# INTRODUCTION

It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you.

—James Baldwin, "The American Dream and the American Negro"

The bulldozers arrived early the morning of May 31, 1956, at 1206 Epiphany Street in the Lower Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Nearby residents watched the demolition of the building with the understanding that their homes, businesses, and churches would soon be next to face the wrecking ball. However, some took comfort in the fact that they had been promised new, clean public housing in other parts of the city. Others believed that this public housing would be built on the very acres that were being razed by the bulldozers and wrecking balls.

A few months later, on September 20, the housing chairman of the branch chapter of the Milwaukee NAACP, Bernard Toliver, wrote to national headquarters asking for "any advice and free literature" on how to open the housing market for "Negroes" in response to the fast-moving developments of the local urban renewal program. These developments would later include targeting and demolishing the Bronzeville neighborhood, the heart of Milwaukee's African American business community, in order to build the I-94/I-43 freeway.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, six days after Toliver's letter requesting help, the local police arrived on an unseasonably warm day at 449 Rondo Avenue wielding axes and sledgehammers. Inside the house lived Reverend George Davis and his wife, Bertha Miller Davis, who was blind and rarely left their

home. The Davises' home was one of many slated to be demolished for the construction of I-94. But the eighty-year-old Davis, who years prior had fled from the Jim Crow South to live in Minnesota, stood in the doorway with a shotgun, refusing to leave his home. The Davis family was one of the last of the 650 families in the Rondo Avenue neighborhood displaced by the construction of I-94, which "split the heart" of the city's Black community.[1] These neighborhoods, three proud Black communities, were never the same again.[2]

These events suggest much about the widespread but local threat of urban renewal policies to African American communities in Northern cities, communities that were already restricted as to where they could live. The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, as well as the Highway Act of 1956, disproportionately affected African Americans through urban renewal, which many dubbed "Negro Removal." In the mid-twentieth century, mostly white city governments were not interested in improving Black neighborhoods but rather in tearing them down to build sports arenas, highways, and high-end apartment buildings. Many of these urban renewal projects were designed to either keep white families from moving to the suburbs or to encourage white families to return to the city for sporting events and entertainment.

During the height of urban renewal programs, spaces became even more racialized through federal policy, social customs, local laws, and violence. Because urban renewal policies increased the formation of racialized spaces and intensified segregation, the democratic ideals of citizenship, such as freedom, inclusivity, equality, and liberty, were hindered. Uncovering communities' rhetorical responses to urban renewal helps us better understand these ideals of citizenship as well as urban history. Spaces designated as "blighted" or "slum" by city governments were most often inhabited by Black residents.[3] This labeling of "Black spaces" as blighted made it easier for city governments to reclaim this space to create "white spaces," such as highways to connect the suburbs with white spaces downtown.

Restrictions on housing based on race predetermined where African Americans could live after being displaced from their homes. This overt form of racism is one way in which spaces in the city become racialized as either Black-only or white-only places. As Mary Triece notes, racialized spaces create "unjust geographies."[4] One way that spaces became racialized, unjust geographies is through the language and narratives circulated to describe them. When we better account for how language functioned to create and perpetuate racialized spaces in Northern cities, we better understand

the interconnectedness of rhetorical strategies (language-in-action), space and place, and forms of citizenship. A rhetorical history of urban renewal thus reveals how racialized spaces (1) limited the organizing and rhetorical agency that took place in African American communities, (2) drew from African American cultural history to inform the materiality of these spaces, and (3) influenced the types of rhetorical actions and forms of citizenship that could take place in response to urban renewal. The policies of urban renewal were an attempt by cities to take historically and segregated Black spaces and make them white. Resistance to these attempts was conducted in creative and innovative ways by the Black community.

Because of segregation, African Americans had limited or no representative power in Northern city governments in the mid-twentieth century and lacked traditional civic means to prevent being uprooted from their homes, businesses, and churches. Compounding the trauma of forced removal, African Americans were not free to move anywhere else in their cities due to redlining by financial institutions (preventing African Americans from getting mortgages in certain areas), racist housing covenants that restricted African Americans from certain rental properties, and outright physical and verbal hostility from white residents when African American families tried to move into exclusively white neighborhoods.[5] In other words, white residents enforced a strict segregation of space in many urban neighborhoods. This violence, along with racist housing laws, restricted African Americans to living in "blighted" neighborhoods. These tensions are often what get highlighted in urban renewal histories—a focus on the racist policies/practices that victimized African American communities. But what they hide, as I discuss later in this introduction, is how the communities responded. We need to look at these responses as creative and strategic acts of citizenship.

Despite the wrecking balls destroying numerous African American homes, churches, and businesses nationwide, many residents tried to stop or modify the urban projects; in some instances, they were successful. Because of segregated spaces and limited access to legislative power, how did African Americans enact the modes of citizenship that were available to them—that is, how did they resist, modify, and in some cases stop the destruction of their neighborhoods? Who were these organizers, leaders, and residents at the local level of a social movement that valiantly resisted urban renewal?

This book is their story. It is the story of a people who worked and organized to be treated like all citizens. It is the story of three Black communities in crisis over the fear of losing their homes and businesses, and their

rhetorical actions in response to the power of city and federal governments. The Hill District in Pittsburgh, the Bronzeville neighborhood in Milwaukee, and the Rondo Avenue neighborhood in St. Paul all saw the formation of grassroots organizations that worked alongside national organizations, such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, to resist urban renewal. These communities are representative of African Americans living in the urban North where urban renewal destroyed the economic resources of the African American neighborhoods. Bridging recent work in rhetorical, historical, and African American studies, this book aims to strengthen our understanding of the Black Freedom Movement (which includes the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement)[6] and better account for the places, narratives, and agency that different forms of citizenship produce, especially in resistance to dominant and persuasive narratives of urban renewal.

Primarily a story about the rhetorical strategies and tactics developed in response to urban renewal, this book draws from Black people's own cultural rhetorical traditions in the practice of parrhesia, "speaking truth in the face of danger."[7] Urban renewal was that danger. But urban renewal was also a story of mobility, another example of forced migration of African Americans in the history of the United States. Many of those forced to move were Black people who migrated to the urban North to escape Jim Crow, poverty, and sharecropping. Their dreams of housing independence and "first-class citizenship" were met with Northern disdain, de facto segregation, and outright physical violence. Their responses speak to the resilience of the people. These responses also illuminate the integral role that rhetoric—the strategic use of language and other symbolic means—played in African American communities' resistance to urban renewal during the Black Freedom Movement. In conducting a rhetorical history of urban renewal, this book reveals the resilience of African Americans by examining their rhetorical actions in response to urban renewal during the Black Freedom Movement.

This research and analysis of urban renewal discourse contributes to African American rhetorical history and urban history by demonstrating the important role of urban renewal arguments and Black Rhetorical Citizenship, the framework I develop in this book, within the overall circulation of the discourse of the Black Freedom Movement. The African American struggle against urban renewal policies also provides a useful site for extending discussions of counter publics, rhetorical agency, and rhetorics of place. And finally, this rhetorical history provides a different perspective on current research by rhetorical scholars of place by demonstrating how rhetorics of place are a central part of African American rhetoric.

## Black Communities in the "Promised Land"

African Americans who made the journey north from the dangerous, racist, and dehumanizing Jim Crow South sometimes referred to the North as the biblical "promised land" where freedom and prosperity could be obtained. Pittsburgh, St. Paul, and Milwaukee were all cities in the "Midwestern stream" of the Great Migration.[8]

### *Lower Hill*

The Hill District neighborhood was the center of African American life in Pittsburgh. The construction of a sports arena in the late 1950s destroyed the area known as the Lower Hill. It was originally a German and Jewish section of town, but the Great Migration brought numerous African Americans. The threat of urban renewal to the rest of the Hill District led to residents creating the Citizens Committee for Hill District Renewal (CCHDR). Alongside the United Negro Protest Committee (UNPC, another local group), as well as the Pittsburgh chapters of the Urban League and the NAACP, the CCHDR would be instrumental in organizing the response to urban renewal in the city.

### *Rondo*

The African American population in St. Paul was smaller than in both Milwaukee and Pittsburgh. African Americans were located in the Rondo neighborhood. In response to the planned highway construction through the central business section of Rondo, residents created the Rondo–St. Anthony Improvement Association, which was led by a preacher and a barber. However, the neighborhood was essentially destroyed when the I-94 construction took place in 1956.

### *Bronzeville*

The Bronzeville neighborhood in Milwaukee was first inhabited by German and Jewish immigrants. African Americans began arriving in larger numbers by the mid-twentieth century, but strict segregation practices restricted them to the north side of the city. Traditional Black organizations, including the Milwaukee chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League, were the primary groups to respond to urban renewal; still, at least one grassroots group, the Walnut Area Improvement Committee (WAICO), formed in response to

urban renewal. While some scholars have argued that the small size of the Black population in Milwaukee may have contributed to less resistance to the highway projects, Milwaukee residents used urban renewal policies as an opportunity to focus on open housing laws (as did the residents of Rondo) to better accommodate the rapidly growing African American population and alleviate poor housing conditions.

## Activism and African American Rhetorical History

The history of US governmental power and African American rhetorics of resistance to it have returned to the forefront of our consciousness with the emergence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism, revitalizing our need to understand the rhetorical strategies of resistance at work in the Black Freedom Movement.[9] Rhetorical history and analysis of the Black Freedom Movement in the North, which includes milestone events that coincide with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Selma Marches, and March on Washington, reveal the impact African American residents in Northern cities had on the movement, including rhetorical strategies of resistance. These strategies continue to influence the actions of the Black Freedom Movement nationwide, including Black Lives Matter.

Because this book explores urban renewal as a rhetorical situation, it uncovers rhetorical strategies of resistance at work in the Black Freedom Movement—in particular, rhetorics of place (counternarratives, placemaking, and critical memory) and rhetorical leadership (community organizing, distributed agency, and critical memory) enacted by African Americans in response to urban renewal in the North. Predominant scholarly analyses of African American rhetorical history have focused on the actions of Southern leaders to better understand grassroots organizing among African Americans.[10] Although these histories provide much-needed insight on the Black Freedom Movement, the existing narrative in rhetorical scholarship tends to overemphasize the South and neglect the key role Northern cities played in the rhetorical history of the Civil Rights Movement. This book therefore addresses the central question of what rhetorical resistance to urban renewal and housing policies looked like in smaller Northern cities during the overlap of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, where smaller, underrepresented communities had to find alternative ways to enact citizenship and resist harmful policies. African Americans faced different challenges, such as housing restrictions and urban renewal projects, despite having the

ability to vote, unlike many of those living in the South during this same time. These Northern sites have not been examined nearly enough but contribute significantly to the history of the Black Freedom Movement. Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* maintains that civil rights in the North was just as important as the movement in the South and cites the works of many forgotten and unknown individuals in the civil rights struggle in Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia. His work has been extended by other urban historians on the struggle of African Americans in the North as well.[11]

However, these important historical studies of Northern urban African American communities do not fully address how rhetorical acts of civic engagement—discursive and material—by African Americans on the ground level served as strategies of resistance and forms of citizenship during the Black Freedom Movement in Northern cities. *Struggle for the City* focuses on the organizing, mobilizing, and protesting by Black people as they responded to urban renewal and housing discrimination. Doing so centers the rhetorical agency of the people and makes visible the cultural rhetorical traditions of the people/communities involved. Because stories of urban renewal are often told from the perspective of city and federal government or highlight only the devastation and victimization of Black people, these narratives exclude too many of the agentive actions of African Americans: the organizing, educating, and civic engagement that took place in these neighborhoods, actions that are part of the long Black Freedom Movement in the United States.

## The Racial Master Narrative of Urban Renewal / "Negro Removal"

What the residents of Rondo, Lower Hill, and Bronzeville didn't know, and perhaps had no way of knowing, was that the process of acquiring their homes had begun years prior and was rooted in the language of urban renewal. Only weeks after the US Supreme Court passed down its verdict in *Brown v. Board of Education*, President Eisenhower signed into law the Housing Act of 1954.[12] Although both legal milestones would have significant consequences for African Americans in Cold War America, it was the Housing Act of 1954 that drastically altered the living conditions for vast numbers of African Americans across the United States. The Housing Act of 1954 gave American cities unprecedented power to build sports arenas, highways, apartment buildings, and shopping areas, which transformed the material layout and appearance of their cities.

Eisenhower saw the signing of the Housing Act of 1954 as a significant accomplishment during his administration. On the signing of the act, he wrote in a public relations statement:

> The country will be benefited by the Housing Act of 1954 which has now become law. It has been one of our major legislative goals. It will raise the housing standards of our people, help our communities get rid of slums and improve their older neighborhoods, and strengthen our mortgage credit system. . . . Millions of our families with modest incomes will be able, for the first time, to buy new or used homes. Families will be helped to enlarge or modernize their present homes. Another feature of the law is especially important. Many families have to move from their homes because of slum clearance and other public improvements. This law provides especially easy terms for these deserving people. The new law makes available, for the first time, a practical way for our citizens, in the towns and cities of America, to get rid of their slums and blight.[13]

Eisenhower's statement reveals the law's difficult and at times conflicting goals. What is the difference between a "slum" to get rid of and an "older neighborhood" to improve? The application of the law resulted in overcrowding in many Black neighborhoods because local governments did not follow through on the promise of new homes for all of those "deserving" displaced people.

As I will show, Eisenhower and others in the federal government made it possible for local governments—which implemented the law—to privilege language that supported their preferred interpretations of the Housing Act of 1954. The language of the law empowered city governments to increase their usage of eminent domain to seize property "to redevelop blighted areas, and drastically reduced the funds to build public housing."[14] City governments spent federal dollars to demolish neighborhoods labeled "blighted" and rebuild them for private development. This approach in combating "blight" suited the needs of private construction and real estate companies because "urban revitalization required the condemnation of blighted properties and the transfer of this real estate to developers who would use it more productively."[15] This differential treatment was justified because city planners believed that certain areas of the city could better serve the larger public, meaning more white people. City officials needed a new "language of urban decline" to argue for clearing certain neighborhoods and leaving

others unaffected.[16] As a result, the urban landscapes of numerous American cities were altered dramatically.

The language of the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, as well as the Highway Act of 1956, provided the roots for an urban renewal "master narrative" that could be used by federal officials and city governments to justify their plans to obliterate Black neighborhoods. Master narratives, according to Hilde Lindemann-Nelson, are "stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings," which we also use to "justify what we do."[17] The master narrative of urban decay and renewal was centered on African Americans and shaped the way other city residents sought solutions to the city's problems. The primary urban renewal narrative dictated that the "good" (buildings, neighborhoods, citizens) must overcome, defeat, or eliminate the "bad" (blight, crime, sickness) in order for all of the city to prosper. Taking Lindeman-Nelson's claim further, I suggest that "socially shared understandings" are created when specific narratives of past or future events are repeated over time. In particular, racial narratives "garner an accepting audience in part because of their familiarity and in part because of the perception that they allow us to make sense of the world, and they are therefore replicated and repeated."[18] In other words, the repetition and circulation of the racial narratives of urban renewal helped create the environment in which there was only one solution—bulldozing neighborhoods.

Through the master narrative of urban renewal, federal and local government officials created a myth that their city would transform into a "city of tomorrow," a "modern acropolis," "a city upon a hill."[19] This narrative of replacing blight with beautiful buildings was repeated continuously in newspaper editorials and political speeches throughout the early period in which urban renewal projects were taking place. The narrative was simple. For American cities to become "modern" or even to survive, the "blighted" and mostly African American spaces had to be demolished and remade into spaces used by majority white people. While not the only way in which city governments argued for urban renewal, this master narrative was at work in much of the news media and government publications at the time, suggesting its effectiveness.

This urban renewal master narrative contains several discursive features that make it effective: (1) metaphors of sickness or disease, (2) euphemisms of progress toward idealized futures, and (3) absence of either racial division or inclusion. Although these features do not have clear delineation points, their overlapping repetition across urban renewal narratives conveys that only the complete razing of neighborhoods can be recognized as urban renewal.

*Metaphors of Disease and Sickness in the Master Narrative*

Ancient rhetoricians have long remarked on the persuasive power of metaphor in language. Aristotle, for instance, called metaphors a "bringing before the eyes" that has "clarity and sweetness and strangeness."[20] Recognizing the effect of metaphor on audiences and the usefulness of metaphors in creating knowledge, Aristotle believed that "to learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are pleasurable."[21] Quintilian viewed metaphor as a trope that is "the artistic alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another."[22] The persuasive power of the master narrative of urban renewal was undergirded and amplified by metaphors.

More recent accounts of metaphor demonstrate how metaphors shape understanding because they are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but also in thought and action, making it easier for an audience to understand a complex idea. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, for example, assert that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."[23] In this way, metaphors structure the way we think and the way we act, "and our systems of knowledge and belief, in a pervasive and fundamental way."[24] In other words, metaphor adds a structuring principle to our thinking, focusing attention on aspects of whatever phenomenon is under scrutiny; at the same time, metaphor can hide other aspects of that same phenomenon.[25] Metaphors are particularly apt at (re)structuring people's thoughts about political subjects.[26]

These theories of metaphor help us understand how narrative and metaphor are closely linked. Metaphors provide background and foundation for narratives, and narratives do the same for metaphors. Because metaphors emerge from and support stories, narratives can also become metaphors whereby concepts may be "formed by and understood as both [metaphors and narratives], separately and in combination."[27] For example, Linda Berger explains that narrative "leads to the shorthand use of metaphors: once a story is embedded in tradition and culture, the die is cast and you no longer have to tell the tale, you can simply use the name of the character or the title of the story as a metaphor, and the plot, characters, and moral will follow, appearing to be logical entailments."[28]

This shorthand use of metaphors highlights the rhetorical potential of "blight" in the metaphors surrounding urban planning, which were instrumental in both the construction and the effectiveness of the urban renewal

master narrative. This language of blight and its historical reference to mysterious infestations served racially a motivated political purpose: to clear and rebuild the parts of the city that were occupied by African American communities.[29] Although blight appears to be a "race-neutral" term, it was primarily deployed to reference certain neighborhoods, becoming a stand-in or name for Black communities and even being seen as an "effect" of these communities.

In traditional usage, blight is defined as "a disease or injury of plants marked by the formation of lesions, withering, and death of parts."[30] Blight sometimes grows to the point that it will destroy the plant, so the diseased part of the plant must be removed for the plant to survive. Because it leverages this metaphor and narrative of disease, "blight" becomes a threat to the health of the city and helps to justify government officials' seizure of private property. Blight also evolved into a warlike metaphor: from something that requires treatment, removal, and perhaps healing into something that must be struggled against and defeated. In other words, the spread of "blight" is the city's antagonist; it provides the central conflict in the narrative that government officials—the city's heroes—must defeat. In this narrative, victory in the struggle against "blight" results in the city's prosperity and growth, a place where new, modern buildings and different people replace the diseased parts.

As illustrated in the following examples, it was primarily African American neighborhoods that were referred to as "blight" or as being "blighted." Applying this metaphor continuously to poor areas created an imagined reality in which strong measures had to be taken immediately to stop the "disease" of blight. By referring to poverty and poor housing as blight, its removal (or relocation) would mean that the community would thrive again. Furthermore, city governments were required to label a place as "blighted" in order to receive federal funds for redevelopment, creating an urban policy of demolishing and rebuilding a city to rid it of "blight." Using blight metaphorically to refer to certain neighborhoods also limited how citizens might imagine other approaches to improving the neighborhood's conditions.

Blight metaphors, along with specific notions of "curing" blight, were prevalent in the congressional deliberations of the Housing Act of 1954. In fact, much of the language of urban renewal can be traced to the Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency, which, in large part, debated the concerns of private building and banking industries. For example, in a statement read during the hearing, Norman P. Mason from the US Chamber of Commerce noted:

> The chamber has worked for many years to encourage the *elimination of slums* and the restoration of *blighted urban* areas to economic and social usefulness. While we had reservations about the urban rehabilitation plans established in the housing acts of 1949, believing it to be too limited and too costly, the pending legislation promises to *remove these defects*. This legislation places a definite responsibility on the locality to put its own house in order with ordinances and enforcement of these ordinances to assure the proper maintenance of housing and to prevent its overcrowding, before that community can go to the Federal Government for assistance. It lets the Federal Government help in such a way as to encourage the conservation of sound structure. It helps to retard the *decline* of existing neighborhoods and to *eliminate the causes of blight* before it becomes necessary to do a *wholesale clearance* operation. Because of these desirable features, the provisions of title IV of the bill are strongly supported by the chamber and we urge their enactment.[31]

Using the metaphor of blight in this context limits other possible approaches to improving neighborhood conditions once the neighborhood receives the "blight" designation. First, the repetition of blight paired with words like "clearance" and "elimination" suggests that the only way for neighborhoods to achieve "usefulness" is to excise all or portions of the neighborhood—like a cancer that must be cut out. Second, the usage of blight also does racial work, suggesting that the causes of blight are within the neighborhoods themselves without explicitly naming the causes. This allows the audience to infer causal relationships, particularly those related to race. Blight is deployed in several ways in the nine-hundred-page transcript of the hearing: "blight" is mentioned more than 140 times, "modern or modernization" 139 times, and the phrase "slum clearance" nearly 200 times. This language of urban renewal, especially metaphors of disease and sickness that leveraged "blight" as the disease, was also used locally in cities like Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, and in each locale this language was used to create a narrative to fit the desired projects.

*Progress Toward an Idealized Future in the Master Narrative*

Urban renewal policies began to take root during the euphoria of post–World War II America. The phrase "urban renewal" offers a sense of hopefulness for a better future, a desire for newness that was shared by many Americans

after winning the war. A more literal definition of renewal is "to make like new: restore to freshness, vigor, or perfection, and to make new spiritually."[32] Synonyms for the word include regenerate, revive, and rebuild. With this sentiment in mind, the goal of many American cities was to become "modernized," and this desired modernization was implied in euphemisms such as "Renaissance." A euphemism is the use of a supposedly less objectionable variant for a word that has negative connotations.[33] The choice of these words may suggest its significance. Carol Cohn, for example, describes how euphemisms used by military intellectuals "were so bland that they never forced the speaker or enabled the listener to touch the realities of nuclear holocaust that lay behind the words."[34] In a similar way, euphemisms and metaphors used within the urban renewal master narrative hid the realities faced by African Americans most affected by urban renewal.

The urban renewal master narrative dictates that the defeat of the antagonist (i.e., blight) will result in an idealized future for all citizens, a sentiment that leveraged the hope and optimism of the time. This utopian vision for urban redevelopment in Northern cities was created, in part, by the euphemisms for demolition deployed consistently by city politicians and newspaper editorials. The overwhelming use of the words "modern," "renewal," and "Renaissance" as euphemisms for the destruction required by many urban renewal policies encapsulates what Kenneth Burke calls a "body of identifications" in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. As Burke states, "Often we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill."[35] In other words, the body of identifications (e.g., metaphors and euphemisms) at work within the urban renewal master narrative was effective in large part because of how frequently it was repeated in speeches and in print.

Working alongside euphemisms of demolition is the notion of progress toward an idealized future, which can be traced to the 1949 Housing Act. A portion of that law says that through the clearance of slums and blight, American families will have more suitable housing and thus contribute "to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the nation."[36] This language gives the law a sense of hope for a better city.

Accompanying notions of progress are ideas of safety and security, which were echoed in a congressional hearing for the 1954 Housing Act. In a written statement in support of amending the 1949 Housing Act, William L. Rafsky—housing coordinator for the City of Philadelphia—argued that a

decrease in crime would result from passing and implementing the revised Housing Act. He writes:

> Indicative of the high price of inferior housing is the fact that in 1953, 65.3 percent of all police arrests were of individuals who resided in Philadelphia's officially certified blighted areas, which contain only 23.5 percent of the city's population. Similar statistics on juvenile arrests reveal that unless our slums are removed, significant numbers of our future juveniles from these areas are doomed to a life of crime. Despite the fact that the cause of crime is usually far more complex than physical environment, it would be ostrich like to ignore the fact that in the third largest city in the country, arrests of juveniles residing in deteriorated neighborhoods were 46.4 percent of the total, as compared to the area's juvenile population of 25.2 percent of the entire city. Similarly, our losses of life and property by fire, our health, and our welfare problems are concentrated in districts where sub-standard housing predominates. From the longer-range point of view, Philadelphia's survival depends upon the solution to this problem.[37]

Despite the attempt to modify the strength of his claim, Rafsky establishes the blighted neighborhoods as the primary source of many of the ills of the city and a significant threat to the city's well-being. Naming this causal relationship (i.e., blight causes juvenile crime) not only raises the stakes of passing the act; it also does racial rhetorical work. If blighted neighborhoods cause crime, what might cause the blight? While race is not explicitly named, audiences of the time may be inclined to connect the neighborhood's primarily Black residents to the sources of the blight. This inference not only suggests that removal of the residents is the only way for the city to "survive," but it also does the rhetorical work in a way that appears "race neutral." In terms of the master narrative, Rafsky seems to be suggesting that blight is antagonistic to the safety and security required for modernization and progress.

*Repetition of Wishes and Fears and the Absence of Racial Division*

At the onset of the urban renewal policy, many African Americans did not strongly resist urban renewal. Organized civic resistance and mass protests to urban renewal often developed *after* initial urban renewal projects had

been completed. Why didn't African Americans resist the implementation of a policy that would be detrimental to them? Why didn't most African American organizations and residents resist when city governments invoked the policy of eminent domain, which left many residents without homes? One reason, I argue, is that the urban renewal master narrative did not overtly use race in its language. In other words, racial division and everyday practices of segregation were absent from the language of urban Renaissance, renewal, and progress. For instance, in the previous quote, Rafsky explains crime in terms of blight rather than in relation to older narratives more recognizably connected to anti-Black racism, which might have, initially, seemed like a step forward. Thus, somewhat ironically, the absence of racial division from the master narrative of urban renewal and the promises made of better housing allowed many African Americans to hope that they, too, would be potential beneficiaries of urban renewal policies and programs.

The mythical image of the ideal city set in a future that has seemingly overcome racial division is perhaps rooted in the idealism of a postwar America. At least this was the thinking of many African Africans who waged the Double V campaign: victory against the Axis overseas, and victory against racists at home. Kenneth Burke explains that a myth is not an idea but an image, a term that takes us "from the order of reason to the order of imagination."[38] Since the myth of the ideal city omitted any discussion of the racial divide and there were no images of people in many depictions of "modern buildings" and new housing or highways, everyone could imagine whom they wanted to see inhabiting those spaces. Many African Americans envisioned improved housing and more economic opportunity. They saw themselves living in and enjoying pristine buildings on flawless landscaped grounds. For some African Americans, this hope for the city was more inclusive than that of those who held racist beliefs; for African Americans, a modern city would also mean civil relations between the two races and open housing. Initially, many African Americans hoped that they would now equally benefit from the exciting changes proposed to the urban center because they, too, were part of Chicago, St. Paul, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh. However, instead of realizing this initial hope, many African Americans eventually found themselves forced into crowded neighborhoods in other parts of town and restricted from living in white areas of the city. As African Americans realized what was happening, they organized, educated themselves on urban renewal, and engaged in civic action—citizenship as resistance.

## Black Rhetorical Citizenship

Because African Americans are endlessly positioned as in opposition to the political and social structures of white America, activism is required for survival for African Americans. Despite often being denied full formal access to civic institutions, African Americans, for their safety and flourishing, have adapted by finding their own forms of civic engagement, which go far beyond legal citizenship and voting. One of the primary contributions of this study is Black Rhetorical Citizenship (BRC), a conceptual framework that situates citizenship as both a site of resistance and "a mode of public engagement"[39] that cannot be divorced from race and the effects of racism. Grounded in theories of African American rhetoric and rhetorical citizenship, BRC envisions citizenship not as specific moments of individual agency, such as voting, but rather as complex discursive processes that emerge across rhetorical situations that include, importantly, the dynamics of racialized place and space. BRC existed before legal citizenship was available to African Americans. In the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass was the Black rhetorical citizen par excellence, despite his status as an enslaved person for the first part of his life. His contemporary, Frances Harper, lectured against slavery, argued for women's rights, and supported the Underground Railroad.[40] In BRC, such tactics of resistance, which may initially appear unimportant, not only become more visible but also increase in magnitude and "spread across social, cultural, and political sites."[41] Conceptually, BRC is informed by Maulana Karenga's claim that African American rhetoric is a rhetoric of community, resistance, and possibility.[42] Given rhetoric's significance to African Americans, we must consider rhetoric as a tool for liberation and freedom.[43] Rhetorical research focused on African Americans must therefore include the varying ways of knowing, acting, and engaging that are rooted in the African American rhetorical tradition. Rhetoricians can analyze "urban renewal" from the top down, tracking policies of racism, white supremacy, and so on, and the rhetorics that justify them, as they mowed through African American neighborhoods. This approach treats rhetoric primarily as a tool for repression and dominance. But because BRC approaches rhetoric as a tool for liberation and freedom, it puts African American rhetorics at the center and relegates oppressive rhetorics to the margin.

BRC highlights modes of rhetorical engagement of Black communities in response to actions, laws, and policies enacted by the majority. It includes alternate forms of engagement, alternate content, and alternate spaces that

Black people employ to make change. These alternate spaces may include church sanctuaries, bars/taverns, recreation areas, hair and barber salons, or the community center classroom. BRC illuminates a shadow political system that attempts to navigate white institutions of power while maintaining Black autonomy. BRC constitutes, creates, and maintains durable discursive spaces for the Black political community to understand, deliberate, and engage with majority political discourse and institutions. If white America represents the default values, arguments, and issues of the dominant mediated public sphere, BRC is an overlapping set of counter publics. BRC helps us to better understand the goals, formations, and maintenance of community that Black people use to engage with the political institutions of the majority in the hopes of infusing change within them. This view of citizenship situates African Americans' varied responses to urban renewal policies not as a series of individual acts (protests, getting elected to an office, working in a municipal department) but rather as rhetorical agency circulating and being distributed through a social movement. By drawing on African American rhetorical history and theories of space and place, BRC better accounts for the actions of African Americans during the Black Freedom Movement because it examines the coaction of the community rather than focusing primarily on individual rhetors.

Black Rhetorical Citizenship is an umbrella term that embraces scholarship from Black studies, rhetoric studies, discourse analysis, political philosophy, political science, sociology, and other fields in the humanities that offer ways of "conceptualizing the discursive, processual, participatory aspects of civic life."[44] BRC operates within the nuanced story of urban renewal and uncovers acts of rhetorical citizenship. Among scholars of rhetoric, the concept of rhetorical citizenship encompasses all the discursive (i.e., rhetorical) acts of deliberating citizens.[45] These discursive acts should not be viewed simply as preparation for civic action but rather as "constitutive of civic engagement."[46] In other words, rhetorical actions, such as citizens deliberating in public or even within themselves, should be considered just as vital to citizenship as legal entitlements, like voting.[47] Rhetorical citizenship as a conceptual frame thus accentuates "the fact that legal rights, privileges and material conditions are not the only constituents of citizenship; discourse that takes place between citizens is arguably more basic to what it means to be a citizen."[48] The concept of rhetorical citizenship thus highlights the role of rhetorical agency as a community, not just an individual phenomenon, in civic engagement—that is, "citizens' possibilities for gaining access to and influencing civic life through symbolic action."[49]

A rhetorical understanding of citizenship relies heavily on the ideals of a participatory democracy. But rhetorical citizenship as defined by these scholars does not fully contain how African Americans access traditional publics as deliberative participants or create counter publics that resist exclusionary norms. Spatial dynamics and mobility restrictions often hinder members of marginalized communities from accessing publics with the most political power, those where "official" deliberation and decision-making take place; when members of these communities *do* get access, they often cannot be heard. In addition, existing concepts of rhetorical citizenship may not fully account for the ways white supremacist practices require different civic acts by African Americans or the variety of ways to resist these practices. Given that the realities of segregation and other exclusionary dynamics of race affect how African Americans practice civic engagement—that is, rhetorically enact citizenship—theories of African American rhetoric must be incorporated into our understanding of rhetorical citizenship, particularly when African Americans are the subject of the study. When we do so—especially in the case of urban renewal and housing policies—different forms of rhetorical agency become visible.

BRC uncovers forms of democratic participation that incorporate place and cultural traditions that extend the concept of citizenship to previously unrecognized rhetorical strategies. According to William Keith and Paula Cossart, "Rhetorical citizenship is that set of communicative and deliberative practices that in a particular culture and political system allow citizens to enact and embody their citizenship, in contrast to practices that are merely 'talking about' politics."[50] This definition gets closer to the importance of the influence of culture on communicative and deliberative acts of citizenship. African American rhetorical and cultural traditions inform the ways in which communities resisted harmful government policies; for a minority group excluded from the halls of power, "talking" politics assumes huge importance by constituting rhetors as legitimate rhetorical actors. BRC incorporates these ways of knowing and uncovers (or recovers) acts of rhetorical agency by African Americans. Thus, BRC creates conceptual space to analyze an overlapping set of publics in which the merits of urban renewal and resident displacements are discussed, argued, and resisted.

Black Rhetorical Citizenship informs how we deploy our methodological tools as rhetorical critics. It enables *Struggle for the City* to uncover both the Black agency and Black solidarity of residents during urban renewal, ensuring that African Americans remain at the center of the dialogue of their own displacement instead of being overshadowed by those conducting the

displacement. In this way, BRC seeks to center average African American citizens in rhetorical histories, highlighting rather than marginalizing their work as complex rhetorical actors playing leading roles in the narratives of their own communities. As a methodology, BRC asks that we look beyond many of the typical representations and artifacts of rhetorical action. This means that we may have to look closer at institutional archives to uncover the Black voice. We must examine local Black newspapers to hear "the word on the street." We have to use oral histories of these traumatic events as a road map to uncover names from the past and to set the scene for important events. We have to be less interested in the machinations and pontificating of white political figures and more interested in the Black voices speaking at public hearings, organizing the community, and writing letters to the editors. We have to be less interested in highlighting the actions of the "white liberal helping the good Black folks" and more interested in how Black people recruited, accepted, and employed non-Black allies to serve the cause of Black Freedom.

BRC also draws attention to the variety of rhetorical acts of resistance that the African American community employs in the fight for full citizenship. When applied to urban renewal and housing policies during the 1950s and 1960s, BRC calls for analysis of multiple case studies, an approach that helps us to recognize and better understand how these rhetorical strategies were, fundamentally, creative acts of civic engagement heavily shaped by the dynamics of segregated spaces in the urban North. As a qualitative approach to research, multiple case studies in context, accessed across a variety of data sources,[51] allows for different analytic methods to be combined to illuminate a case from different perspectives.[52] This approach creates a framework for valuing these different perspectives; thus, this book employs various modes of analysis, including rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and public address. Because rhetoricians draw from "the past to interpret how discourse shaped the meanings of past events,"[53] my primary focus is on how the performance of rhetorical citizenship functions as resistance to local governments and urban renewal projects. Prioritizing "bottom-up" arguments from African American citizens and organizations not only allows me to compare the rhetorical strategies between African American residents in each of the sites; it also allows me to make broader arguments about African American rhetoric, such as how residents in the urban North informed the larger Civil Rights Movement.

Using BRC as a foundational concept that informs a methodological framework, *Struggle for the City* reveals several key ways that African American

communities responded to the exigency of urban renewal policies: counternarratives, placemaking, community organizing, and critical memory. These rhetorical strategies fall within the two overlapping categories of rhetorics of place and rhetorical leadership. By examining urban renewal discourse through Black newspapers, documents from Black organizations, and oral histories, we see African American residents resisting urban renewal by building a political community. We learn that citizenship is a form of resistance—indeed, a rhetorical act of survival—used by African American organizations such as the Citizens Committee for Hill District Renewal in Pittsburgh, the Northside Community Inventory Committee in Milwaukee, and the Rondo–St. Anthony Improvement Association in St. Paul.

## The Role of Citizenship in African American Rhetorical History

The greatest hope of Reconstruction (and there were many) was the notion that African Americans would become citizens in the fullest sense (not just legally) by simply amending the Constitution. But, in fact, enacting citizenship requires a complex cultural and political infrastructure, which was denied to many African Americans and which white America was in no hurry to supply. Although African Americans became "legal citizens" after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, their ethnic heritage was used to exclude them from many of the benefits of citizenship.[54] Thus, throughout American history, citizenship has been both the practice and the goal of African Americans so as to "deal with their experience of alienation in America."[55] By the twentieth century, the language of "full citizenship"—the cultural capital that white Americans automatically receive—continued to fuel the Black Freedom Movement; it was used in preparation for fighting political battles, demanding legal reforms, and resisting what the majority continued to think was the right way to do things. The federally backed urban renewal program of the 1950s and '60s was one such "right way." African Americans in Northern cities, many of whom had recently migrated from the Jim Crow South, were forced to be more civically engaged because their homes, businesses, and churches were at stake; even if they had nominal access to institutions, they needed to create and participate in their own forms of citizenship.

As it developed meaning for many in the Black Freedom Struggle, citizenship became a goal or destination to achieve. It came to signify action, freedom of movement, and protection of place/space. For Black people, citizenship is "distinct from traditional definitions of legal and political citizenship that

entail obeying laws and helping to craft them."[56] In other words, citizenship is a mode of resistance. To be an African American in the United States is to be civically engaged, to enact Black agency. There is no choice: citizenship, defined as discursive engagement with the dominant institutions, is a form of action—an organizing mechanism—and it is survival.

For many African American organizations and institutions, citizenship requires active participation that includes not only voting and deliberation but also organizing communities, providing civic education, and speaking out on issues. In other words, citizenship is a "rhetorical force," as discussed by rhetoric scholar Candice Rai, "so freighted with meaning, simply evoking it summons all of the networked webs of associations, dispositions, identities, affects, practices, and contested beliefs attached to it within our collective, public memories."[57] Citizenship is the work showing that you belong someplace and deserve equal treatment under the law. In response to urban renewal policies, African Americans were defining these beliefs about citizenship while engaging civically in contested issues with government officials.

This book, written at a time when scholars are discussing and critiquing the utility of citizenship as an analytical framework, draws attention to how important the language of citizenship is within the Black Freedom Movement.[58] While some scholars critique citizenship's reliance on oppressive colonial institutions, I maintain that a rhetorical analysis of the actions of African Americans cannot avoid the language or framework of citizenship, insofar as their world-making cannot avoid engaging the political institutions of their oppressors.[59] The language of citizenship for African Americans dates as far back as the Dred Scott decision by the US Supreme Court in 1857, where Chief Justice Roger Taney wrote: "There are two clauses in the Constitution which point directly and specifically to the negro race as a separate class of persons and show clearly that they were not regarded as a portion of the people or citizens of the Government then formed."[60] In fact, the Black Freedom Movement has often been characterized by African American activists as the right for "first-class citizenship" or "full citizenship." Famed historian Rayford Logan, in his introduction to *What the Negro Wants*, defines first-class citizenship in part as the "equal protection of the laws," "abolition of public segregation," and the "equal recognition of the dignity of the human being."[61] What this quote suggests is that citizenship from a Black perspective does not merely signal belonging to a nation-state or legal status. Rather, it is a term for freedom, humanity, liberation, and mobility. For these reasons, the language of citizenship is integral to the history of African Americans and the goals of the Black Freedom Movement.

Furthermore, activism and resistance rhetoric have also been central to notions of "full citizenship" among African Americans. Rhetoric of resistance and the rhetoric of community are staples of African American rhetoric. As Ella Forbes argues, white people prefer to see peaceful, nonviolent images of African Americans as opposed to those of self-empowerment. Giving numerous examples of powerful resistance rhetoric by African Americans in the nineteenth century, she asserts that African American rhetoric "has consistently challenged the notion of African American passivity and civility."[62] The Colored Convention Movement of the nineteenth century was indicative of Black Americans organizing and agitating for change.[63] For African Americans, both resistance rhetoric and African American rhetoric are rooted in "the rhetoric of communal deliberation, discourse, and action, oriented toward that which is good in the world."[64] Importantly, African American rhetoric recognizes the humanity in all persons and does not seek to achieve its goals through verbal or physical violence. Resistance rhetoric for African Americans in general means taking actions that benefit everyone and not just Black people. In short, for African Americans, citizenship is just as much about resisting oppressive institutions through creative forms of civic engagement as it is about negotiating or enjoying the putative benefits of these institutions.

We're perhaps most familiar with how citizenship was wielded in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma March, and the Birmingham confrontations as instruments to change existing law. The Southern civil rights leaders decided to challenge the Goliath of the nation-state to gain rights for African Americans, using the court system, marches, boycotts, and so forth to get laws passed and/or changed as well as enforced. To be clear, I am not claiming that citizenship was a rallying point for *all* Black Freedom Movements and organizations; for instance, some were challenging and refusing citizenship as a useful concept for struggle in relation to international decolonization movements. Although many of the so-called Black radical groups used a variety of means to accomplish their civic goals, we can see how members of the Black Panther Party invoked the language and actions of citizenship when, proclaiming their Second Amendment rights and citing existing state law, they stood on the California state capitol steps just before marching inside the legislative building wielding shotguns to demonstrate their opposition to an anti-gun bill.[65]

Citizenship as a concept also indicates a sense of belonging to a place and a community. For example, organizations like the Black Panther Party and other Black nationalist groups within the Black Freedom Movement used the

language of citizenship in reference to belonging to the Black community: a self-help ethos, "we belong to each other and are citizens of our community." Perhaps more germane to this study, arguments over space and place are often at the center of rhetorical histories of the Black Freedom Movement. African American residents belonged to the city, but they also felt a stronger sense of belonging to their neighborhoods, which were often organized and reinforced legally, economically, and politically by racial identity. Citizenship in this manner, while still linked to notions of the nation-state, plays a vital role in connecting members to a shared sense of community, which extends even to the wider African diaspora.

In urban environments, spaces became racialized through federal policy, social customs, local laws, and housing covenants,[66] and these racialized spaces played an "active role in the construction and organization of social life."[67] Because many urban renewal projects and policies forcefully migrated and/or restricted African Americans to carefully targeted areas, space was contested both materially and culturally. Names of neighborhoods could be invoked to indicate the race of the people who lived there. For instance, some white residents stated that they did not want their neighborhood to become a "Hill District," which was predominately African American.

Because African Americans were concentrated in and restricted to specific areas of cities, they had to build organizations and coalitions with institutions close to them. And these organizations and institutions provided places in the African American community in which members of the community could deliberate and discuss ideas and propose actions without fear of reprisal. For instance, Black churches were instrumental in the Black Freedom Struggle because they, like other Black-controlled institutions, provided safe spaces or "hush harbors" for discussions and organizing without fear of the "hegemonic gaze of whiteness."[68]

Yet this notion of place cannot be separated from movement, both of which are conceptually and materially integral to African American history. Ira Berlin notes that "six million black people—about fifteen times the number of the original African transit—fled the South for the cities of the North making urban wage workers out of the sharecroppers and once again reconstructing black life in the United States."[69] Here, Berlin emphasizes how movement alternates with a sense of place, a tension captured in Black Atlantic scholar Paul Gilroy's phrase "routes and roots."[70] Through the Great Migration, African Americans moved into Black neighborhoods in the North and were either fighting to save these places, resisting forced relocation, or arguing to move freely to anywhere in the city that they could afford. Thus, place and

movement are entwined, overlapping, circulating, engaging, and renewing within the African American struggle for "full citizenship" and the language of urban renewal. This tension between space, place, and race within the concept of citizenship reveals why it is necessary for further examination.

## Rhetorics of Resistance in the "Promised Land"

*Struggle for the City* advances a narrative that the community fight against urban renewal was an important feature of the Black Freedom Movement in the urban North. This project shifts between chronological and conceptual development by highlighting when the three communities first became aware of urban renewal and the rhetorical strategies created in response. It identifies key features of urban renewal discourse by tracing the history of urban renewal alongside distinct rhetorical actions, including the actions of resistance taken by African American residents—counternarratives, placemaking, distribution of agency, and critical memory. Specific examples of these rhetorical actions are situated in chapters that focus on a single city—Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, or St. Paul. Although these three Black communities faced similar threats, they each handled them in slightly different ways because of the size, resources, and local histories within these places.

Chapter 1 provides the historical background of urban renewal policies and actions in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I explore how citizenship performance creates power through rhetorics of place. First, as the imminent destruction of the Lower Hill became apparent, counternarratives of place that resisted the dominant narrative of blighted neighborhoods began to appear in the African American newspapers. These narratives challenged the existing master narrative of urban renewal history in Pittsburgh. Second, this chapter shows how residents employed a materialist rhetoric of place by producing a map that depicted their vision of a renewed and revitalized neighborhood that ran counter to the city's plans. In the final section, I discuss how Pittsburgh's Freedom Corner spoke symbolically and materially as a "place in protest."[71]

Chapter 2 explores how African American residents in St. Paul, Minnesota, organized in response and resistance to the dominant narrative of blighted neighborhoods and asserted new visions for their communities. This chapter also explores how race is implicated in the contested spaces and places of urban renewal policies. I argue that the Davis home on Rondo Avenue and his subsequent refusal to leave are illustrative of how urban

African American neighborhoods became racialized "rhetorical spaces" that informed the deliberative process and rhetorical actions taken for the survival of the community.

Chapter 3 examines the ways African American residents and organizations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, built partnerships with nearby academic institutions to increase their rhetorical agency to impact city officials in urban renewal discussions. African American residents of Milwaukee created leadership seminars in part as a rhetorical strategy to resist urban renewal by establishing the conditions for the distribution of agency within the Milwaukee African American community. By building relationships with individuals who had prominent roles in the Catholic Church, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and Marquette University, the African American community created coalitions that provided resources: speakers who assisted the residents to shape discussions of their community, and space to learn about urban renewal policies and thus develop strategies to resist them.

Chapter 4 articulates a theory of critical memory and how the remembrance of urban renewal loss informs the present and shapes the future in Pittsburgh, St. Paul, and Milwaukee. This chapter outlines ways in which African American communities memorialized lost communities through material rhetorics. It concludes with a discussion on how sites of urban renewal resistance inform current social movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

The book concludes with thinking about the ways in which future rhetorical scholarship on public policy decisions should consider the ideas of agency within cultural rhetorics. It discusses how African American residents troubled, disrupted, and at times influenced the local government's claims for what was best for their city, which illuminates the powerful role cultural rhetorical traditions serve in social movements, rhetorical theory, and civic engagement.