

Blight, **noun**. \blahyt\:

- botany,
 - a: a disease or injury of plants marked by the formation of lesions, withering, and death of parts (such as leaves and tubers).
 - b: an organism (such as an insect or a fungus) that causes blight.
- something that frustrates plans or hopes.
- something that impairs or destroys.
- a deteriorated condition. urban blight. ("blight," *Merriam-Webster*.)

"Blight refers to a specific symptom affecting plants in response to infection by a pathogenic organism. It is a rapid and complete **chlorosis, browning, then death** of plant tissues such as leaves, branches, twigs, or floral organs." ("blight," *Wikipedia*.)

"Measures for controlling and preventing blights typically involve the **destruction of the infected plant parts**; use of disease-free seed or stock and resistant varieties; **crop rotation**; **pruning and spacing of plants for better air circulation**; **controlling pests that carry the fungus from plant to plant**; avoidance of overhead watering and working among wet plants; and, where needed, **the application of fungicide or antibiotics**. Proper sanitation is key to stop the spread of the infestation." ("blight," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.)

“CHLOROSIS, BROWNING, THEN DEATH”

1767: Swedish botanist Carlus Linnaeus publishes the 10th edition of **Systemae Naturae**. Originally published in 1735, the seminal text attempts the first formal classification and nomenclature (naming) of plants and animals. Linnaeus coined the term *Homo sapiens*, yet little is spoken of his role in pioneering human racial classification. The 10th edition outlines **four varieties of Homo sapiens**:

Americanus: reddish, choleric, and erect; hair—black, straight, thick; wide nostrils, scanty beard; obstinate, merry, free; paints himself with fine red lines; regulated by customs.

Asiaticus: sallow, melancholy, stify; black hair, dark eyes; severe, haughty, avaricious; covered with loose garments; ruled by opinions.

Africanus: black, phlegmatic, relaxed; hair—black, frizzled; skin—silky; nose—flat; lips—tumid; women without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent; anoints himself with grease; governed by caprice.

Europeanus: White, sanguine, muscular; hair—long, flowing; eyes—blue; gentle, acute, inventive; covers himself with close vestments; governed by laws.

"Linnaeus' commingling of physical features with behavioral and psychological traits shows the growing influence of a certain type of thinking that presumed that each species had innate qualities of behavior or temperament." (Smiedley, Audrey. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 2018.)

Editor’s Note: During the 18th century *Era of Enlightenment*, most of the celebrated taxonomists and naturalists in Europe were trying to classify **biological variation** among humans in the same terms used to classify nature. The term “race” was used interchangeably with species, type, or variety. Their prejudiced opinions, veiled under the guise of “scientific observation,” served to justify and reinforce the pseudoscientific notions of racial distinction and **hierarchy** that arose at the same time as the “humanistic” and “scientific” pursuits of the Enlightenment, which in turn justified colonialism, Indigenous genocide, racialized systematic slavery, capitalism, and the nation-state as the sole legitimate political body.

1864: Sociologist **Herbert Spencer** (1820-1903) publishes *Principles of Biology* and coins the term “**survival of the fittest**,” which suggests **competition**, rather than **cooperation**, as the driver of **natural selection**, counter to Darwin’s theories in *On the Origin of Species*. Spencer was considered the single most influential intellectual at the close of the 19th century and was instrumental in popularizing the concept of **racial degeneration** and arguing against social welfare in *Man Versus the State* (1884). (Burdette, Carolyn. *Post Darwin*: social Darwinism, degeneration, eugenics, The British Library Online. Pub: 15 May 2014. Web: 28 May 2018.)

1910: The American Breeders Association launches its magazine with a special introduction from US Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson, who served four US presidents (1897-1913). The magazine bases its mission—artificial selection to drive evolution of plants, animals, and humans—in the work of biologists like Darwin, Spencer and Mendel: “The science on which the art of selective breeding rests consists in the main of five categories of knowledge: Variation, heredity, environment, selection and **segregation**. [...] Of course all artificial race improvement must rest on artificial selection. [...] Selection without segregation or separation is ineffective, whether natural or artificial.” (*American Breeders Magazine*, Vol. 1. No. 1. First Quarter, 1910.)

EN: Over time, Enlightenment notions of racial classification and hierarchy lead to twin concepts of “positive” **eugenics** through encouraging “selective breeding” of the “fit” and “negative” **eugenics** through active segregation, discrimination, displacement, and, ultimately, genocide of those deemed by society to be “unfit.”

From American Breeders Magazine:

Page 142: On Brahma Cattie Hybrids and Horse Hybrids
Page 143: “A greater total of human happiness, higher social standards, higher average of individual efficiency, greater personal security would be the gain, if **within this century it became possible to reduce the present three and a quarter million defectives, criminals, insane, vicious and incapable of various institutions in the United States by ever so small a fraction, purging the blood current of the nation of base heredity elements and producing less of the human wreckage which fills those institutions.**”
Page 146: On Heredity in Winter Rye
(*American Breeders Magazine*, ibid.)

Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the United States, 1781: “The first difference which strikes us is that of color. — Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from some other secretion, **the difference is fixed in nature**, and as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of **beauty** in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and White, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the Whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is **the preference of the Orangutan for the black women over those of his own species**. The circumstance of **superior beauty**, if thought worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? [...]”

To our reproach it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the Whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. **Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them?**” (Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the United States, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781.)

EN: South African sociologist David Theo Goldberg traces the philosophy underpinning South African apartheid to Herbert Spencer’s theories:

South Africa, 1993: “In the nineteenth century, the concept [of degeneration] was central to fundamental discourses of collective identity and identification. It found expression in biology, including evolutionary theory, in sociology, criminology, economic and psychiatric theory, in discourses defining sex, nation, and race. [...] The racial assumptions presupposed decay, the extent of which was defined by racial type. Races accordingly have their proper or **natural places**, geographically and biologically. Displaced from their proper or normal class, national or ethnic positions in the social and ultimately urban setting, a ‘Native’ or ‘Negro’ would generate **pathologies**—slums, criminality, poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, disease, insanity—that if allowed to transgress the social norms would pollute the (White) body politic and at the extreme bring about **racial extinction**.” (David Theo Goldberg, “Polluting the Body Politic: Race and Urban Location” in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, 1993. p. 200.)

Apartheid, noun. South African English. \uh-pahrṯ-hahyt\; lit. ‘apart-ness’ or ‘separateness’.

- racial segregation; specifically : a former policy of segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-European groups in the Republic of South Africa.
- separation; segregation. (“apartheid,” *Merriam-Webster*.)

Redlining, noun. \red-lahy-nīng\; “The systematic denial of various services to residents of specific, often racially associated, neighborhoods or communities, either directly or through the selective raising of prices.” (“redlining,” *Wikipedia*.)

EN: Beginning in the 1930s, the **Home Owners Loan Corporation** ranked the risk level of mortgage loans by ethnicity, keeping housing segregation firmly in place without the need for explicit racial covenants. Yet this policy was merely one head of the hydra. Since emancipation, US segregationist laws and policy at the federal, state, local, and hyperlocal levels have restricted the geographic movement and spaces of habitation of Blacks. At the core of such regulations is the belief that Black people and the neighborhoods to which they are designated must be **quarantined**—spatially separated and from time to time displaced to prioritize *White economic and racial “fitness.”* This end is achieved by preventing **Black prosperity** through the community, economy, culture, and knowledge that comes from being securely grounded in place.

South Africa, 1993: “Stratified by race and class, the modern city becomes the testing ground of **survival**, of racialized **power** and **control**. The paranoia of losing power assumes the image of becoming **Other**, to be avoided like the **plague**.” (Goldberg, ibid.)

EN: Armed with pseudo-science, the State appropriated the word ‘blight’ from the realm of plants and applied it to urban habitats as a catch-all to describe various states of ‘unfitness’ that should be considered **contagious** to White ‘fitness,’ aka **public health** [See: Development]. Today, blight may mean anything from housing with conditions that endanger human health, life, or dignity to housing that is subjectively considered ‘**unattractive**’ or ‘**sub-optimal**.’

Thus begins a cycle of segregation, disinvestment, condemnation, demolition, and replacement that your editor has coined Architectural Eugenics.

ARCHITECTURAL EUGENICS

Roman Republic, 2nd Century AD: “Downtown was encircled by a dense ring of **slums**. There being no public transportation, the proletarians had to be housed within walking distance of work sites and markets. The solution was to pile them into thousands of poorly lit **inner-city tenements** along narrow streets. Such dwellings were sometimes seven or eight floors high, all lacking toilets, running water, and decent ventilation. The rents for these fetid, disease-ridden warrens were usually more than the plebs could afford, forcing them to double and triple up, with **entire families residing in one room**. [...] They are expected to sleep secure though the beams are about to crash above them.” (A description of the Late Roman Empire in Parenti, Michael. *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People’s*

History of Ancient Rome, 2004. p. 28.)

EN: *The United States based its value and political systems, and with them its housing policy, on the Roman Republic. From the Fall of Rome to the Great Depression to the Great Recession, systemic wealth inequality is a cyclical driver of societal collapse.*

New Orleans, 1908: “Some of the old dungeons which swarm with awaiting poverty are a **scandal** to civilization. Many violate even the adequate laws which exist. Fire traps, death-holes, foul, dark, stench-ridden, hobcobs of **contagion**—they are all of this. [...] One case of infectious disease in one of these hidden hives of darkness is a thing of dread. Faster than flame it might spread from house to house and from street to street, over the city—as the fever of 1906.” (“Bad Building Laws and Foul Tenements,” *New Orleans Item*, 19 Sep. 1908. p. 4.)

1918-19: “Scattered through the city are hundreds of little brick ‘quarters’ two stories in height which are **occupied by negroes**. Apparently these buildings were at one time used as **slave quarters**. A gallery runs across the front of both the first and second floors. From this gallery doors open into rooms. The arrangement is comparable to a **tier of cells**. Sometimes there is a window as well as the door to a room, sometimes only a door. There are no windows on the rear and of course no side lighting, except the end rooms on the tier. Another type of negro home, which is **undesirable**, is the investment shanty, one-story frame cottages which are often built in rows.” (“Report of the Health and Sanitary Survey of the City of New Orleans,” 1918-1919. p. 136.)

2010: “This is your house?” he asked. Hameed nodded.

“Well, why does it look like that?” [...] “It’s just hard getting to it when you’re trying to make a living,” he said. Butler was unmoved. ‘You can start by cutting the grass and making sure all the holes are boarded up,’ he said, then confirmed Hameed’s mailing address. A citation would be sent, Butler said, adding that continued violation of the city’s building and health codes could lead to stiff fines, and ultimately, foreclosures.” (Krupa, Michelle. “Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Inspectors Kick off Blight Sweeps in New Orleans.” *The Times-Picayune*, 2 Nov. 2010. Web: 10 Jan. 2018.)

EN: Historic and contemporary race- and class-based social and economic discrimination, disinvestment, and exclusion perpetuated by the State and private agencies directly and indirectly produce conditions that lead to the deterioration of homes into blight, yet the role of law, policy, and history is not included in the mainstream definition of the term or considered in blight remediation strategies. Developers, interest groups, planners, and politicians tend to suffer no consequence for creating miserable housing conditions. The systematic creation of blight is a reflection of a society’s morals.

THE BASIS OF BLIGHT IN NEW ORLEANS

EN: *Reconstruction (1865-1877), the 12 year period marked by social, economic, and political gains by African Americans in the aftermath of the Civil War, ends in New Orleans after the Crescent City White League, a White paramilitary organization, massacres the City’s first racially integrated police department. (A monument to the event—the so-called Battle of Liberty Place—was only removed from public space in 2017 thanks to the efforts of Take ‘Em Down NOLA.) With the fall of Reconstruction in 1877, efforts toward desegregation were squandered and Jim Crow was imposed. [See: Gentrification]*

1918-19: “A debt of millions was accumulated through wasteful extravagances during Reconstruction days, and many **civil rights were outraged**. Indignation was intense. An attempt on the part of State officials to prevent the landing of arms from a boat precipitated the battle on Canal Street, September 14, 1874, between the **citizens as represented by the ‘White League’** and the Metropolitan Police.” (“Report of the Health and Sanitary Survey of the City of New Orleans,” 1918-1919.)

EN: *So begins the 1918-19 Health and Sanitary Survey. Given the ‘debt’ owed to White ‘citizens’ for Reconstruction-Era policies advancing racial equity [See: Auction] [See: Debt], the post-Reconstruction State used law and policy to reinforce **White supremacy** and recoup the capital lost after the emancipation of enslaved laborers. The tides had turned and it was a given that Black Americans would not receive **reparations** or **welfare**; would be barred from education, voting, serving on juries, and running for public election; would be unable to accrue wealth; and would ever toil as the **permanent underclass**.*

LA State Act 192, 1898: “[...] Enlarging the powers and the duties of the Board of Health in the City of New Orleans, requiring the inspection of all buildings and premises within the city limits, enforcing cleanliness and adequate water supply

Blight, noun. \blahyt\:

on all premises; to provide fine and penalties for violation of the provisions of this act and the enforcement thereof, and for the payment of monies received as fines to the board of health.” (Referenced in “Board of Health Biennial Report,” 1900-1907.)

EN: LA State Act 192 established the modern **Board of Health** for the City of New Orleans. This body is invested with collecting and recording vital statistics, tracking communicable diseases and conducting food inspections, and monitoring tenement and other ‘sub-standard’ forms of housing. Act 192 codified the treatment of blighted housing as diseased persons according to the medical logic of the day: necessitating quarantine and aggressive treatment of symptoms rather than addressing root causes.

1908: “The work of the Tenement House Commission and the Board of Health includes, we believe, a **crusade** against foul houses—veritable **lepers** among buildings they are, some of them.” (“Bad Building Laws and Foul Tenements,” *New Orleans Item*, 19 Sep. 1908. p. 4.)

EN: In 1908, the Tenement Housing Commission and the Board of Health combined forces to begin their inspection of tenement houses in downtown New Orleans. The newly enlarged Board of Health vested itself with collecting racially segregated housing statistics: Whites separated from Negroes, foreign-born Whites separated from US-born Whites. No category and no public support for Indigenous people. Commissioners saw their mission as bringing order and safety to the growing urban space, but also a mission to cleanse and assimilate European immigrants into the purified space of Whiteness and, ultimately, citizenship.

1908: “The best part of the scheme she thought would be in the education of the foreigners to be cleanly, to see that they got the sufficient air and space, and instruct them in the preventatives of diseases.” (“Tenement House Inspection Starts And the Commission Is Made Very Hopeful Thereby, For Its Reception.” *The Times-Picayune*, 11 Feb. 1908. p. 15.)

EN: The City Board of Health saw public health and sanitation as part of the local business plan to keep workers healthy enough to labor. A citizen’s worth is proportionate to a citizen’s ability to generate profits. [See: Auction]

1918: “Surely New Orleans is standing on the very threshold of a remarkable commercial prosperity. [...] The prosperity of the manufacturer depends to a large extent on the health of his employees.” (Report of the Health and Sanitary Survey of the City of New Orleans.)

URBAN IMPROVEMENT = NEGRO REMOVAL

Blights Out

EN: In 1952, the City of New Orleans hired corporate development firm **Harland Bartholomew & Associates** to produce a 25-year urban redevelopment plan. HB&A used class and race to rank neighborhoods and determine their worth. *Non-White neighborhoods like the Tremé* faced high penalty scores. [See: Development]

1952: “Six of the 41 areas studied received a penalty score of 500 or more points out of a possible 1,000. All of these were located immediately around or near to the Central Business District. The area with the worst conditions is below Claiborne and immediately uptown from the railroad yards and terminals. This is a **very congested non-White residential area** which has long been considered as the **worst slum area in the City of New Orleans**. Two other areas immediately adjacent to the Number 1 District also received very high penalty scores and these are also occupied by **non-White families**.” (“A 25 Year Urban Redevelopment Program Prepared for the City Planning & Zoning Commission,” Harland Bartholomew & Associates, Feb. 1952.)

Urban Renewal, noun: \ur-buhn ri-noo-ul\

- A program of land redevelopment in cities, often where there is **urban decay**. However, in more recent cases this term has been replaced with more vague ones, like ‘blight,’ an elastic term that has been used and abused to justify the taking and destruction of habitable and badly needed low-cost urban housing, and its replacement with privately-owned, private profit-making commercial structures. [...] Many cities link the revitalization of the central business district and **gentrification** of residential neighborhoods to earlier urban renewal programs. (“urban renewal,” *Wikipedia*.)
- A brand of clothing at Urban Outfitters. [See: Gentrification]

EN: *The Housing Act of 1954* introduced the term ‘urban renewal’ to the public, allowing up to 10% of federal funds to be spent on commercial development, meaning that some demolished residential properties would be replaced with commercial property. The anti-blight policy operationalized wartime rhetoric like ‘elimination,’ ‘obliteration’—a “*blitzkrieg against slum living*”—to describe removal of families and communities. Federally aided slum clearance projects marked the trajectory of addressing blight and widespread disinvestment through demolition and displacement; the transference of disinvested property to development corporations; neighborhoods cleared to make way for private development and public housing projects. [See: Demolition]

Backed with federal funds and private capital, a long process of human removal begins.

1954: “Simply stated, the Housing Act of 1954 will require every city in the nation planning federally aided slum clearance projects to submit individual plans to the government, not only designed to wipe out existing slums, but also **arrest the spread of housing blight in America**.” (C.U.S. Slum Battle Being Prepared: Three-Way Blitzkrieg Launched Soon.” *The Times-Picayune*, 13 Jun. 1954. p. 92.)

EN: Under the direction of Mayor de Leseppe Story Morrison, the City of New Orleans used blight as an excuse to **demolish**

and displace an entire neighborhood in order to build a modernized City Hall and Civic Center.

1957: “The clearance of the site of the new City Hall and Civic Center has served to eliminate from the center of the downtown business district a serious residential blight. [...] Just as the new City Hall and Civic Center has **changed the face** and has given new life to that particular district, our Division of Housing Improvement has been ‘changing the face’ and giving new life to blighted neighborhoods throughout the city.” (*New Orleans Item*, 6 May 1957. p. 28.)

EN: “Arresting the spread of blight” meant ‘changing the face’ of neighborhoods from Black to White and the elimination of poor faces through class-based quarantine and segregation. The 35,000 units of public housing included in the Act could only be built on land authorized for persons displaced by slum clearance.

1955: “HISP [Department of Housing Improvement and Slum Prevention] inspectors reported to their boss, Shelton P. Hubbard, that 40 percent of the St. Monica dwellings were so ramshackle that they could not be salvaged. They recommended ordering the houses torn down. [...] A lot of people are going to be displaced while the repairing, tearing down, and rebuilding go on. The HISP is required to find either public housing or ‘suitable private rental’ for these displaced persons.” (“City’s Goal No Pipe Dream,” *New Orleans Item*, 8 June 1955. p. 12.)

1952: “Two methods now seem to afford the best possibilities for accommodating the displaced families, namely (1) rehousing the families in public housing projects and (2) rehousing the families in new living units that are constructed by **private capital**. Another possibility that may be of equal importance is **rehousing the displaced families in older and marginal living units** that are vacated by families who move to new or better facilities.” (Harland Bartholomew & Associates, p. 11.)

EN: *The option of rehousing displaced families in ‘marginal’ units reveals that the program was never intended to improve the lives of the poor, but rather to maintain race and class divisions through the shuffling of existing spatial organizing systems.*

1952: “The 1940 Census also contained data regarding the number of substandard living units within the corporate limits of New Orleans. This data revealed a total of 48,755 units or 37% of the total dwelling units within the city that needed either major repairs or were without private bath. Of particular importance however is the fact that of these 48,755 substandard living units 32,962—approximately 82%—were occupied by **non-White families**. The preliminary releases of the 1950 housing census revealed that there were then some 65,679 occupied substandard dwellings within the city—an increase of 16,921 units during the past ten years. **Clearly, there is an immediate local need for extensive slum clearance and urban redevelopment.**” (Harland Bartholomew & Associates, p.1.)

EN: By 1965, the percentage of federal housing funds allocated for commercial development increased to 35% (an increase of 25% in 11 years). The promise of decent housing for poor people eroded without local and federal investment in public housing. Rather than see disinvestment and resultant poverty as the cause of growing urban blight, the state encouraged confirmation bias of theories of degeneration.

Within the first five years, the private company contracted to redevelop New Orleans estimated the relocation of 267 White households and 1,483 Black families. Within 10 years they estimated another 163 White families and 2,192 Black families. And by 25 years they estimated the relocation of 3,938 White families and 7,663 Black families.

2017: “The desire to preserve the inferior status of blacks has motivated policies against all members of the low-wage sector.” (Peter Temlin, quoted in “US has regressed to developing nation status, MIT economist warns,” *The Independent*, 21 Apr. 2017.)

KATRINA: AS WEAPON AND OPPORTUNITY

2005: “The silver lining of Katrina’s storm clouds is the historic opportunity that we have now to start anew.” (Kathleen Blanco, former Governor of Louisiana, 2004-2008.)

2005: “As a colleague of mine says, every crisis is an opportunity. And sure enough, Hurricane Katrina has given us an amazing chance to do something serious about urban poverty. [...] The first rule of the rebuilding effort should be: Nothing Like Before. Most of the **ambitious and organized people abandoned** the inner-city areas of New Orleans long ago, leaving neighborhoods where roughly three-quarters of the people were poor.” (Brooks, David, “Katrina’s Silver Lining,” *The New York Times*, 8 Sept. 2005.) [See: Gentrification]

Endesha Juakali: “Blight post-Katrina was a precursor to **gentrification**, and it took on a whole different kind of meaning based upon the socioeconomic conditions that existed. And then blight became a situation where people were stranded or exiled in different parts of the country, and there

was no plan to actually bring them back home and they did not have the resources to come home and they did not have the resources to fix and remodel and clear up the problems that their property incurred such as deterioration and **demolition by neglect** and other things that was beyond their economic control.” (Endesha Juakali, Housing Justice Organizer, creator of the Fight Back Center.) [See: Demolition]

2014: “Property owners in violation of Chapter 26 can be found guilty in an administrative hearings process. This results in fines of up to **\$500 per violation per day**, as well as authorization for the City to remediate the property through demolition and/or lot clearing. **Code violation liens** are assessed if fines are not paid; failure to pay liens provides the City with legal authority to **foreclose** on the property in a Sheriff’s sale.” (2013 New Orleans Blight Reduction Report,” January 2014, pg. 7.)

EN: *BlightStatus, the Office of Mayor Landrieu, and the New Orleans City Council have maintained the narrative that can be managed with repair or demolition, stemming from a property owner’s laziness, negligence, or unwillingness to maintain their property rather than a structural issue inevitable within a system that refuses to acknowledge the living legacy of racism and poverty. Within the government’s shallow worldview, a property owner can be compelled to afford expensive repairs through the repeat levying of fines.*

The blight reporting system allows for individuals with predatory intentions to anonymously report a property, overwhelm the owner with fines, drive the owner into debt, and drive the property into adjudication. Their motivation may be to push the occupants out of the neighborhood or to acquire the property for themselves.

In 2016, your editor spoke with a local businessman and notable public figure who wanted to acquire an unoccupied building that the current owner refused to sell. The property was flagged by BlightStatus for five violations: Exterior Surfaces, Paint or Protective Treatment, Siding and Masonry, Studs, and Weatherboards. The property was levied with fines amounting to \$2,500 per day for five variations on chipped paint.

James Stull: “There was a house in Mid City where the lady had lived for 20 years. She repaired what she could after the storm. She moved back into her home. The city came out and charged her with a blight lien. They give you 30 days to repair. This is a woman who lives off social security. Her son’s trying to help her, so he came and he did three-fourths of the repairs they were asking to be done. So, they gave them 30 days and then they started charging the fines. She felt like, *If I’m gonna lose my home I gotta sell it*. She was able to get a little chunk of money to start over but she ended up in an apartment in Mid City. Now she’s renting when she owned a house.” (James Stull, a mortgage broker and real estate agent in New Orleans, 2016.)

2014: “When I took office 3 1/2 years ago, we had the worst blight problem in America and no strategy to deal with it [...] after extensive public input and advice from national experts, I announced a strategy in 2010 that **prioritizes aggressive code enforcement and code lien foreclosure sales**, as well as reinvestment strategies that grow neighborhoods and promote homeownership.” (Former New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, 2010-2018.)

Stull: “They started enforcing these liens where, in some cases, the liens took up all the equity that was left in the property. You know, if you have a damaged property that was worth \$30,000, but you have a couple thousand of back taxes and a \$15,000 blight lien collecting interest, next thing you know there’s almost no money left. So the city’s getting all the money for the transfer of the property, so **there’s no benefit for them to solve that problem.**”

EN: *In a 3,000 year affordable housing crisis requiring at least 33 million new affordable housing opportunities by 2025 (10-Year Housing Plan, Housing NOLA, 2015), the Landrieu Administration diagnosed blight as “a symptom of an imbalance between the supply and demand for housing.”* (“2013 New Orleans Blight Reduction Report,” January 2014, pg. 9.)

Juakali: “The point of blight being used as a weapon against poor people, and in particular poor Black people, was the norm for the New Orleans neighborhoods, which allowed people who are not native New Orleanians and not people of color just to come in. Even progressive ‘Whites or liberal Whites or ‘Whites who felt they had the good of the general community at heart—it allowed them to come in and scoop up property that Black people had **invested generations in**, and to take that property, and under the guise of fighting against blight or reestablishing neighborhoods, to appropriate peoples’ property and actually people’s lives. And that’s the kind of blight that we’ve seen since 2005.”

EN: Today, blight is “cured” when a middle class or wealthy citizen or development corporation comes along to purchase the property, lifting the indebted parcel of land back onto the for-profit real estate market with no mandates for affordable housing. [See: Auction]

Stull: “I don’t think they had an intent from the beginning to bring people home. I think their intent from the beginning was to clear as much blight as possible and allow for **new development**.” [See: Development]

EN: *As the economic failure of a people is systemic and cyclical, so is blight systemic and cyclical. Though it is treated as a personal failure or defect attributed to a class of people, the state leverages blight to dismantle, demolish, displace, and replace communities. [See: Demolition]*

Shana M. griffin: “To address issues of blight, it is important to understand how White supremacy, patriarchy, surveillance, violence, and ideologies of control—such as eugenics and xenophobia—are inseparably linked and inform social policies, particularly with regards to housing. Housing and the geographic location of our residence fundamentally influence who we are, what we can become, how we live, what our life chances are, and whether we live or die. A Black feminist perspective allows us to examine the violence of housing policies,

particularly those associated with blight, critically. Where one resides determines whether or not they will attend a **poorly funded school**, encounter **aggressive policing** and street harassment, **live in poverty**, be exposed to **toxic pollution** and **hazardous working conditions**, inhabit **substandard housing** and **unsafe living situations**, experience **violence** and **discrimination**, and is **targeted for displacement** [...]. Housing and the geography of housing are not simply about a dwelling in which one lives, but is about how one is situated in a school district, a public transportation system, a job market, a social network, and in a community. Additionally, access to housing is not merely an exercise of finding somewhere to live but is a continuous process of sustaining access, maintaining security of tenure, and avoiding losing one’s home. The rhetoric of blight and blight eradication strategies in urban settings increases low-income Black people’s, particularly low-income Black women’s, vulnerability to disposability and criminalization in the housing market. So, it is time for ‘blight’ to go, among other things.” (Shana M. griffin, Co-Founder, Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative. Creator, DISPLACED. Founder, PUNCTUATE.)

Editor’s Definition, blight, noun: \blahyt\ A term originally used to describe diseased and dying plants, later appropriated by the State to describe dwellings occupied by poor, generally non-White, people. The classification of ‘blight’ is a key tool in strategies of segregating neighborhoods and grooming them for financial extraction on the market. By focusing on cosmetic ‘blight’ when describing various states of individual or neighborhood-wide disrepair, the State can deflect attention from structural disinvestment, namely racism, wealth disparity, low wages, racialized geography, and a commodified housing system.

EN: Are we, Black people, a ‘Blight,’ in the eyes of the capitalist market? Is our presence a contagion in the sterile imaginary of the American Dream? [See: Property]

griffin: “The idea that ‘everyone’ in the US has equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and entrepreneurship granted by the ideas of the Declaration of Independence is an unattainable ‘Dream’ for many, and a ‘Dream’ of equality continually deferred for most by violence, discrimination, confinement, displacement, and indebtedness