

US House of Representatives
Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity
Chaired by The Honorable Maxine Waters

**“The Use of Federal Housing and Economic Development Funds in St. Louis:
From Team Four into the Future”**

I would like to thank Congressman Lacy Clay for the invitation to participate in this important hearing and for the Subcommittee’s interest in one of the greatest travesties this city has exacted upon its citizens than I have ever seen. It is one that not only deserves a critical exploration and thorough assessment nearly 35 years later but it demands an array of remedies for the hemorrhaging that is still occurring today.

My name is Jamala Rogers. I have been a community organizer for forty years. I am currently chairperson of the Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) that I helped to found in 1980 for the purpose of organizing African-Americans around issues that affect our quality of life. Some of our members were also involved in a number of predecessor organizations including the Ad Hoc Committee Against Team Four Projections and the Coalition Against the Team Four Plan. As a result, files on the struggle against the implementation of the Team Four Plan are part of the OBS archives.

My formal training is in education and youth development. I have a BA in education and English and a MA in education and curriculum development. I have served in a number of capacities in youth services and programs. In 1993, I was appointed by Mayor Freeman Bosley, Jr. to establish the Office of Youth Development for the City of St. Louis. I continued to serve as Commissioner of Youth under Mayors Clarence Harmon and Francis Slay. My responsibility was to look at the holistic development of the City’s children and youth and to ensure that the environments where they lived, played, went to school and worked were stable, safe and secure. That was—and still remains—a challenge for children, who are black and poor and their families.

To fully understand the genesis of a Team Four Plan, we must know the social, political and economic landscape of that period. The Kerner Report, which turned 40 years old this year, documented the incendiary conditions leading to the rebellions in black communities from 1965-1967. This included chronic poverty, police violence, high unemployment, poor schools, and lack of access to health care aggravated by racism. It was the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King that lit the fuse on April 4, 1968 and saw the nation’s urban centers go up in smoke. The human spirit can only take so much.

The Kerner Report was regarded by many as a genuine investigation by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, affirming the life situations of the black, brown and white masses. The Kerner Commission concluded that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” However, it was really intended to be a national wake-up call to middle class and wealthy white urban dwellers. The sweeping recommendations of federal initiatives such as the creation of jobs, the construction of decent housing and the removal of discriminatory barriers to

economic mobility were buried in the graveyard of opportunity when a conservative white backlash whisked Richard Nixon into the US presidency.

The hidden message of the Kerner Report concluded that poverty and hopelessness were too entrenched in America's ghettos, that future rebellions were inevitable and destined to be even more devastating and deadly. There was also the fear of exploding black populations which threatened the status quo and consolidation of political power in the hands of the white elite. The underlying strategy was to move large sections of black people out of the city's core. These urban experiments came wrapped in program names that implied rejuvenation and hope but not for a forgotten people. Instead, housing theories such as mobility and spatial deconcentration began take on a less ominous character in the development of urban plans.

In 1968, Bernard Weissbourd wrote a paper entitled *An Urban Strategy* which outlined the moving blacks out of the city through various incentives, dispersing them throughout outlying municipalities until they represented only one fourth of the total population. On cue, other cities across the nation quickly developed similar urban development plans. Waiting in the shadows were a slew of urban planners, consultants and developers eager to satisfy the bidding of the City Fathers.

Chicago had Weissbourd; St. Louis had Team Four, Inc. The Team Four Plan was designed in a shroud of secrecy. Its existence was initially denied and housing activists and civil rights advocates were accused of being conspiracy theorists. Mayor John Poelker refused to make the plan public so HUD was finally forced to cough up the plan under the Freedom of Information Act. When the plan was finally exposed and publicly dissected, it also contained the basic elements of mobility, disinvestment and neglect of the black community.

The stage was set for Team Four in 1973 with the creation of the Land Reutilization Authority by Mayor Alfonzo Cervantes. That same year, Aldermen Richard Gephardt and John Roach passed bills that would preserve 74,000 buildings on the city's South Side and destroy 70,000 on the City's predominantly African-American North Side. Ironically, Roach would be appointed executive director of the newly formed Community Development Agency where he intensified efforts to de-stabilize and destroy the North Side. Gephardt went on to further his political ambitions as the US Representative of the 2nd Congressional District.

Things were really buzzing right about now. Also in 1973, the City of St. Louis began formal plans for its comprehensive plan. In 1974, the Community Development Agency was established to replace the City Plan Commission and Team Four, Inc. was contracted to do a study of the city and make recommendations for the implementation of a comprehensive plan. Their report, *Citywide Implementation Strategies: The Draft Comprehensive Plan*, was issued on March 31, 1975.

The plan called for the city to be divided into three area types. Conservation identified the area as worthy of continued public and private investment, public services, strict code enforcement and other benefits needed to revitalize it. Redevelopment applied to the areas between progress and decay where limited, but concentrated, investments would be made and outcomes closely monitored. Depletion referred to areas where investment should not be encouraged, where city services would be diminished and codes selectively enforced so as to add to the City's land bank, the Land Reutilization

Authority. LRA is the City's largest landholder (some would say slum landlord) and does less land banking than land holding.

The response to the Team Four Plan was swift and visceral. Outrage and condemnation followed.

The Black newspapers criticized the plan. The St. Louis American called it a "secret plan to rip off the poor blacks again...and drop them further in the poverty bag."

Ernest Calloway, assistant professor of urban affairs at St. Louis University, denounced the Team Four Plan as perpetuation of the city's racial segregation of two cities—"the black ghetto and the white sanctuary." Calloway was also a member of the city's Community Development Commission and maintained the plan was a sophisticated version of previous "black containment syndrome."

Organized response to the plan came in the form of at least two groups. One was the Coalition Against Team Four and the other was the Ad Hoc Committee Against Team Four. They included various black elected officials, civic leaders, community organizations and concerned citizens. As the public face of the Team Four Plan, John Roach quickly became the target of the black community's wrath.

What were the damaging effects of the Team Four Plan? They were physical, emotional, psychological, cultural, economic and political.

Redlining, foreclosures, landlord-induced arson for collected insurance claims, eminent domain and a host of other disinvestment tools led to not just single or multi family housing deterioration or abandonment but in some cases, entire city blocks were grim examples of benign neglect. Vital businesses, such as major grocery stores, began to leave as the cost of doing business became too high.

The Ville is one neighborhood which stands out as being particularly hard hit by Team Four. Once the celebrated enclave of the black middle class, it also contained Sumner High School and the crown jewel of the entire black community, Homer G. Phillips Hospital. The hospital was world renowned as a teaching facility and for its superior medical services. Duplicity between local and federal governments led to the demise of Homer G as it was affectionately called and in the wake of the Team Four depletion strategy, the hospital was closed in 1979. For several years, organized protests and negotiations took place to reopen the hospital but to no avail. It was not fully utilized for many years until it was transformed into a senior citizen residence by black developers William Thomas and his daughter Sharon Robnett in 2003.

City Hospital #1 and other health clinics eventually received the proverbial ax. City Hospital was renovated and turned into high-priced condominiums.

During the initial phase of Team Four, the city's depopulation accelerated and both black and white middle-class citizens took flight. St. Louis reached its peak population in 1950 at 856,796 according to the US Census Bureau. Its population saw its worst decline during 1970-1980 when Team Four was in full throttle. Our current population is half that of 1960. That has perilous implications for federal and state funding as well as redistricting.

Social outlets and recreation centers are rarities for youth or their families. Young people end up in unsupervised, unsafe or unhealthy places in their absences. It has been sufficiently documented that juvenile crime is highest during the after-school hours yet we still have made no provision for our children to have safe fun, educational enrichment and physical exercise.

For residents determined to stay or unable to move, it is a continuous struggle to maintain one's property and one's pride in community. Regularly passing by boarded up buildings, burnt out shells and derelict lots can be demoralizing. It was ripe for the crack cocaine epidemic and the crime wave that hit us in the mid-1970s. Much of the North Side never recovered and the blight continues. Abandoned buildings became drug dens, inferior housing for the homeless and inviting places for all types of crimes. Police response and protection are unpredictable.

Most unfortunate have been the St. Louis Board of Education's closing of schools allegedly due to declining enrollment. When schools close and there's no immediate plan for development, neighborhoods must tolerate these over-sized eye sores standing tall and defiant for a very long time.

Racial segregation and isolation give way to internalized oppression and self-hate. The collective psyche of the African-American community has been negatively impacted and the inability to bring significant changes to our quality of life is disempowering. Although St. Louis has endured the same conditions detailed in the Kerner Report, the black community's anger and frustration never boiled over as it had in other urban cities. But for how long can we grin and bear it?

The vestiges of racism and poverty coupled with the lack of political will and public investment persists in 2008. The Team Four Plan was never stopped in spite of our best efforts; it was only forced to alter its course and timeline once exposed.

The current dismantling of the St. Louis Public Schools is a continuation of the Team Four Plan where our children have been targeted for failure and numbered for residency in the prison industrial complex. Obvious Conservation areas are Downtown, and the Central West End where millions of dollars and TIFs have gone into the design and creation of livable spaces for mainly middle and upper class whites.

I would like to make several recommendations to the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity in the hopes that it will lead to a fuller discussion about Team Four and that will bring a crippled community off its knees. It is difficult to see our government as an advocate or friend given the kind of blood that has flowed between us.

I recommend the following:

1. That the CDA budget be reviewed to ascertain its proper use of funds and to determine budgetary shifts that will better support the city's development;
2. That funds from CDA be used to fully research the damage of the Team Four Plan on the African-American community and to outline specific remedies;
3. That CDA and its cohort agencies be used as a resource to the black alderpeople, engaging them in workshops on land use and urban planning, helping to identify additional funding for their respective ward planning, etc.;
4. That code violations and the use of eminent domain in the Depletion area be reviewed for fairness and necessity;

5. That the former and current city plans be reviewed to determine if they continue the blatant discriminatory policies and practices of Team Four;
6. That the city engage in a truly comprehensive planning process with its citizens to plan a city that reflects its rich diversity, culture and history;
7. That the city makes periodic reports on the progress of the plan's implementation including a financial report.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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