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# Battleground in University City

## A Look at the City

Author: Michelle Osborn

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TWO graduate student reporters called it “the quiet war in West Philadelphia.” Their five-part report printed two years ago in the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, the University of Pennsylvania’s student newspaper, concluded the war was far from over.

The war was fought in classic urban renewal style. On one side were the approximately 20 institutions and research organizations backing the development of the University City Science Center, a project conceived to use federal subsidies to capitalize on the growing demand for scientific skills. The Science Center’s big pitch was that it would stimulate new economic activity in the city.

On the other side was a population variously estimated at between 520 and 900 families, with an average income of about \$4,000, mostly Negro, and many elderly, who felt their poverty and powerlessness were being exploited.

The battleground was a 105-acre tract immediately north of the University of Pennsylvania called University City area 3. Twenty-six of these acres were for the Science Center. The area was certified for redevelopment in 1961. Plans for clearance reportedly were developed without consultation with the residents.



UNIVERSITY CITY urban renewal area 3 is well-documented. Five masters’ theses have forged on its Byzantine intricacies. Prominence or notoriety came to some of the actors on its stage. Bitterness and exhaustion have characterized many of its participants.

At the heart of the conflict is relocation. Planning Professor Paul L. Niebanck calls it “the clash between housing and nonhousing goals” in redevelopment.

The main nonhousing goal was revitalization of the city based on proof that the “knowledge industries” are the biggest growth industries in the nation.

The first conflict between the displacers and those to be displaced reached a climax when about 120 homeowners banded together to protest clearance. As a result of their pressure, after a sit-in at the Mayor's office in 1963, 7.6 acres out of the 105 were designated for replacement or rehabilitation housing.

There were problems producing the housing. In 1966, the School Board voted to condemn this site for use as a science high school. Because of a clerical error, some 50 residents were informed they had 60 days in which to move. The result was further escalation of hostility by residents toward the government agencies.



IN FEBRUARY, 1969, the "quiet war" erupted into a six-day student demonstration. The students and the University negotiated a settlement. A quadri-partite commission formed of representatives from the student body, the faculty, Renewal Housing, Inc., as representatives of the West Philadelphia residents, and the trustees were to have powers of initiation, review and veto over future University expansion. The trustees agreed to raise a \$10 million development fund.

The quiet war is not yet over. Perhaps its most astonishing aspect is that although urban renewal is 20 years old, the same old well-documented conflicts and frustrations keep occurring with such monotonous regularity.

Renewal Housing, Inc., a non-profit corporation, was designated developer of two parcels of land totaling 4.5 acres last year. The land and shells haven't been delivered, but are promised for April or May. Lorenzo Graham, president of the corporation, says, "There's a little holdup due to bureaucratic red tape."

Marie P. Shumate, assistant director of the Housing Association of Delaware Valley, comments: "Redevelopment works up to the point of providing land, but they find it difficult to put back the housing that is torn down."



In the meantime, over 90 percent of the estimated 5,000 displaced persons have scattered. A recent survey of 400 former residents conducted by the Volunteer Community Resources Council indicated one-third of them moved to nearby Mantua, an area about the size of University City 3 with a population of 22,000. Rents averaged 35 percent higher, causing "severe hardship."

Thirty percent of the relocatees [sic] reportedly had had no contact with the relocation bureau and received none of the moving expenses to which they were entitled. "A spot check indicates that between 30 percent and 40 percent of Area 3 have been relocated in substandard housing," the survey notes.

Behind the cold statistics there are human beings. The Rev. Edward J. Sims, director of VCRC, particularly remembers Ruth Byrd, who had lived in the area most of her life.

"She didn't want to leave, but all the pipes were busting up," Sims says. "Finally, Ruth was able to find a place. She was so depressed, she stopped eating. She saw her whole life being wiped out. Three months after she moved out, she died."

People are being pushed into areas with two and three times the population density of the rest of the city, Sims says.

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By MICHELLE OSBORN

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