

Episode 2 final

[00:00:00] **Eric Hollaway (reading Earl Lewis):** On the stoops, in the alleys and along the lanes, children played, adults talked and folks gathered. If visitors listened closely, they might have heard the worldly -wise soliloquys of men who sat on front stoops and back porches, and mused about the world's problems. No doubt they could have smelled the pleasant sweetness of a freshly baked sweet potato pie or the salty smell of seasoned collard greens. (sounds of crickets chirping, voices conversing and yelling on the street, distant music, and a slow nostalgic swell of major chords)

[00:00:35] **Adrian:** Through the center of Norfolk runs Church Street. In the early 20th century, Church Street was the heart of Black Norfolk. In his first book, *In Their Own Interests*, historian Earl Lewis describes the Church Street corridor.

[00:00:50] **Eric Hollaway (reading Earl Lewis):** In this era, during hot and humid summer months, windows were thrown open all around. Residents used these opportunities to engage their [00:01:00] neighbors in these public spaces. The individual became one with the community. Such gatherings wrote the history of the people as they struggled to be included in a rapidly changing and industrializing economy. (background sounds fade out)

[00:01:14] **Alease Balmar Brickers:** (tape hiss) The Black people, on Easter Sunday, they would get dressed and they'd walk down Church Street and the white people would dress up and ride down Church Street to see the black people. Cause honey, they were *dressed* to go to church. (laughing) Then, when they get out church, they walk down Church Street and show their Easter. (end of tape hiss)

[00:01:40] **Adrian:** That was Alease Balmar Brickers, a lifelong Norfolk resident and activist from a 1991 interview. In the 1800s and early 1900s, Church Street was on the outskirts of the city and therefore more affordable. It was also cheaper because it was so [00:02:00] swampy and flood prone. Perhaps most influentially, racist law and culture dictated that Church Street was the only area that Black owned businesses were allowed to be. (snappy background music)

Throughout the beginning of the 20th century, the city of Norfolk failed to invest in solid infrastructure in Black neighborhoods like Church Street. In the thirties, more than half of Black renters lacked indoor plumbing, and many

families would share restroom facilities. Lack of accessible housing for Black people, combined with the flood of Black rural refugees now moving into Norfolk led to seriously crowded conditions. And a lot of people crowded together, surrounded by stagnant water, without sanitation facilities and nowhere else to go.... In 1920, 1 in 20 white babies died. One in six [00:03:00] black babies. Those death tolls were products of the overcrowding stagnant water and frequent flooding, which led to disease in these neighborhoods.

In fact, the Church Street area has historically seen some of the worst of Norfolk's recurring flooding. This is from a 1942 account in the Norfolk Journal and Guide, a Black newspaper and one of the most widely read news sources in the country, at the time.

[00:03:30] **Barbara Faison (reading the Journal and Guide):** (tape hiss) In the uptown section, certain parts of Church Street took on a river like appearance. The unpaved sidewalks in most of the colored districts became virtual mud banks.

[00:03:41] **Adrian:** Church Street still floods terribly. But there are citywide flood mitigation efforts underway. In this episode, we'll hear about the Vision 2100 plan, a climate resiliency document that builds on and replicates historically racist housing patterns of the Norfolk housing market. (building rhythmic background music) [00:04:00]

You're listening to Waiting Between Two Titans from the Repair Lab. I'm Adrian Wood. Norfolk passed its first municipal segregation law in 1914, and then they kept enforcing it-- even after the US Supreme Court struck down racial zoning laws three years later. At the same time, banks denied loans to Black families, if they wanted to buy a home in a white area. Realtors wouldn't show Black families homes in white areas. In the thirties, for middle class Black families seeking healthier, safer, more dignified housing, options were limited. Black families with means weren't trying to flee their neighborhoods. Matter of fact, they often had strong nurturing community connections there, but enforced segregation prevented them from improving living conditions in those places.

[00:04:59] **Paul Riddick:** I'm [00:05:00] 74 years old and have lived here my entire life. Anybody ask me about living in Norfolk? My response is that I've only lived where white folks have allowed me to.

[00:05:16] **Adrian:** That's city council member Paul Riddick. He grew up in Norfolk at a time when the city government was expanding city limits through annexation reaching North and East. Annexations often left Black

neighborhoods just on the outskirts of city limits and without the benefits of inclusion in the city, like the premise of police protection. Or city sewage treatment. One of those neighborhoods was Coronado, a subdivision in what is now the geographic center of Norfolk. In the mid 1950s, Coronado was an in-between zone racially, wedged between Norview, a Black neighborhood, and Chesapeake Gardens, a white neighborhood.

[00:05:58] **Paul Riddick:** When Blacks [00:06:00] started moving into Chesapeake Gardens, you're talking about being four miles from whites. So whites started moving out of Coronado.

[00:06:10] **Adrian:** (background music growing in tension) There was a rumor that a white homeowner had sold a home in Coronado to a Black buyer as revenge on neighbors they'd had a falling out with. That rumor is the context in which the first Black family moved into Coronado. In late summer 1955, (eerie scary music)

[00:06:28] **Paul Riddick:** they actually burned a house down that belonged to Blacks.

[00:06:36] **Adrian:** The county police reported that they were investigating. No arrests were made. Only a few weeks later, there was an explosion at the house of Mr. And Mrs. Skinner on their first night in their new house in Coronado. The Journal and Guide reported:

[00:06:52] **Eric Hollaway (reading the Journal and Guide):** Two nights before, the house had been flooded by vandals who ripped out plumbing in the vacant property. But that, [00:07:00] evidently, was not enough to convince the Skinners that being human beings was not qualification enough to guarantee them the measure of security that home ownership brings.

[00:07:11] **Adrian:** It was an ugly scene. There were white mobs in the yard yelling at the couple and berating them as they went in and out of their new home. One year later, there was another house bombing in Coronado. In response, the Norfolk County sheriff told the Black homeowners there just to "face the facts" that they "weren't wanted" in Coronado. Meanwhile, Black residents of Coronado found more direct ways to protect themselves.

[00:07:43] **Paul Riddick:** In a lot of instances, Black men in the community had to sit on their front porch with shotguns to keep whites from, uh, you know, being disruptive.

[00:07:56] **Adrian:** The white Coronado residents' fear of Black [00:08:00] people merged with their fear of economic loss. They thought their property value would go down if they had Black neighbors. This fear was staked in truth. Property values did tend to be lower in neighborhoods with more people of color and immigrants living in them-- because the housing market was designed that way.

[00:08:18] **Johnny Finn:** Redlining has come to stand in for kind of a whole host of discriminatory housing policies and practices, policies related to public housing, discriminatory practices of banks, of realtors.

[00:08:34] **Adrian:** Johnny Finn is a Professor of Geography and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology at Christopher Newport University. (transitional piano-themed beat-based music)

Redlining originated during the Great Depression as part of the New Deal. President Franklin Roosevelt created the Homeowner's Loan Corporation, or HOLC, in 1933 to save homes in danger of foreclosure. HOLC sent out [00:09:00] a survey to cities all over the country to rate and map neighborhoods. The information to make the maps was supplied by individuals working in private real estate industry. Neighborhoods got rated by those individuals according to four categories, based on their investment worthiness: A, B, C, and D.

Green, A rated neighborhoods were the wealthiest and the whitest, but if the area was maxed out in terms of home value, sometimes they get a B. Blue on the map, B rated areas were still mostly white. There was a low chance of an immigrant or a person of color moving in, so they got a higher rating compared to the C rated neighborhoods, which were yellow. They bordered Black neighborhoods and were partially integrated, so they were rated lower. Probably they included some non-Black people of color. D-rated neighborhoods were the highest concentration of African Americans, [00:10:00] as well as nonBlack immigrants of color and Jewish people. On the map, these areas were red.

HOLC maps were not public, but the value judgements they expressed reflected the racist, classist beliefs of the local real estate industry. They existed as paper maps, but also internal maps alive in the minds of the realtors and banks and public officials in Norfolk.

[00:10:24] **Johnny Finn:** Overwhelmingly, Black neighborhoods were redlined and white neighborhoods were not. In the case of Norfolk, every single majority Black neighborhood in that entire region was redlined.

[00:10:35] **Adrian:** HOLC was short-lived. It ended before World War II started. After World War II, we see the growth of the middle class through initiatives like the GI Bill. But those opportunities were mostly for white families, who reaped all the benefits of government investment. The Federal Housing Administration, or FHA, was established in 1934 to build a new foundation for the [00:11:00] housing market after the crash. The FHA worked hand in hand with HOLC, but had a much longer lifespan. The FHA internalized the racist logic of the real estate industry and made it federal policy through its home mortgage program. They actually had their own redlining maps that the White House had destroyed decades ago.

By mid-century, the momentum of segregation was impossible to stop. Black people were unlikely to get approved for federally insured mortgages through the bank in their own neighborhoods or elsewhere, and there were massive benefits that came along with those loans that only white people could access. The legacy of the FHA's home mortgage program followed the trajectory of the HOLC redlining maps in shaping neighborhoods along racial lines in patterns that still persist.

You can see it in the data that Johnny showed me [00:12:00] on race and home ownership that he gathered from the 2020 census.

[00:12:04] **Johnny Finn:** Like, I don't know how, how much of a stats person you are.

[00:12:07] **Adrian:** Um, but I, uh, I have two degrees in art , so, (laughing)

[00:12:11] **Johnny Finn:** (laughing) so not much stats. So what you're seeing here is on the, on the X-axis, (fading out)

over here and of the same income that's 100% Black over there, the Black neighborhood's home values will be \$70,000 lower than the white neighborhoods.

[00:12:31] **Adrian:** Redlining essentially guaranteed that a neighborhood would not be invested in by the federal government, and that's what the white Coronado residents wanted to avoid. For those neighborhoods that did get invested in by the federal government, home values grew pretty steadily. Without that investment, an African American family like the Skinners in Coronado would have trouble building intergenerational wealth through home equity. For the Black [00:13:00] people and immigrants who were subject to the violence of racist disinvestment through redlining, life took a certain shape.

[00:13:08] **Cassandra Newby-Alexander:** African American communities, then, were put in harm's way because a lot of the cities were rezoning areas to place, dumping grounds, industrialized areas, and so forth, right in the black communities.

That's Professor Cassandra Newby-Alexander.

[00:13:28] **Adrian:** Because people in red lined neighborhoods didn't get that investment from the government, that money, the buildings and infrastructure in those neighborhoods got run down. Municipalities started putting harmful stuff in those places. Incinerators, garbage dumps, highways.

[00:13:48] **Cassandra Newby-Alexander:** I grew up in a community in which we had two major city dumps, one right smack in the middle of my neighborhood. This was a middle class neighborhood, not talking about (little laugh) [00:14:00] a government housing, talking about private ownership, and then to get to my school, I had to pass by another dump, and there was no support to the African American homeowners who had to constantly fight against the vermin trying to come into. Into their homes because the city put two dumping grounds right there within their living space.

[00:14:26] **Adrian:** This isn't just about the structures people live in or how nice your house is, or whether there's rats in your neighborhood. This is about decisions that determine people's ability to continue to live healthy, dignified lives.

[00:14:43] **Cassandra Newby-Alexander:** When you're talking about the legislating, the government legislating of inequality from the, the city, the state, and the national level, there was an all out assault on [00:15:00] African Americans in the 20th century.

[00:15:03] **Adrian:** Even with the harm that redlining left behind, african Americans in Norfolk still created and maintained important social organizations, businesses, and culture.

[00:15:15] **Cassandra Newby-Alexander:** But then this is where the perseverance comes in. You can do all kinds of stuff. But I'm still going to rise. Because you still see African Americans building communities. You see even more developers emerging. You see a success rate of African Americans becoming professionals. You see Norfolk State University come into being.

You see the continuation of advancement. So even with all of the threats and the challenges and the-- you still see, even with that, you see success. Imagine if you didn't have all of that, what could have been achieved and what the city [00:16:00] lost as a result of too much energy being put into trying to subvert and subjugate.

[00:16:08] **Adrian:** Black people in Norfolk didn't just let harm happen to each other either. There were multiple strands of leadership in different Black communities in Norfolk advocating for different strategies to advance social progress. Black women have historically taken the lead in organizing in Norfolk.

[00:16:26] **Cassandra Newby-Alexander:** You had a cadre of Black women who were more highly educated than any of the others, who were making, in some cases, three times what they were making. And yet these women helped to organize serious efforts against the atrocities that they were experiencing. Many of them helped to create, in 1908. The Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Y W C A. They helped to create an old folks home called the Leaky Old Folks Home. They helped to [00:17:00] create the King's Daughter's Children's Hospital for African American children.

[00:17:05] **Adrian:** There was also Alene Black, who challenged the racist, misogynist pay scale for teachers in Norfolk schools. And Laura Titus, who co-founded the Phyllis Wheatley Y W C A. Notable in this tradition is the United Order of Tents, the oldest benefit society for Black women in the history of the US. It was founded in Norfolk in 1867 by Annetta M. Lane, and it's still around and they do all the things. Care for the sick and elderly, help those in need. Bury the dead, provide loans to members who were refused by banks.

Efforts like these were modes of survival for Black residents of Norfolk, and they were crucial. But they weren't structural interventions in a foundationally racist system like the real estate market. But the legacy of mutual [00:18:00] aid and deep kinship and communality is resilient in Norfolk. Kim Sudderth, 2022 Practitioner in Residence for the Repair Lab and Norfolk community leader told me about what this means to her in the Berkley neighborhood.

[00:18:17] **Kim Sudderth:** When I moved to Berkley I instantly felt community. Everybody looks like me. (gentle swells of subtle major chords in the background) That November was my first Thanksgiving dinner. And for free, hundreds of people are fed. And I mean, it's wall to wall Black people. And people are honored. There's a band. There's some spoken word. It's a whole vibe. And I remember going home and I'm in the driveway and I just stopped

and I was like, that's the Blackest thing I've ever done in my life. And I never want it to end.

[00:18:56] **Adrian:** Berkley is on the south side of Norfolk, [00:19:00] separated from the city's mainland by the mile wide Elizabeth River. It's on relatively high ground compared to the mainland. But even still, Berkley residents are dealing with the effects of sea level rise. But in Berkley, those effects don't necessarily look like flooding.

[00:19:19] **Kim Sudderth:** Yeah, all of Berkeley is in that red lining. "Good pride of home ownership is evidenced in the maintenance of lawns and shrubbery. The neighborhood is not adversely affected by the adjacent negro sections. (bahahahahaha)

[00:19:33] **Adrian:** Kim is reading from the 1939 HOLC map that redlined Berkley.

[00:19:38] **Kim Sudderth:** "0% Negro?" Okay so it wasn't Black just yet. But I think it's interesting, they don't say what is a hundred percent of? (forced laugh) It's just "0% negro ." (exclaiminge) Oh, because white's the standard! (hurt laughing)

[00:19:57] **Adrian:** Unlike when that map was [00:20:00] made back in 1939, today Berkley is 98% black. (clappy background musice) In the early 1940s, Berkley got redlined due to being quote unquote, the poorest class of whites, in the map maker's terms. The area was partially industrialized due to the ship repair yards that employed most of the residents. There were a few dumps. The roads were poorly maintained. So, not desirable. Home values dropped. Over a few decades, the white Berkley residents left and middle class Black families moved in. Today, Berkley is a very close knit neighborhood, full of character, very historic.

[00:20:40] **Kim Sudderth:** I love my house . I can't wait for you to come see it. It's 122 years old and it has so much personality.

[00:20:51] **Adrian:** (gentle major chords in background) There are grand three story houses with wraparound porches and bay windows. Many of them are [00:21:00] over a hundred years old. But now a lot of them sit empty.

[00:21:06] **Kim Sudderth:** Grandma lived in Berkley. She was born and raised. Raised her children, maybe even grandchildren. And once the people kind of, you know, get established, first thing they wanna do, move outta Berkley. 'I

wanna get out the hood .' And grandma's house, maybe it wasn't kept up. Obviously it's showing its age.

[00:21:26] **Adrian:** These homes have survived hurricanes and nor Easterns that have torn up lower parts of the city. Being on relatively higher ground means they're now ripe for renovation, to then be sold at higher prices to affluent buyers who are being chased from the waterfront by sea level rise.

[00:21:44] **Kim Sudderth:** It's the very definition of gentrification. What you will see at most major intersections are those signs that say "we buy ugly houses." Well, what I wanna say is, 1- 800- don't () sell grandma's house! (Ha)

[00:21:59] **Adrian:** This [00:22:00] process of climate change -accelerated gentrification is being stewarded by the same forces that engineered neighborhoods through redlining: the real estate market, working hand in hand with the city government.

When it comes to housing and flooding in Norfolk, because of historical redlining and racist housing policies, Black neighborhoods tend to be appraised at lower values, which makes those places more appealing for flood resistant redevelopment plans. Vision 2100 is a document the city put out that envisions a flood resistant Norfolk.

[00:22:40] **Andria McClellan:** The Vision 2100 really addresses where we see the city of Norfolk and the opportunities when we get to the turn of the century. Where should we be thinking about planning now for the future?

[00:22:54] **Adrian:** City Council Member Andria McClellan was on the Norfolk Planning Commission when this project [00:23:00] started in 2015. Much like the HOLC Maps of the 1930s, Vision 2100 imagines where wealth will be accumulated in the city of Norfolk, 78 years into the future, incorporating a map with coastlines adjusted for sea level rise.

[00:23:17] **Andria McClellan:** What you see is a lot more emphasis and opportunity inland, where there has been a lot of disinvestment, or underinvestment I should say. So that is actually, I think, a real positive thing.

[00:23:30] **Adrian:** But guess who lives in those areas where there has been a lot of disinvestment and underinvestment? Guess who will have to "sell grandma's house" to make room for these new inland opportunities?

[00:23:43] **Jackie Hope Glass:** I just saw it as a roadmap to start. Um, Changing the fabrics of neighborhoods.

[00:23:49] **Adrian:** Jackie Glass represents part of Norfolk in Virginia's 89th House district in the General Assembly.

[00:23:56] **Jackie Hope Glass:** All of us know with the Vision 2100, you know, these are the, the biggest [00:24:00] opportunity places. So folks are starting to move to those places. You see it now.

[00:24:04] **Johnny Finn:** I would like to think that it's not intentional, but what I see in Vision 2100 is a plan for climate gentrification. It's investing climate resiliency in majority white areas in the city, and setting up policies and incentives to move people into the historically disinvested areas.

That's Johnny Finn, again. (background music) Vision 2100, like the redlining map, represents the land of Norfolk in four categories. A, B, C, and D have been replaced with yellow, green, purple, and red. The HOLC Maps and Vision 2100 all point out where to invest in work, home, and play, and where to move away from.

Vision 2100 has visioned future wealth accumulation springboarding off the discriminatory housing patterns baked into the city through redlining and [00:25:00] other racist policies. This plays out throughout the four color coded categories.

[00:25:06] **Kim Sudderth:** Yellow, you guys are screwed.

[00:25:08] **Johnny Finn:** The yellow area on the map is highly disproportionately white. The population of the city of Norfolk is 55 or 58% white. And the yellow areas, it's closer to 75% white.

[00:25:21] **Adrian:** In the yellow zones, there are a disproportionate number of white residents in fancy beachside homes who are now eyeing previously disinvested, previously redlined areas. Like Berkley. The residential part of Berkley is purple on the Vision 2100 map.

[00:25:43] **Johnny Finn:** African American population is overrepresented compared to the city total in the purple and green areas. When these neighborhoods have been now identified as less flood-prone, that all the folks from the coasts are gonna have to be fleeing into these neighborhoods.

[00:25:58] **Kim Sudderth:** The purple is where you need to go. [00:26:00] It's going to be inexpensive and there's gonna be less flooding. The green, maybe it floods a little bit more than over in the purple, but you know it, it's gonna be dry and it's probably gonna be relatively cheap.

[00:26:14] **Adrian:** That means that those areas on the Vision 2100 map that are purple and green, those Black neighborhoods, many of which were previously redlined, are now-- for the first time-- prime real estate for developers. In other words, while redlining maps led to white people bombing, avoiding, or fleeing areas where Black people lived, the Vision 2100 map is encouraging white people to flood into Black neighborhoods. Just like it has for a century, the city of Norfolk is using maps to determine who's allowed to live where.

[00:26:56] **Kim Sudderth:** The red is where it's gonna be protected.

[00:26:58] **Johnny Finn:** In the red [00:27:00] zone, that's the only area where racially, the population of the zone is proportional to the population of the city. Basically, the city of Norfolk is about 60%, a little less than 60% white, about 40% Black. That red zone covers Church Street... (flashback to beginning of episode -- echoes of crickets, Alease Balmar Brickers's voice) ... the same area that was one of the first hubs for Black community in Norfolk. (clappy background music with piano theme)

These days, Church Street runs right next to three public housing communities that are 95% African American. Collectively, these communities are called the St. Paul's quadrant. They're squarely in the sites of redevelopment catalyzed by Vision 2100.

What they're doing though, with St. Paul's, is they're relocating almost a third of the African American population within that red zone. With that removal of Black population from that area, the red zone becomes, [00:28:00] compared to the city, much whiter. Disproportionately white.

And that's where they're pushing most of the economic resources, the climate resiliency resources, uh, where they're building sea walls and pump stations and all of this. This is becoming whiter.

Next time on *Wading Between Two Titans*: disinvestment paves the way for redevelopment.

[00:28:21] **Mr. Vernell:** I can't believe all this gone. I ain't been there for so long. I ain't know all these houses gone, man! Tear'n'em down!

[00:28:28] **Adrian:** Redevelopment leads to gentrification.

[00:28:31] **Vincent Hodges:** Water is taking care of there at the rate of convenient displacement. Water's taken care of at the speed of redevelopment.

[00:28:39] **Adrian:** And gentrification leads to displacement.

[00:28:41] **Johnny Finn:** Like if I wanted to gentrify an area, this is how I would do it.

[00:28:46] **Adrian:** Find us online at twotitans.org or follow us on Twitter-- for now-- for updates [@therepairlab](https://twitter.com/therepairlab) . This episode [00:29:00] was written, recorded, produced, edited, mixed, mastered, and hosted by me, Adrian Wood. Show art by Adrian Wood. Story editing by Kelly Jones. Music by sugarlift. Consultation and visioning with 2022 Practitioner in Residence Kim Sudderth. The Journal and Guide was voiced by Barbara Faison. The selection from In Their Own Interests by Earl Lewis was voiced by Eric Hollaway. Alease Balmar Brickers's interview is from Duke University's Behind The Veil Oral History Project. Thanks to the Repair Lab. Co-directors are Kimberly Fields, Andrew Kahrl, Sarah Milov, and Sally Pusede.

Featuring original research on the events in Coronado by Post-doctoral Research Associate Jonna Yarrington and the Repair Lab's Environmental Justice Policy Clinic: Allanah Bell, SG Archer Coyle, Allison Lu, Gabrielle Rosario, Sydney [00:30:00] Stevens, and Gabby Vargas. With support from Music Theory Studios in downtown Norfolk, W T J U, the UVA Race, Religion and Democracy Lab, and the Karsh Institute of Democracy.

Thanks for listening.