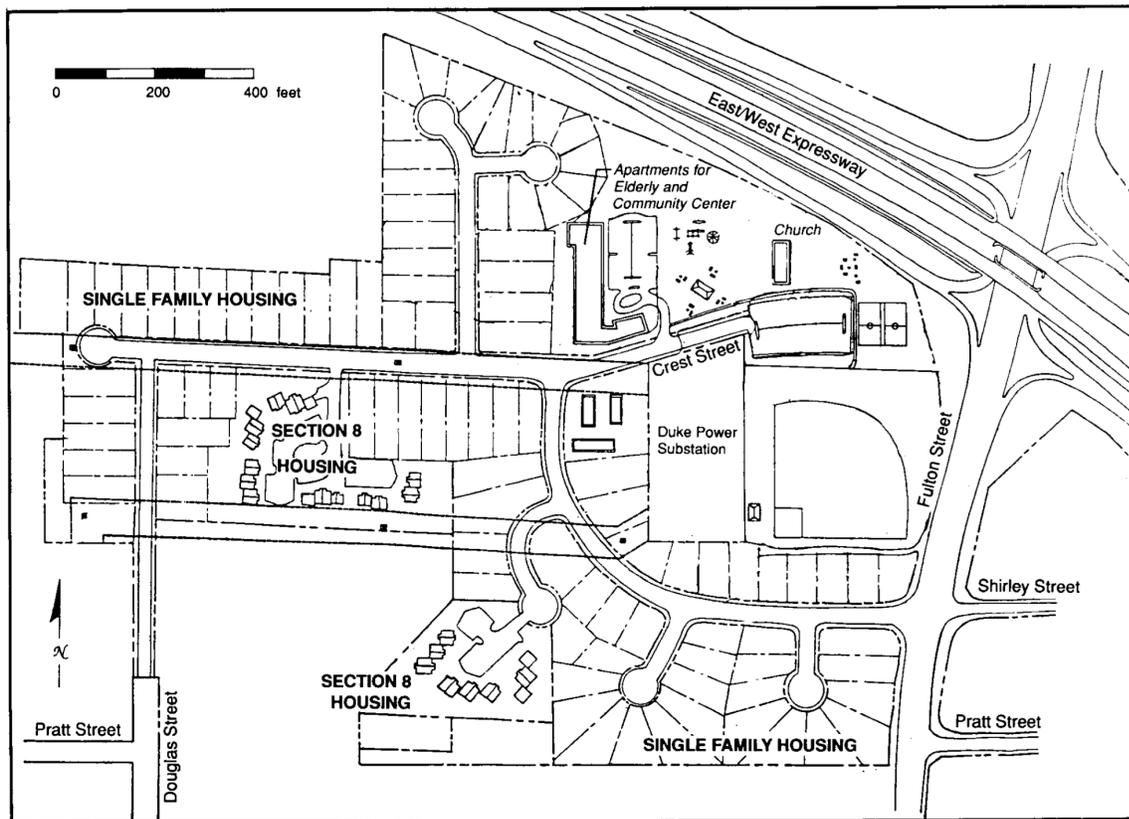


Figure 12 – North Carolina Department of Transportation site plan for the new Crest Street community.

I - M - P - O - R - T - A - N - T

IF YOU SEE ANYONE THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW

GOING AROUND THE COMMUNITY ASKING QUESTIONS,

DO NOT TALK WITH THEM AND TELL WILLIE

PATTERSON OR MILDRED BOOTH ABOUT IT.

I M P O R T A N T

Figure 13 – Flyer distributed to Crest Street community members in a Crest Street newsletter from 1979.

CREST STREET NEWSLETTER

TRIP TO WASHINGTON:

Betty Johnson, Tony Booth, Robert Pratt, Rev. Reid, Mike Calhoun and Alice Ratliff went to Washington on December 5 to meet with officials of the U.S. Dept. of Transportation to discuss the action they are taking on the Administrative Complaint which we filed with the Office of Civil Rights. We feel assured by this meeting that our rights and our Community will be protected by the Office of Civil Rights. We feel assured by this meeting that our rights and our Community will be protected by the Office of Civil Rights. The main advice they gave at this time was not to move or sell any property. If you have other questions about the meeting, get in touch with any of us who went.

TRIP TO GREENSBORO:

Mildred Booth and Alice Ratliff went to Greensboro on December 14 to meet with officials of the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development area office to discuss getting Community Development funds for Crest Street. During this meeting we gave them lots of information about Crest Street and after hearing this information, they indicated to us that Crest Street will be eligible to get some CD money now and more once the Expressway issue is decided. We will have more definite information on this soon. If you have questions in the meantime, get in touch with either of us.

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS:

Many articles have been written about Crest Street and the Expressway recently. Much of what is being written is wrong, so please don't be worried about what you read. All indications at this point are that everything is going very well for us. If you are disturbed by what you read, contact Alice or Mike and they'll try to get the correct information to you.

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Figure 14 – A portion of a newsletter distributed to the community in the winter of 1979.

WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED (FROM CREST STREET ST. COMMUNITY)

We shall not, we shall not be moved
We shall not, we shall not be moved
(refrain)
Just like a tree, standin' by the water
We shall not be moved

1. We'll fight that old expressway
(we shall not be moved)
We'll fight that old expressway
(we shall not be moved)

(Refrain)

2. We'll fight the City Council

(Refrain)

3. We're fighting for our neighborhood
4. We're fighting for our Church
5. We're fighting for our Playground
6. We're fighting for our Baseball Field
7. We're fighting for our Basketball Court
8. We'll fighting for Uncle Bill's Place
9. We'll fighting for better houses
10. We'll fighting for pave streets
11. We're fighting for our children
12. We're fighting for our future
13. We're fighting for our freedom

WE DON'T WANT A HIGHWAY

(Sing to the tune of Swing Low, Sweet Chariot)

Written and composed by the Children of Crest Street

Chorus: We don't want a highway
We want a place to stay
We don't want a highway
We want some place to play

1st Verse:

I looked out my window
and what did I see
A highway coming my way
I said to myself, go back highway
We want to keep our homes

2nd Verse:

We all got together
and said to each other
We don't want a highway
So we're gonna fight till this
thing is over
We don't want a highway

Figure 15 – Lyrics to the protest songs “We Shall Not Be Moved (From the Crest Street Community)” and “We Don’t Want a Highway,” 1979.



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

FEB 20 1980

Mr. Thomas W. Bradshaw, Jr.
Secretary of Transportation
State of North Carolina
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611

Dear Mr. Bradshaw:

I am writing concerning our investigation of the Crest Street Community's complaint about the location of the proposed East-West Expressway in Durham as presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This complaint was filed with us pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits discrimination based on race, color or national origin in Federally-assisted programs.

The additional information you submitted in your letter of December 5, 1979 responding to my previous letter has been reviewed.

I understand that you have not made a final decision with regard to the preferred alternative location of the proposed highway. Nevertheless, I believe it important to inform you of our preliminary judgments concerning the alignment proposed in the Draft EIS and challenged by the Title VI complaint, so that you may take them into account in your future planning.

On the basis of all of the information that has been furnished to us, our preliminary conclusions are as follows:

- (1) The proposed alignment which shows an interchange displacing virtually the entire Black community along Crest Street would entail extremely adverse and disproportionate impacts on Blacks as compared with Whites in the surrounding area in terms of displacement, relocation, and general community disruption.
- (2) The identification and discussion of alternatives in your submitted materials, principally the Draft EIS,

- 2 -
appear inadequate as justification for such extreme, adverse racial impacts in light of transportation requirements.

- (3) We are advised by John Hassell that there is at least one apparently reasonable and prudent alternative not explored in any of the present alternative analyses that would involve substantially less adverse impact on the Crest Street community and still respond to your transportation requirements.

In view of the above preliminary judgments, we find reasonable cause to believe that the construction of the Expressway along the alignment proposed in the Draft EIS would constitute a prima facie violation of Title VI and, in particular, Section 21.5(b)(3) of our Departmental Title VI regulation which provides:

"In determining the site or location of facilities, a recipient or applicant may not make selections with the purpose or effect of excluding persons from, denying them the benefits of, or subjecting them to discrimination under any program to which this regulation applies, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin; or with the purpose or effect of defeating or substantially impairing the accomplishment of the objectives of the Act or this part." -49 CFR 21

John and I will be happy to discuss this matter with you.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Ellen Feingold
Director of Civil Rights

cc: Michael Calhoun, Esq.



Figure 16 – Letter from the U.S. Department of Transportation Director of Civil Rights Ellen Feingold to North Carolina Secretary of Transportation Tom Bradshaw regarding the Title VI Administrative Complaint filed by the Crest Street community, February 20, 1980.



Figure 17 – The redeveloped Crest Street community at the intersection of Crest Street and Shirley Street, 2009.



Figure 18 – The New Bethel Baptist Church after the redevelopment of the community, 2009.



Figure 19 – The L. W. Reid and New Bethel Retirement Apartments, 2009.