



King-Lincoln A Freeway Divides

Historical Context and Overview

By the 1950s and 1960s, the King-Lincoln neighborhood was changing. With the enactment of civil rights legislation that outlawed segregation in public areas and accommodations, the hotels, theaters, and jazz clubs which had served as venues for African American musicians were no longer the only places they could play. In addition, African-American doctors, teachers, dentists, and prominent families had enough money to be able to take advantage of new opportunities in housing.

The post-World War II move to the suburbs was not limited to white families. Many black families moved to the new area of Berwick or Teakwood Heights near Ohio Dominican. The East Gate neighborhood, off Nelson Road, turned from white to black within a few months. Some neighborhoods, like Berwick, remained integrated while others did not. New housing opportunities also emerged in the Whitehall area, which benefited from the nearby location of the Defense Supply Center Columbus (present name). By World War II, the center was a major supplier of weapons with a workforce of more than 10,000 civilians. Just as in early years when people chose to live near where they worked, new opportunities were drawing families from the King-Lincoln neighborhood, and government jobs were often more equal opportunity. As families moved to new opportunities, shops and business closed in King-Lincoln. The spiral continued—loss of businesses convinced more families to move.

One of the most significant changes to the neighborhood came with the Federal Highway Act. Signed into law by President Eisenhower in 1956, it called for massive highway construction across the United States. In Columbus, I-70 and I-71, crossed right at the door of King-Lincoln. The freeway further isolated the community though there are now proposals to create more of a visual connection along Long Street to encourage pedestrian traffic and make the entrance into King Lincoln more vibrant.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies

Grade 3, Content Statement 3: Local communities change over time.

Grade 8, Content Statement 15: The movement of people, products, and ideas resulted in new patterns of settlement and land use that influenced the political and economic development of the United States.

Grade 8, Content Statement 22: Choices made by individuals, businesses and governments have both present and future consequences.

HS American History Content Statement 29: The continuing populations flow from the cities to the suburbs, the internal migration from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt, and the increase of immigrants resulting from the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act have had social and political effects.

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the reasons for increased suburbanization following World War II and how this affected the King-Lincoln neighborhood.
- Explain how the automobile industry and changing consumer attitudes affected economic and social issues within neighborhoods and cities.
- Explain how the decision to locate I-70 and I-71 freeways affected King-Lincoln.

Discussion Questions

1. How did transportation and suburbanization affect the King-Lincoln neighborhood in both positive and negative ways?
2. Why was the Federal Highway Act signed into legislation by President Eisenhower? How did this impact the King-Lincoln neighborhood?
3. Why did President Jimmy Carter come to Columbus?
4. How did the building of Mt. Vernon Plaza and the creation of the Model Cities Program relate to the freeway issue also underway?

Extension Activities

In the 1970s, the federal government's Model Cities Program resulted in the clearance of enormous areas of homes and commercial districts on the north side of Mt Vernon. The Mt. Vernon Plaza Shopping Centers and high-rise apartment buildings and suburban-looking homes were to be built in place. Have students outline the King-Lincoln neighborhood, shading the area that was used to create the Model Cities Program. Hold a debate between the two sides of the issue—did the Model Cities Program work for King Lincoln? What was it designed to do? What factors were not addressed in how to help a neighborhood? (Helpful sources, including the Near East Side area plan, are available on the city's website: www.columbus.gov.)

One of the first examples of subsidized federal housing in the United States was Poindexter Village, dedicated in 1940 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that created more than 40 brick housing units. Later Poindexter Tower was built nearby and is now in the process of being demolished. Find pictures of each development. Discuss why there is an outcry from the neighborhood about the possible loss of all of the smaller housing units of Poindexter Village and no protest about the loss of the long abandoned Poindexter Tower. How much does design influence the success or failure of housing in a neighborhood? What factors should an architect take into consideration when building in an older and established area?

Additional Resources

Near East Area Plan. City of Columbus. In hard copy in libraries and also available on the city's website: assets.columbus.gov/development/planning/neareastareaplan.pdf

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