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Conserving the Urban Environment: Hough Residents, Riots, and Rehabilitation, 1960-1980. ¹

Abstract

By

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On July 18th, 1966 the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland erupted in fire and protest. Explaining this episode, historians have focused on the socioeconomic and racial causes and consequences of urban riots. Few consider how minority and working class inner-city residents were environmental actors. By recognizing that the built environment is founded on ecological principles and natural materials, subjects like housing activism can be seen as acts of conservation. Before the Hough Riots, residents rated conserving and maintaining the built environment in their neighborhood as primary concerns. Responding to community needs in the aftermath of the riots, organizers like DeForest Brown and Christine Randles formed the Hough Area Development Corporation (HADC) to build, rehabilitate, and maintain quality housing in their neighborhood. Hough residents lacked power and support and Hough lost housing and population in the following decades, but residents there tried to ameliorate environmental inequalities to build a more lasting city.

¹ A debate exists over whether to call the events of the 1960s riots or rebellions. I chose not to wade into that debate here and instead simply use Hough Riots as it is more common.
“The city’s decline was gradual… Some scholars maintain that it is irrelevant to identify the point of no return, since the influential and the well to do had abandoned the city by then, and those remaining had neither the power, the knowledge, nor the means to alter the course of events. Instead, they prefer to trace the decisive events that led to the political and social jettison of the city. Those events most commonly singled out are the Urban Birth Riots, the Urban Water Riots, and the Spring Water Scandals.”


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2 “Hough Spending, Programs Fail to Solve the Area’s Postriot Problems,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer (CPD)*, Dec. 17, 1972.

Landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn ended her compelling work on the natural foundations of urban landscapes with a warning: Builders, policy makers, and urban dwellers, ignore how the air, earth, water, and life interact in urban ecosystems at their own peril. A failure to recognize the proliferation of nature in the city could mask dangerous environmental inequalities. Spirn imagined that urban ecological inequality would lead to unrest and “Urban Water Riots.” Unlike Spirn, we do not have to imagine riots occurring over environmental issues in the future, because some have already happened. Urban riots have occurred periodically throughout the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries and have often been diagnosed as the explosion of resentment over socioeconomic or racial tension. As recently as the summer of 2014, the spectacular violence in Ferguson, Missouri demonstrated to the world that urban inequality and its resulting tensions are not simply problems of the past. Spatial and environmental inequality are long-standing historical issues which persist in the present. During the civil rights era, riots broke out in cities across the country, including one in Hough, a predominately black low-income neighborhood in Cleveland. Yet, while historians often examine socioeconomic and racial strife, before and after the riots the residents of Hough protested against and organized to resolve environmental inequalities.

On July 18th, 1966 the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland erupted in fire and protest in one of the most infamous rebellions of the 1960s. Urban riots flared up across the nation in the late 1960s in response to long-term unrest over inequality, and also immediate triggers like the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. In Hough, a dispute broke out at the Seventy-Niner’s Café over a glass of water before spilling into the streets. This spark ignited the tensions Hough residents had built up as they dealt with
socioeconomic, racial, and environmental inequalities in their segregated neighborhood. Hough burned for six nights as gunfire was exchanged between discontented residents, police, and national guardsmen. Each evening, firefight erupted throughout the neighborhood between policemen and rioters. Looting was rampant and dozens of businesses and abandoned buildings were burned. At its end, hundreds were arrested, dozens were injured, and four bystanders were killed. In the midst of the riots, different explanations were offered for the reasons behind the violence. One group of local black pastors pointed to inadequate housing and housing codes and a lack of playground areas. Residents interviewed in newspapers during the riots explained that they were angry with a lack of jobs, poor police relations, and racial discrimination, but also with environmental conditions like deteriorated housing, poor garbage collection, and rat infestations. Environmental inequality was one of the long-term causes that triggered urban unrest. As the city burned, Hough residents’ environmental concerns were brought to light.4

Historians have focused on the social, economic, and political causes and effects of 1960s race riots, but before and after the Hough riots, residents and community leaders worked tirelessly to conserve their environment. Before the riots, citizens denounced the quality of their urban community. As they moved into Hough in the 1950s and 1960s, black residents inherited a neighborhood abandoned by whites who feared that integration and would not improve their deteriorating neighborhood. Some activists had

already started to organize for change. Through organizations like Citizens for Better Housing and Housing Our People Economically (HOPE Inc.), Hough residents worked to conserve housing and the vitality of their neighborhood. Reverend Albert A Koklowsky proposed during the riots that unemployed youth be put to work to maintain properties and cleanup the neighborhood in order to remove “the breeding grounds for rats and vermin.” In early 1966, concerns over deteriorated housing in the neighborhood appeared throughout a Civil Rights Commission Hearing held in Cleveland. Later that same year, in the midst of the riots, one resident exclaimed that “Negroes live in rat-infested homes, they swat rats and roaches and hunger.” His concerns sound ecological. While the media discussed themes like jobs, police conduct, and race relations, some residents declared frustrations with inadequate shelter, hunger, and relationships with pests. In the aftermath of unrest, Hough residents responded to complaints like this and helped organize the Hough Area Development Corporation (HADC) to combat problems that they saw plaguing their neighborhood. Community activists like DeForest Brown and Christine Randles formed Homes for Hough (HFH) and the Handyman’s Maintenance Service, Inc. (HMS) to build, rehabilitate, and maintain housing in Hough. They saw the unrest in Hough in part as a response to environmental inequality. People wanted jobs, good policing, and political representation, but they also just wanted a healthy neighborhood to live in. Responding to residents’ troubles, these programs sought to conserve the material environment of Hough. While few if any Hough activists would have considered themselves environmentalists at the time, their actions to maintain their neighborhood should be considered acts of conservation. A more lasting Hough could have led to less habitat destruction in the suburbs, less reliance on cars, fewer natural materials used for
new housing, and more equally distributed environmental resources. In effect, conserving
Hough and other inner-city neighborhoods would have benefited society as a whole.5

Hough residents then and since have been blamed for the physical destruction of
their neighborhood, but their efforts to conserve Hough have largely gone unnoticed.
Hough residents faced overwhelming odds. Historians have shown that in Hough and
other riot-torn neighborhoods, deterioration predated urban unrest. Amanda Seligman
argues that before whites took flight from Chicago’s West Side, they first tried and failed
“to improve the area’s physical environment.” Whites protested for the enforcement of
housing codes, for urban renewal money, and for infrastructural investments. Their
concerns echo those of the Hough residents before and after the riots. Unhampered by
racial inequality, even these white Chicagoans did not have the political or economic
clout to stem the decline of their housing. In Hough, when white neighbors moved out in
the 1950s and 1960s, black migrants inherited deteriorated neighborhoods. In the hot
summers of the Civil Rights Era, some inhabitants protested and rioted to have their
environmental concerns heard. After the riots, Hough organizers used community
participation to improve their surroundings despite continued economic and political
struggles. Despite their continual efforts over the last half century, Hough has declined in
population and lost housing stock. Today, Hough residents like LaJean Ray claim that
there are “a lot of stereotypical attitudes about Hough, dating to the riots.” Few recognize

5 For social, economic, and political analyses of 1960s riots see, W. Dennis Keating, The Suburban Racial
Dilemma: Housing and Neighborhoods (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Thomas Sugrue,
The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1996); Nishani Frazier, “A McDonald’s That Reflects the Soul of a People: Hough Area
Development Corporation and Community Development in Cleveland,” in The Business of Black Power
eds. Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012). For apocalyptic
visions of riots in environmental writing see, Anne Whiston Spirn, The Granite Garden, 265. “Hough Area
that Hough residents acquired a community in decline and tried to improve it before and after the riots. Perhaps there were too many social, economic, and political obstacles to conserve Hough, but had residents there had access to more resources, one could certainly imagine a more populous and vibrant community in Hough today. In popular explanations of urban decline, black and working class actors have often been ignored, or worse, blamed for the city’s failure.6

Social historians have shown that urban deindustrialization and disinvestment predate the race riots of the 1960s, but their explanations of this urban crisis often invoke empathy for the disadvantaged people who remained in the inner city without acknowledging that American society as a whole has been harmed by our inability to conserve urban environments. Thomas Sugrue, in his seminal work *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, urges his readers to lament what has become of the “bleak landscapes and unremitting poverty of Detroit.” In his history he argues that racial segregation, discrimination, and urban deindustrialization, and not urban unrest are responsible for the city’s decline. Detroit, and the people who live there, are to be pitied for their plight. In her work, Seligman also complicates the narrative of white flight, arguing instead that whites first tried and failed to conserve the city before their exodus to the suburbs. Black Chicagoans inherited an environment that whites had failed to preserve. Again, the tragedy here is that whites have failed, fled, and the disadvantaged residents of the inner city are to be pitied. Despite this great injustice, empathy does not need to be invoked to

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lament the physical deterioration of the inner city. In a society that still struggles with racism, empathy for minority urbanites can be hard to come by. Instead, the story of Hough shows how the failed preservation of a neighborhood affects all Americans in this increasingly urban society. Hough lost thousands of housing units to decay. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of wood, metal, and glass went up in flames or was piled into landfills. More housing had to be built in suburbs to accommodate the exodus from Hough. The subsequent expansion of the suburbs has destroyed habitats, expanded resource use, and locked many into a car-dependent infrastructure. Adam Rome detailed the negative effects of suburbanization on urban ecosystems in his work *Bulldozer in the Countryside*. With fewer jobs and houses in a thinned out Hough, the neighborhood today is less walkable and more reliant on cars. Had the residents of Hough succeeded in conserving their neighborhood, Cleveland would be a denser, more sustainable city.

Americans in the mid-twentieth century abandoned their cities to urban crises and brought on ecological crises. The failure to conserve Hough contributed to the wasteful suburbanized structure of modern Cleveland. The decline of Hough and America’s inner cities did not simply harm the people who lived there; it harmed the whole society and future generations.7

Environmental historians have only begun to study minority and working class urbanites, but their investigations reveal that, as in Hough, a person’s class and race frequently controls the quality of their environment. Historians have examined the

relationship between the natural world and the city, but often their primary actors are engineers and city planners, or those individuals with the power and agency to make noticeable physical changes. Minority residents are depicted carving out spaces in areas controlled by metropolitan authorities. The racially and economically marginalized peoples in historians’ narratives are shown limited by segregation and a lack of political power. Environmental historians demonstrate that some of the difficulty of studying the relationship between minority and working class people and their environments lies in the limited power these groups have over their settings and the limited access they have had to anything considered "natural.” Despite this lack of agency, some environmental historians reveal that inner-city actors have sought to change their surroundings. Authors like Matthew Gandy have shown that urban activists protested overcrowding, inadequate garbage collection, and high infant mortality. These are problems associated with human living conditions, waste, and health. De facto and de jure segregation in northern cities barred minority groups from equal participation in the ostensibly “natural” world.

Exemplary work, like Matthew Klingle’s *Emerald City*, brings together a variety of actors to show the complexity of urban ecosystems. By consulting engineers, Indians, salmon, sociologists, and shack inhabitants, Klingle captures a dialectic of oppression and resistance. This dialectic reveals who had power over the environment and, alternatively, the different visions each group had for how to use their urban ecosystem. From these historians, one can see that even segregated in the city, minority and working class groups tried to shape their environments to suit their needs. Hough residents tried to conserve their neighborhood through protests and activism, but ultimately their efforts to
maintain housing were thwarted by a lack of political and economic capital and the segregated housing practices of the mid-century.\(^8\)

It can be difficult to see how inner-city city landscapes might be natural, but Martin Melosi and Andrew Hurley provide models for how to begin. In his work, Melosi argues, with some caveats, that “cities are part of the environment – part of the ecosystem.” Cities are a complex part of the ecosystem that are influenced by social, economic, and political structures. Nevertheless they are affected by natural forces such as “weather conditions, geological changes,” and “competing flora and fauna.” Hough residents note the impacts of snow, pests, and cold on the quality of their housing. Humans create cities in part due to biological reasons like “hunger, mobility,” and the “need for shelter.” The “built environment,” a most unnatural sounding phrase, is built of earthly materials to satisfy biological needs for shelter. While housing is often considered a commodity, it is first and foremost a shelter from natural elements. Preservation of the built environment then, Andrew Hurley argues, is “too infrequently advertised as a recycling program, but that is precisely what it is.” For housing decays naturally unless maintained. Like natural preservation, preservation of the built environment is an attempt at conserving materials and the quality of homes. Hough residents and activists built and

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rehabilitated housing to satisfying human needs for shelter and to make Hough an enduring neighborhood.9

As Hough transitioned from predominately white to predominantly black in the 1950s, white abandonment reflected a neighborhood in need of maintenance. Much like the West side of Chicago in Seligman’s work, Hough began to transition from a predominantly middle class white neighborhood to a middle and working class black neighborhood in the 1950s. From the early- to mid-twentieth century, several million blacks moved from the rural South to urban destinations in the Northern and Western United States. The initial increase of black population in Cleveland during the Great Migration occurred largely in the Central-Woodland area directly east of downtown. Hough is located farther east of Cleveland’s downtown, between East 55th and East 105th streets and Superior and Euclid Avenues.* As of 1950, Hough’s 65,615 residents were 95 percent white. In that decade, black residents that had been pushed out of the inner-city by overcrowding and slum clearance found landlords in Hough willing to rent to them, although generally at higher rates than whites. As Historians have noted, neighborhood transition from white to black was often a violent and exploitative process during which white mobs and unsavory realtors each worked to maintain segregation. Realtors and insurance companies employed racially coded maps to deny blacks equal access to housing and insurance. Hough was quickly resegregated after it began to transition racially in 1950. In a mere five years, Hough grew into a neighborhood of 82,443 people,

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and almost 60 percent of them were black. This marked a peak for Hough, which has declined in population in every census since. Hough grew to this peak despite inadequate housing. Restricted in their choice of neighborhood by segregation, black residents’ housing needs were met by subdividing homes into multi-family units and by renting homes that did not meet housing standards. Overcrowding and inferior housing were frequent complaints in the decades that followed. Concurrently, first whites and then middle class blacks began to leave the city in response to deindustrialization and suburbanization. As a result of this post-industrial exodus of jobs and deflated demand for housing, property values collapsed. Landlords responded by cutting back on upkeep. The city responded in part by cutting back on services like trash removal, demolishing abandoned structures, and neglecting the enforcement of housing codes. Low income and minority residents were restricted by segregation and a lack of capital and often had little choice but to remain in Hough or move to similar neighborhoods like Glenville, and eventually East Cleveland, which faced similar issues. Facing these serious economic issues, many abandoned Hough or sought to demolish its built environment. Yet some residents attempted to ameliorate their housing conditions and conserve their community.10

As they inherited a deteriorated neighborhood, several neighborhood groups worked to clean streets and rehabilitate homes. Residents of Hough were concerned about environmental quality before the shock of the riots called more to action. Citizens for

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10 For the racial polarization of Cleveland in the twentieth century see, W. Dennis Keating, The Suburban Racial Dilemma, 53-66. On racial transition and responses to it in Hough, specifically claims of reduced city services, see, Kerr, Derelict Paradise, 148-159. For blockbusting and urban transition see Sugrue, The Urban Crises; Seligmann, Block by Block; and Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). * See the Historical Map of Cleveland from the CPD which precedes the text.
Better Housing, a housing advocacy group, sponsored an event called Operation New Look Day. Residents of Hough kept twenty-five Cleveland city trucks busy as they cleaned trash from yards and streets. The Cleveland Press ran photos of the event that show young children sweeping up the sidewalk and claim that as many as four thousand families participated. In this case, residents worked with local city chairman to affect their environment. Others vented their frustration over poor city services. In 1964, in response to cutbacks in garbage removal services, a group called Garbage Removal or Income Now picketed and demonstrated on the steps of City Hall. In the common vernacular of the day, these groups saw garbage as a problem contributing to the “blight” of their community and organized to protest how the issue was handled at the local government level. Religious groups worked with the people of Hough to rehab housing. Albert Koklowsky, worked with Our Lady of Fatima to rehabilitate housing and advocated for improved garbage collection, the creation of low-cost housing, a neighborhood jobs plan, and cleanup projects. Reverend Koklowsky also worked with Housing Our People Economically, Inc. (HOPE, Inc.), a non-profit organization started in 1965 to provide low-cost housing in Hough. By May, 1966, the chairman of HOPE could claim that his group controlled one hundred vacant buildings and had rehabilitated three. He concluded, however, that one still saw “progressive blight” and “more and more houses become vacant and vandalized.” Vacant houses, a symbol of urban decline, were a primary target of arson during the riots. The loss of homes to deterioration and vacancy only exacerbated the issue of overcrowding. Despite the effort of these organizations, the built environment of Hough was deteriorating in the mid-60s.11

In April of 1966, residents of Hough attested before the United States Commission on Civil Rights that they did not feel that American society was meeting their housing needs. Before the riots would break out later that summer, it was clear that Hough residents resented and fought back against environmental inequality in their neighborhood. Their testimony resonates with the findings of historian Dawn Biehler. In her work on *Pests in the City*, Biehler argues that “poor African-Americans in many cities were vulnerable” to pests, pesticides, and environmental inequalities manifested in their housing. Recognizing that minorities had limited options in a segregated housing market, landlords effectively had “license to neglect their buildings.” While they recognized their landlord’s neglect, residents of these segregated neighborhoods experienced their environmental problems on both a public and personal level. Despite the widespread prevalence of pests in their community, they felt the stigma of their association with rats and bedbugs. In their testimony, Hough residents frequently recounted their numerous environmental woes and pointed to their difficulties in solving the issues on their own or with their landlords. Mrs. Hattie Mae Dugan of 93rd Street testified that she had a broken bathtub, toilet, and sink, boarded up windows, and no hot water. It took her landlord two months to unplug the toilet. Mrs. Dugan helped where she could, she even painted the apartment herself, but she simply didn’t have the funds to solve every issue as it arose. Her apartment wasn’t meeting the basic needs of a shelter in a seasonally cold and snowy climate like Cleveland’s. She stated that “the kids they play with rats like a child would play with a dog.” As Biehler argues in her work, Mrs. Dugan

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felt that her rat problem was personal, but she also saw the pervasiveness of pests as a public issue. Like other tenants in the area, Mrs. Dugan was unsure who the absentee owner of her apartment was or how she could contact them. She contacted the Board of Health, but received no inspection. Mrs. Dugan was arrested in the summer of 1965 for placing rats on the steps of City Hall in protest. She had tried to gain a seat on a local participation committee, and when community representation was cut back she used protest to let her local government know about her concerns over environmental inequality. Other residents shared similar stories. Mrs. Ethel Plummer testified that her building had no heat and that the “window frames are rotten and the wind comes in.” Her son Sam complained that the rats were so numerous, “you can’t count them all.” Her landlord arranged for an exterminator to eliminate the mice and roaches she reported, but she was unable to let the exterminator in because she was at work. While some residents worked with their landlords, others spoke out against them. Mrs. Carnella Turner and Mr. James Russell of Wade Park said that they had been evicted from a building for protesting about stopped up bathtubs and sinks, loose plaster, shorted electrical wiring, rats, roaches, wild cats, inadequate plumbing and plugged up garbage chutes. They claimed that, “in some apartments when it rained people had to get out their cooking utensils and catch the water that leaked down.” In this testimony before the riots, Hough residents made it clear that they were upset about the environmental inequalities in their daily lives. They made ends meet, they used protest when they could, and they engaged in the Federal legal process, but each witness struggled with their lack of power over their environment. Segregation, absentee landlords, a lack of capital, and a lack of political power kept these residents from affecting much environmental change in Hough.

12 Dawn Day Biehler, *Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press,
Witnesses and experts pointed to segregation and overcrowding as issues that limited the quality and availability of housing that could be sold or rented to blacks. One of the experts in the hearing, urban planner Mr. Lyle Schaller, noted that “almost all of the housing available to Negroes in Cleveland has been second-hand housing.” Like Seligmann argues, the housing in segregated neighborhoods like Hough was already deteriorating or deteriorated by the time black Clevelanders began to move in. In this second-hand housing, Hough neighborhood residents had to deal with environmental inequalities. They lived in deteriorating housing subject to the wind, rain, and cold and often in the presence of animals known to be disease vectors. Many left for the newly resegregating neighborhoods of Glenville and East Cleveland, where they faced a multitude of similar problems. As blacks moved into these communities, whites moved away from deteriorating neighborhoods and further out into attractive and subsidized new housing in the suburbs. As Biehler argues in her work, pests like rats were simply one facet of the larger issue of environmental inequality. As she says, “residents who stewarded garbage and tidied their homes and yards remained confined to their segregated neighborhoods.” Yet many others agreed with local Hough resident and salesman Mr. Morris Thorington when he said “if you put up decent homes [in Hough] for them today, tomorrow they will be back.” Residents were concerned with segregation and a wealth of socioeconomic and racial injustices, but in addition they wanted homes with working sinks and no rats. Like many housing activists to follow, Thorington argued that housing quality was a primary concern of Hough residents. He claimed that, despite
problems like segregation, discrimination, and police relations, Hough residents would attempt to maintain their community if they simply had decent living conditions.13

Riots rocked Hough in July of 1966, but in their midst and afterwards community members demonstrated their resolve and rallied to clean up and conserve their neighborhood. Just as perceived environmental quality proved to be a primary concern among residents and activists before the riots, in their aftermath organizers were quick to institute cleanup measures to target the refuse that had accumulated. Prior to the riots in the spring of 1966, the Council on Economic Opportunity in Greater Cleveland administered the federally financed “Project 1060,” named for the amount of people it intended to employ in projects designed to clean up the city. By late July the program had overshot its employment goal. While this reflected high unemployment in the city, perhaps some of the over four thousand applicants, and eventually over two thousand workers, were not motivated simply by a desire for employment but because they sought to improve their neighborhoods. Just days after the riots ended Mayor Ralph Locker launched a cleanup drive that employed one hundred Youth Corps members and one hundred welfare recipients to gather debris in Hough. Responding to the riots, in August Project 1060 deployed in Hough to clean debris. Pictures taken days after the riots ended in late July show workers handing out tools and gathering debris into large piles for removal. While federal money and city agencies backed these cleanup programs, it was men and women from Hough, Glenville, Kinsman, and Central that enthusiastically cleaned up backyards, exterminated rats, and spread information for the Anti-Tuberculosis League. Jack Appling of the Hough cleanup crew said to one reporter, “Tell

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13 Commission on Civil Rights, 100. For black migration within Cleveland’s east side neighborhoods see, Keating, The Suburban Racial Dilemma. Biehler, Pests in the City, 175.
‘em we’ll work through the winter, man.” Volunteer based agencies like Citizens for Better Housing and HOPE Inc., sought to alleviate some of the same problems, but when money was available, working class urbanites jumped at the chance to improve their surroundings while being gainfully employed simultaneously.14

Community leaders like DeForest Brown and Christine Randles took the riots as inspiration to intensify their efforts for social and environmental change. These leaders took advantage of changing urban planning policy to increase community participation in planning decisions. After the failures and criticism of the centrally planned urban renewal policies of the 1950s, the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s yielded to widespread demands for community participation. Organizers like Brown and Randles spearheaded that participation in Hough. Early in his life, DeForest Brown had been a hospital maintenance worker. Through his actions as a Baptist Reverend, a social worker, and a civil rights activist, Brown became a respected leader in Cleveland’s black community. Brown lived and worked in Hough. He was the first executive director of the Hough Area Development Corporation, the first president of the Association of Community Development Corporations, a board member with Housing Our People Economically, and he served on several Economic Development councils. Brown also served for a brief time as the director of Cleveland’s politically maligned Model Cities Program. With this impressive body of work, Brown was an influential political figure during and after the Civil Rights era. Still, he had his detractors. Brown faced attacks in the media from The Plain Dealer and criticism from within the community. Despite his respectable work, Brown was often criticized for having relationships with radical organizations and

businesses in this contentious era. Negative popular and media perceptions of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements left Brown and other leaders to continuously defend against charges of corruption and violence. Within black activist movements there was a great deal of contention over how to go about instituting change, and so Brown faced difficulty building coalitions within the black community as well. However, in many ways he was a model community leader. He earned the support of the business community as the Cleveland Businessmen’s Alliance and Greater Cleveland Growth association offered him commendations. At the same time, he was seen as a social progressive by his neighbors. Cleveland’s African-American newspaper the Call and Post was sometimes critical of Brown and other black leaders, but frequently offered more sympathetic analyses. Contributors to the opinion section of the Call and Post were quick to defend Brown each time criticism of him or his organizations appeared in the press. Brown was an impressive and accomplished figure who directed much of his influence as a leader of community participation toward Hough’s housing problem.15

Christine Randles was an equally impressive figure. She had been a nurse for fifteen years before beginning her second career as a housing activist. In 1964 she helped organize the Bell Center of Social Services for Children and became the president of Citizens for Better Housing; both groups worked toward social and environmental reform. After being selected to direct Homes for Hough, Randles became a well-known housing advocate in the neighborhood. She went on to direct Housing Services, which

was another HADC subsidiary, and Community Circle Inc. The latter was a housing-oriented development program which worked with University Circle Inc. to establish a relationship between Hough and the adjacent, and affluent, University Circle neighborhood. The organizations Christine Randles represented were responsible for rehabilitating hundreds of units of housing throughout the 1960s and 1970s. For her efforts Christine Randles was commended numerous times by the city and by Cleveland business and development groups. Her first completed housing project was named Randles Estates in her honor. Randles learned many insights from her work in homebuilding. “Make the places where people will live easy to maintain,” she said. Randles saw that housing deterioration and neighborhood deterioration went hand in hand and she preached a home stewardship ethic that held landlords, residents, and the city accountable for housing quality. She was a believer in homeownership and felt it would stem the tide of deterioration. “If we can stop deterioration… we could say to the wider community that this is a place to reinvest and come back and live.” Randles embodied the idea that housing was not simply a commodity, instead that adequate housing was the foundation of a community and therefore its provision and maintenance was a social good. Randles was echoing the thoughts of contemporary black activists. Historian Rhonda Williams has noted that black public housing activists often organized for the rehabilitation and maintenance of their homes in the face of physical deterioration. Like the men and women in Biehler’s histories, these activists were tired of both deterioration and the stigma it carried and they worked to improve their homes and neighborhoods. Randles and Brown were inspired by the physical deterioration of Hough and the rampant damage and negative attention brought on by the riots and worked
tirelessly to stem flight, encourage investment, and build and maintain housing to ameliorate the environmental inequalities they saw.16

In response to the Hough Riots of that summer, DeForest Brown, Christine Randles, and other community leaders in Hough began the Hough Area Development Corporation (HADC) to build and maintain housing and conserve the vitality of their neighborhood. Days after the riots ended Mrs. Fannie Lewis said that “it takes something like this [the riot] to get them to react” in City Hall. Along with Brown and Randles, Fannie Lewis was an outspoken Hough activist and public servant who became active in housing and jobs programs after the spark of the Hough Riots. The riots sparked reform efforts close to home and became a popular topic in newspapers and historical memory. By 1967, DeForest Brown and other community leaders got together and formed the HADC to attempt to tackle some of the problems Hough citizens faced. These organizers, many of whom lived in Hough, sought to bring investment and jobs back to their community. Urban renewal policies of the 1940s and 1950s had often been planned centrally with little input from local residents or activists. After the unrest of the mid-1960s made the failure of urban renewal policies clear, politicians and local leaders were swayed to allow decentralized community participation from entities like Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and programs like those set up by the Demonstration Cities Act (Model Cities). Local leaders’ goals were not simply to increase their personal wealth or build a black middle-class, but to rebuild Hough through something historian

Nishani Frazier has called “community capitalism.” Combining funding from federal and local governments, corporations, and foundations, CDCs engaged in community activism encouraged poor black communities to participate in their local economy through participation in credit unions, company ownership, and social projects. Funding came from organizing members, Cleveland businessman Richard Harris, Carl Stokes’ mayoral program Cleveland NOW!, and later, the Office of Economic Opportunity. OEO funding helped make the HADC one of the best funded Community Development Corporations in the nation by 1968. The explosion of funding for CDCs marked a transition to community participation in urban planning. Responding to the desires of their community, HADC organizers made housing quality one of their top priorities.17

The fledgling HADC directed two of its earliest programs to housing and housing maintenance in accordance with its founders’ assessment of Hough’s ills. The “Homes for Hough,” project had initially sought to create 51 single-family homes. Its stated goal was to “halt the physical decay of Hough now characterized by overcrowded tenements and converted multi-family houses.” As black migrants moved to Hough in the early 1960s, increased housing demand led landlords to subdivide houses and rent units of inadequate quality. HFH would directly address the housing shortage pointed out by so many Hough residents. Similarly, Handyman’s Maintenance Service, Inc. (Originally called New Home Service Co.) would aim to revitalize Hough through “landscaping, maintenance, exterminating, and snow removal.” These men would work in conjunction

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with HFH to provide “the latest maintenance techniques.” In lieu of new housing, housing maintenance was a strategy that would increase the longevity of Hough’s homes and their environmental adequacy. Extermination, landscaping, and snow removal directly addressed natural phenomena like pests, weeds, and snow that are rarely seen as part of wild nature, but are detrimental to the lifespan of a house. These programs aimed to employ Hough residents as builders and maintenance men in an effort to solve housing and job issues simultaneously. While money invested in Hough would not necessarily bring the economic returns of money invested in higher-income neighborhoods, jobs and housing programs were expected to provide a social good. However, by the early 1970s, investment agencies like banks and the federal government were increasingly more concerned with return on investment, even regarding charitable or socially impactful funding. Neither HADC program would quite live up to their ambitious beginnings, but they were an effort by activists to respond to the problems Hough residents identified in their physical environments.18

Each program had some successes, but in the face of a massive housing problem and a critical media, each was dubbed a failure scarcely before they could get off the ground. Like its leaders DeForest Brown and Christine Randles, the HADC was under harsh scrutiny from a public distrustful of black leadership. This criticism came at a time when few others were investing in Hough, and before these programs had an opportunity to realize their goals. The HADC had scarcely begun to participate when they started to be blamed for the deterioration of Hough. Less than two years after its inception, HFH was criticized by the Cleveland Plain Dealer in April of 1970 for reducing the number of

homes in its initial project from 51 to 35. In the same issue, HMS was lambasted for losing money and for problems maintaining employees, including those with criminal records. The next day the Plain Dealer ran another article claiming that the HADC was “failing its constituency” due to poor management and inexperience. The article singled out HFH as having produced “one duplex and seven vacant lots.” Writers and opinion contributors for the Plain Dealer were quick to criticize the HADC for their lofty goals. While the paper ran a few stories which lauded the organization’s accomplishments, especially later in the 1970s, early in the decade it ran a number of articles alleging fraud and mismanagement. The Call and Post was more sympathetic to the immense problems the HADC faced, and more likely to chalk up organizational deficiencies to inexperience. DeForest Brown took to the Call & Post to defend the fledgling organization. Brown argued that the very intent of Handyman’s Maintenance Service, Inc. was “to hire previously unemployed and inexperienced persons” and some struggles were expected. By employing those with criminal records, HMS had run afoul of popular opinion by rewarding “the underserving poor.” As for HFH, he asserted that loans had been secured and building was imminent for 32 units. The company could not acquire enough affordable land to for all 51 planned units that would “make the construction of low-income housing feasible.” HFH had been forced to scale back their initial planning goals to accommodate their plans to offer low-income housing. In a difficult climate the HADC faced criticism early and often. In the face of such a large exodus of people and capital from Hough, media criticism hampered the HADC in its goal to stem the tide of flight and conserve the vitality of the neighborhood.19

The Office of Economic Opportunity, the government entity that oversaw funding to CDCs, largely agreed with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that the HADC had done little for Hough in its 1971 assessment for congress. As a result the OEO pushed the organization away from its roots in community capitalism and toward a traditional for-profit business model that relied on viewing housing as a commodity. Having completed three houses, HFH was significantly behind its “overly optimistic goals.” However, the report noted that the program had helped “nonprofit housing corporations… to acquire land on which to build houses” and that it was “only scratching the surface of the housing problem.” In fact, HFH was one of the few organizations attempting to build housing while the city was intent on demolition. The OEO had tempered optimism for HMS as well. By February of 1971 the program had employed 31 full-time employees since its inception and, despite early losses, was coming closer to breaking even financially.

Again, the program was evaluated purely on the basis of short-term investment without respect to the social good it could provide or in light of the negative consequences of ongoing suburbanization in response to flight. While the OEO report concluded that the HADC “had brought few visible benefits to Hough,” it also noted that given the communities “deep-seated and long-standing problems…it would be unrealistic to expect a major social and economic impact” in its first three years. Neighborhood housing and maintenance problems proved too vast for the HADC to tackle. The OEO was...

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enthusiastic about potential social benefits to the community, but their report consistently privileged financial health over social aid.\footnote{Comptroller General of the United States, “Report to the Congress: Development of Minority Businesses and Employment in the Hough Area of Cleveland, Ohio, Under the Special Impact Program,” Office of Economic Opportunity (Aug. 17, 1971), 2, 14, 35-36, 43.}

Despite the OEO’s tempered optimism, HMS was never able to meet its goals as a social and environmental program and simultaneously meet the economic expectations of the federal government. At its inception, HMS had the “social goal of hiring and training the hard-core unemployables” of Hough and the environmental goal of halting the decay of housing. However, by 1972 the company struggled financially. The OEO pressured the HADC to cut salaries and restructure management in order to turn a profit. While the HADC obliged, they found that operating as a training program kept their performance “below-standard” and “non-competitive,” which made “market penetration difficult.” By acting as a jobs program intent on bringing the unemployed back to the workforce, the HMS was limited in how efficiently it could operate. Therefore, HMS struggled to obtain contracts in a competitive environment, and thus to employ workers, even with increased advertising. Many of the HMS contracts which did exist were not providing a service to the community, but to HADC subsidiaries and supporters, occasionally without compensation. By 1975, with the approval of the OEO, HADC sold HMS to the subsidiary’s general manager, Marshall Gamble. Mr. Gamble had the company making a small profit, but it only employed six Hough residents. The HADC was encouraged to hold HMS to the standard of a for-profit business, without regard to the social goals which had originally inspired HADC leaders. Their goal wasn’t to create a company that would profit, but one that would increase the viability of Hough as a neighborhood by maintaining its housing and providing employment to its residents. Handyman’s
Maintenance Service, Inc. struggled to meet its lofty social goals in a difficult economic environment.\(^{21}\)

Handyman’s Maintenance Service never developed the working relationship with Homes for Hough that those at the HADC conceived. This left the organization with few guaranteed contracts in a difficult economic environment. Instead HFH had been operating with another non-profit entity managing their housing, Housing Services, Inc. Housing Services was created in 1970 with funding from Cleveland NOW!, the City of Cleveland, the Ford Foundation, and the State of Ohio. Unlike HMS, the stated aim of Housing Services had been “making a profit” from day one. But it had a nobler goal as well. Housing Services provided employment, tenant counseling, social services, and preventative maintenance and repair services in the buildings it managed. These services were designed to “see that once housing is built or rehabilitated it will not be allowed to deteriorate.” In this Housing Services was much more successful than HMS. By 1976 Housing Services was managing over 900 units of housing for HFH and other non-profits.\(^{22}\)

From its early struggles, HFH greatly expanded in the mid-70s and grew into an organization capable of providing and maintaining housing in a neighborhood where few others were motivated to do so. In the summer of 1973, Christine Randles and then HADC executive director Franklin Anderson broke ground on Community Circle Estates,


a 160-unit high-rise. This building was a significant addition to a neighborhood that had seen few new housing units even in the decade before the riots. While it partnered with other non-profits, HFH acquired the land and designed the project. In addition to its planning and rehabilitating efforts, HFH operated as a land bank for non-profit housing agencies and also provided them technical assistance. By the fall of 1973 it was involved in the construction of over four-hundred units of housing in Hough. In 1977, Community Circle Estates was followed up with Community Circle II, which housed 110 units. At that time HFH could boast that it was “involved in the construction or rehabilitation of more than 1,700 units of housing within the Hough community.” While many others were abandoning Hough, Christine Randles asserted that “we have roots here… that is important. We all live or work in Hough. No matter what the problems, we stay and find ways to keep things going.” Randle’s thoughts embodied the conservation ethic of the HADC. They worked for the betterment of their neighborhood and the people within it and not for exclusively economic gains. For a time, Homes for Hough managed to fight against the tide of decline to build and maintain housing in the neighborhood.23

The HADC’s commitment to community capitalism waned as the organization was increasingly encouraged to elevate financial interests over social goals. The corporation’s early goals promoted community control of management in line with the community participation orientation of War on Poverty urban development programs. However, a transition in management from DeForest Brown to Franklin Anderson in 1971 and pressure from the OEO changed the nature of the HADC. Brown had left to direct Cleveland’s Model Cities program, which was also mired in political difficulty and

media criticism. While Anderson was an original member of the group of community leaders that created the organization, his education at the Harvard Business School convinced him of the merits of laissez-faire capitalism. He clashed with the community control ideology of the HADC board, which was largely staffed by Hough residents and other prominent black leaders. When the OEO criticized HADC management, Anderson went against the wishes of the board to cut staff and reduce employee ownership of corporations. His goals were noble, as Anderson was in fact seeking to revitalize Hough economically in the way he had been trained, but his strategies left the HADC internally conflicted and put it at odds with the Hough community. As historian Nishani Frazier has claimed, “not only had the community lost the opportunity to own a business via stock, but some also felt Anderson’s changes forfeited even symbolic ownership of HADC.” This marked departure in the philosophy of the HADC improved profits, but at the expense of social standing and commitment to a more radical and inclusive economic vision. Some of HADC’s businesses rebounded to make slight profits under Frank Anderson’s management, but even after his resignation in 1976 the organization continued to trend toward a for-profit business attitude and away from its original vision of community capitalism and a close association with the vitality of Hough. By the mid-1970s the HADC had grown temporally and ideologically distant from the fiery tensions behind the Hough Riots.24

As the 1970s drew to a close HADC companies faced economic and political challenges that would hasten their demise. The HADC found that there was an “ever-increasing need for new or rehabilitated housing in the Hough Area.” Even in the early

24 For a business oriented history of the HADC that focuses on the organization’s efforts to operate two McDonald’s franchises see Frazier, “A McDonald’s.” For “not only had,” see Frazier, 84.
seventies they expressed concerns that their funding was inadequate to meet this need. The HADC was tied to the vitality of Hough. When Hough continued to decline in population and economic well-being, the HADC was declared to be failing. In retrospect, the problems Hough faced were far too great to be alleviated by one organization. The OEO, later renamed the US Community Services Administration (CSA), threatened to cut off funding in 1974 and again in 1977 over questions about funding and management decisions. This was after HADC management had already been reduced and reorganized in the early 1970s by Frank Anderson to comply with OEO recommendations. Later, despite what HADC management felt was a strong proposal, the CSA rejected a plan to capitalize Housing Services’ continued management of HFH properties. These were two of the more successful organizations affiliated with the HADC, but the CSA’s rejection left both organizations in difficult financial states. The HADC didn’t feel it had received consistent political support either. HFH management frequently complained in internal memoranda that city administration was uncooperative. They charged that the city had “caused a disproportionate use of staff time and many unnecessary delays,” which in turn made “long-range planning almost impossible.” Their charges echo the difficulties faced by the Cleveland incantation of the Model Cities program. Finally, in 1979, HFH ceased operations as a non-profit company. CSA mandated that HFH reorganize to become a for-profit business. The HADC complied and in 1980 Homes for Hough, Inc. became Homes for Hough Construction Co. Neither the new subsidiary nor the HADC lasted much longer. In the eighties the HADC lost federal money as the Reagan administration moved away from funding CDCs. In 1984, sixteen years after it formed to rebuild Hough in the wake of the destruction of the riots, the HADC ceased operations.25

25 1972, Fourth Quarter Progress Report (October 1, 1972 – December 31, 1972), HADC Collection, box
Despite its efforts, the HADC could not tackle the enormous problem of conserving Hough. Abandonment and decay of the built environment continued and neither the city’s political nor financial systems were committed to stemming decline. Financially, the Hough neighborhood suffered depressed property values after the riots. Much of Cleveland was losing property value, housing, population, and jobs due to ongoing deindustrialization and suburbanization. While Hough saw an increased demand for housing in the 1960s, this was due to a disproportionately high black migration as it was a newly segregated neighborhood. After the peak of housing demand in the 1960s, black residents departed to neighborhoods like Glenville, East Cleveland, and other suburbs, thereby decreasing demand for housing and housing value in Hough. Those areas closest to the Hough and Glenville Riots decreased in property value even faster than others. Economists studying Cleveland have argued that this disproportionate property devaluation was likely caused by negative media coverage and popular perceptions of violence in these neighborhoods after the riots. However, while the houses were worth less as a commodity due to their location in Hough, they cost the same to build and maintain. Therefore homebuilding was less lucrative and builders could expect a lower return on investment. As Christine Randles noted in 1971, “we learned one thing real quick… that a completed home comes just as expensive in Hough as anywhere else in the county.” Unless they were concerned with preserving the community like the members of the HADC, there was little economic incentive for anyone to invest in home-
building in Hough. Environmental concerns like walkability and housing preservation were not prerogatives in the suburban heyday of the late twentieth century. Instead customers sought modern amenities and suburban lifestyles. Investors were likely to receive smaller returns than their investments could yield in high-income suburban neighborhoods. When the OEO demanded HFH become a for-profit entity, the organization was thrust into a dismal housing market with vestiges of a social goal to revitalize a community. Likewise, HMS was never able to function while under HADC management as both a jobs program and a for-profit business. When pressed to reduce losses, the HADC retreated from its original goal of employing the “hard-core unemployables” and providing adequate maintainable housing to employing a smaller, more manageable workforce and making small profits.26

While the city government made some efforts to improve the neighborhood after the riots, it was influenced by contemporary urban ecological theories to promote slum clearance. Policy-makers had been won over by the ecological thinking of the day to support destruction of neighborhoods over conservation. The effectively conservationist ethic of Hough activists was a minority opinion. City planners advocated the popular triage policy of urban planning in the mid-70s. They argued that the city “had to focus its rehabilitation efforts on ‘more stable fringe neighborhoods’ that were ‘in the initial, not the final stages of deterioration.’” According to those theories, Hough was one of those neighborhoods in the final stages of deterioration and thus revitalization would be a waste

of city expenditures. It was these policies that encouraged planners to cut back on city services like garbage removal and fire prevention. Urban planners had been influenced by the sociologists and ecologists of the Chicago School who had proposed theories of neighborhood succession in the early twentieth century. These theories were loosely based on the ecological thought of that time. Ecologists argued that plant communities existed in steady states which evolved into complex climax communities. Grassy plains supporting little animal life would, if undisturbed, evolve into complex climax forests teeming with life. The theory proposed that disturbances could destroy these climax communities and send them spiraling back to uncomplicated and lifeless states. Chicago school urban ecologists adapted the theory to cities. They argued that invasions of working class and minority residents disturbed climax neighborhoods. As a result, these neighborhoods should be destroyed and redeveloped. Popular urban planning thought of the 1960s and 1970s rejected the ideas of Hough residents, that minority or integrated communities could be maintained as vital neighborhoods and were worthy of investment. Ecologists in the latter half of the century disputed the steady state ecology theories that undergirded triage planning. In their place, they offered up theories based on complexity and interconnectedness, in which no community was ever in climax and each was constantly evolving as a diverse array of organisms sought to find their place. Their theories invalidated the ostensibly ecological ideas of urban succession. Minority and working class residents did not invade neighborhoods due to ecological factors. They moved because middle class whites abandoned those neighborhoods or were pushed out by blockbusting tactics and thus landlords were required to expand their pool of residents. However, urban planners had not yet adopted the emerging theories of ecologists in the
1970s, and therefore supported triage over conservation. While the city government engaged in cleanup programs like Project 1060, it also cut back city services, redirected federal renewal money away from Hough after the 1970s, and continued a pattern of slum clearance. As a result of this triage policy the city of Cleveland aided in the destruction of 8,412 units of housing in Hough between 1970 and 1980. Many houses were lost to arson as the city cut back on fighting fire in the neighborhood. The city used fire itself as a tool to demolish homes. Slum clearance was the order of the day. The organizers of the HADC were no match for such systemic destruction.27

The decay of an urban neighborhood does not seem like an environmental issue. Most are used to thinking of the natural world as wilderness, parklands, or pastoral landscapes, but even the central city is influenced by ecological forces. Hough residents experienced cold, pests, and disease, and required shelters made of earthly materials. In Hough, before and after the riots, residents and community leaders worked to improve their environment and conserve their neighborhood. In the 1960s the people of Hough deplored environmental inequalities in their neighborhood and so they organized and protested for solutions. A racist population and the segregationist housing policies of the 1950s and 1960s encouraged landlords and realtors to overextend the inadequate housing supply in Hough to an overcrowded population. Discontented Hough residents protested against cutbacks in city services, organized cleanup and rehab efforts, and testified about the dismal state of their housing in front of the US Commission on Civil Rights. By the

summer of 1966, unrest over environmental inequality contributed to an explosion of violence in the Hough riots, as residents later attested. In the wake of the riots, Hough leaders like DeForest Brown and Christine Randles organized the Hough Area Development Corporation. Through organizations like Homes for Hough and the Handyman’s Maintenance Service, Inc. they attempted to conserve and improve their environment by building, rehabilitating, and maintaining homes. Randles and Homes for Hough embodied a vision that quality housing and the maintenance of that housing was essential to the health of a neighborhood. Yet, Randles recognized that the housing market in which she operated was still governed by the value of a house as a commodity and not as a social or community good. Unfortunately, social, economic, and political factors continued to undermine the viability of the inner-city. While they achieved many successes, Hough residents and HADC organizers faced a problem too large for one organization.

Few Clevelanders know that the Hough Riots inspired many living there to take action to change their environment. Historians focus on the socioeconomic and racial causes and effects of the Riots, but Hough residents also decried physical inequalities all around them. Hough residents were discriminated against racially and they lacked the capital and political power to reform housing in their neighborhood. Despite their efforts, HADC organizers were blamed in part for Hough’s decline just as they gained funding and pushed for community participation. Their efforts to build and rehabilitate housing were no match for widespread demolition and abandonment. Had the HADC been more successful, perhaps Hough and Cleveland would be denser, more walkable communities less reliant on cars. Perhaps some suburban sprawl and its resulting environmental
degradation could have been avoided. Most Americans live and work in cities, and it is in these cities, not out in romantic, wild nature, that we impact the world around us. Abandoning Hough and neighborhoods like it is a waste of scarce natural resources. The people of Hough attempted to conserve their neighborhood. They tried to eliminate environmental inequalities, and they worked to create a more equal, equitable, and lasting city. Leaders like Christine Randles and DeForest Brown and organizations like the HADC took inspiration from the destruction of the Hough riots and redoubled efforts to build and maintain quality housing in Hough. Unfortunately, Clevelanders today know a Hough that lives with a legacy of environmental inequality.
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