



BUFFALO, NY

A Health Crisis 100 Years in the Making

FAST FACTS

Buffalo-Niagara metro area ranked 5th most racially segregated city in the U.S.

85% of Buffalo's Black residents live on the East Side of Main Street.

Racial gaps in income cost the region \$4.3 billion annually.

Black residents are 6x more likely than white residents to live in a "food desert."

Children from primarily Black neighborhoods are 12x more likely to test positive for elevated levels of lead.

Buffalo has the 3rd highest homeownership gap between Black and white residents in the U.S.

Black children in Buffalo under 17 years old are more than 4x more likely to be hospitalized for asthma.

Infant mortality is nearly 2.5x higher for Black mothers in Buffalo.

Black residents are 3x more likely to die from diabetes.

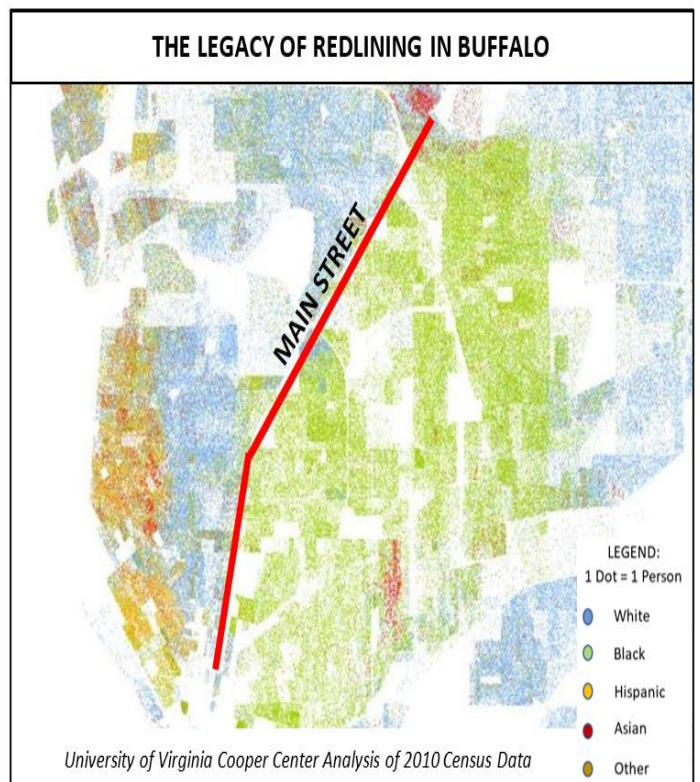
RUST, RACE, & REDLINING

On May 14, 2022, a racist gunman traveled 4 hours to Buffalo's East Side, methodically walked through the only grocery store serving the predominantly Black community, and opened fire, leaving 10 dead and 3 wounded. In a 180-page racist manifesto written before the shooting, the gunman stated that he chose to target Buffalo's East Side because "it has the highest black percentage that is close enough to where I live." A century of segregation and disinvestment created the community that the gunman chose to target.

Buffalo, NY is one of the largest among a group of cities in the northeast that flourished in the heyday of industrial manufacturing in the 1900s. Once proud and thriving, by the 1980s, this collection of cities came to be derisively referred to as the "rust belt," owing to the literal and figurative slow decay of their infrastructure, economies, and population base as businesses shuttered or fled.

As Buffalo slowly rusted, decades of environmental neglect and racial inequality that were once obscured by a strong economy and robust middle class became readily evident. The city's beautiful shorelines were filled with industrial waste, many of its historic neighborhoods were bifurcated or bulldozed to ease the travel burdens of suburban commuters, and the soil surrounding the hollowed-out carcasses of former factories were infused with toxic waste.

The city's economic downturn also laid bare the consequences of racial segregation that began in response to the great northern migration of southern Blacks in the 1800s and was codified under the New Deal. From 1933 until 1968, as New Deal legislation offered heavily subsidized mortgages to white home buyers, it also promoted the practice of redlining, based on racist lending laws and real estate covenants, to essentially block Black families from purchasing homes.



By 2050, residents of Buffalo will experience a fivefold increase in the number of days reaching temperatures above 88°.

Only 8% of those working in green energy sectors are Black.

Moody's predicts that more than 80% of new green energy jobs will be filled by white workers.

Residents from predominantly Black neighborhoods in Buffalo must travel further to access public green space.

9 of the highest risk zip codes for lead poisoning are in Buffalo, NY

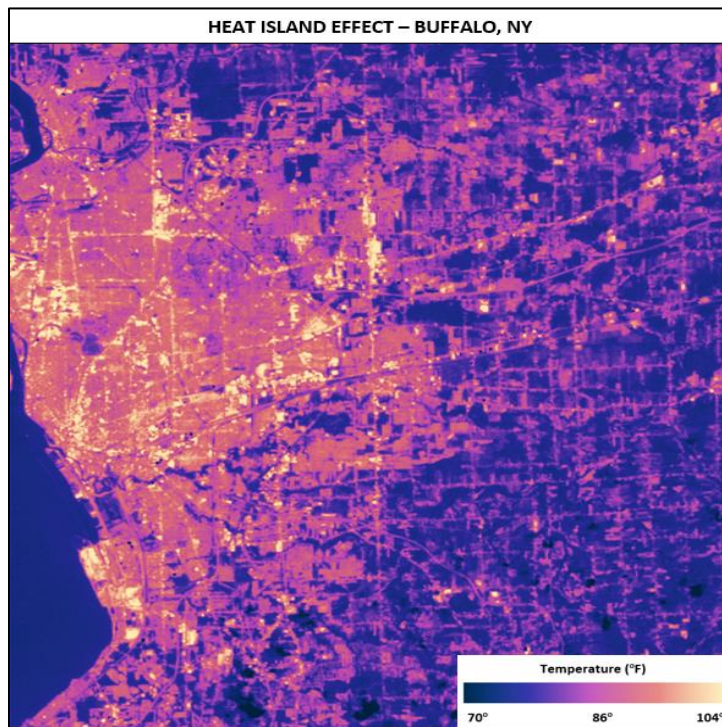
97% of Buffalo's housing stock was built before the first residential energy codes.

Though the practice of redlining officially ended in 1968, mortgage and housing discrimination remain entrenched in Buffalo. In fact, 85% of Buffalo's Black families currently live east of Main Street in the neighborhoods that were redlined back in the 1930s, and a recent NYS investigation found that less than 10% of mortgages are underwritten for Black borrowers in Buffalo. In 2015, Evans National Bank was fined nearly \$900,000 for mortgage discrimination, following an investigation that found that the bank issued less than 1% of its mortgages to Black borrowers. Consequently, Buffalo has the 3rd largest homeownership gap in the U.S., with only 29% of Buffalo's Black families owning homes, compared to 73% of white families.

To this end, while the remnants of Buffalo's industrial past are embedded within the city's soil, the consequences of the city's segregated past are woven into the everyday lived experiences of those living on the East Side. Residents have spent decades contending with lead contaminated housing stock, inadequate public transportation, and a lack of accessible options for grocery shopping, banking, or health care needs, and the growing climate crisis is exacerbating existing inequities while also creating additional challenges to the health and well-being of this community.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Rising temperatures caused by climate change have increased the intensity and frequency of weather events, the consequences of which are increasingly concentrated in cities such as Buffalo. Older housing stock, such as found on the East Side, with poor insulation and aging and/or inadequate HVAC systems, increases the likelihood of illness and death from cold or heat.



For example, 51% of those who died from the blizzard of 2022 were Buffalo residents of color. Conversely, rising temperatures combined with a lack of green space have caused cities such as Buffalo to become "heat islands," with temperatures averaging 7 degrees warmer than surrounding areas. As a result, the NYS Department of Health's Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI) categorizes Buffalo residents as having "high vulnerability" to heat-related health conditions and mortality. In fact, unlike most other cities in the Northeast, the number heat related deaths have increased over time in Buffalo and is comparable to cities on the West Coast.

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GREEN SPACE

In addition to helping mitigate the heat island effect in cities, green space is vital to the health and well-being of residents. However, while Buffalo is home to many beautiful parks, residents in predominantly Black neighborhoods must travel further distances than those in predominantly white neighborhoods to enjoy these spaces.

This inequity in access to Buffalo's parks is particularly harmful to children, as multiple studies have found that exposure to green space improves child and adolescent mental health and resilience and helps mitigate risk factors for obesity by offering opportunities for increased physical activity. Moreover, access to green space has been associated with improved school performance, management of learning disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and overall mood.

GREEN JOBS

Climate change has brought a shift in employment opportunities. WNY is home to more than 130,000 green energy jobs and this sector of the job market has grown six times faster than all other sectors in the region. As such, workforce development for green energy jobs is essential to building a strong economic future for the city and region.

However, Black workers are consistently underrepresented in all areas of clean energy, including manufacturing, construction and installation, and distribution. For example, wind power is a fast growing, high wage sector of clean energy, but only 5% of the workforce is Black. Millions of state and federal dollars have been allocated to workforce training for green energy jobs, but Moody's Analytics projects that current employment trends will continue, with more than 80% of new jobs going to white workers.

MOVING FORWARD: THE OPEN BUFFALO ECOLOGY CENTER

The Open Buffalo Ecology Center will address the intersecting and systemic challenges faced by Buffalo residents, with a particular focus on the 50,000 residents of the East Side of Buffalo. The Eco Center will provide much-needed outdoor green space to promote personal and community wellness, develop neighborhood-level climate resilience strategies, prepare communities of color for new green sector jobs, and utilize community-building strategies that create more just, and joyful neighborhoods for us all.

