NEXT EXIT: SYRACUSE AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

IT'S A LOT TO UNPACK

HOW I-81 DESTROYED A COMMUNITY (AND MORE!)
As a student in Syracuse, you might have been told to "stay away from the other side of 81" or had it referred to as the "bad part of 'cuse"...

However, if you make your way to "the other side", you see it's made up of boarded up buildings, run-down or completely abandoned homes and corner stores.

If you were wondering, the majority of the demographic is, (you guessed it) Black.

Wow. Who could have guessed.
The placement of Interstate 81 (I-81) served to segregate the city of Syracuse. Through the racist practice of redlining, a predominately black neighborhood was targeted as the prime location for I-81.

"Well maybe that's just a coincidence."

Nope. It's definitely not.

The following is a detour to understand redlining. Take the detour.
HOW REDLINING CAME TO BE

The New Deal was a series of government aid programs with the purpose of rebuilding the economy after WWII and helping the American people. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) were aid programs which bought and refinanced mortgages that were at risk of default.

Their purpose was to help people own homes. The HOLC created color-coded security maps outlining neighborhoods favorability and investment value. Areas with little to no minorities were colored blue and green, respectively, labeled as "Good or Best" and considered safe investments. Areas fully populated by minorities were colored in red, labeled as "hazardous," and deemed bad investments.
SHORT-TERM IMPACTS

The favorability of blue and green areas was expressed through easy mortgage eligibility and good mortgage rates for members in those communities.

Even though the HOLC agency didn’t last long, it set the precedent for lending. The FHA would NOT back banks that did not adhere to the HOLC security maps.

Redlining is a clear example of institutional racism that existed and continues to exist in America. This practice gave White residents funding to own homes and develop their communities. As Black residents were not eligible for the same funding or access to resources, their communities become rundown, further depreciating their value.
"So what's the correlation between I-81 and Redlining?"

The 15th Ward
This neighborhood, located in Downtown Syracuse, was originally predominately Jewish. As African Americans came to Syracuse in the 1990s in search of jobs, they were restricted from moving to many areas within the city. The 15th ward was one of the few areas they could settle and as they moved in, the Jewish community moved out.

On the 1937 HOLC security maps, it was completely red. Declared the "slums," when the 1956 Federal Highway Act gave $500 Million to Syracuse for the interstate construction, 75% of the 15th Ward was displaced as the new site for I-81. 90% of the structures in the area were torn down, 400-500 businesses were lost, and 1200 families relocated.
People are not worthless because they live in poverty. Low-income minority communities are not a dispensable population. A community was torn apart and its members put at greater health risk for the benefit of people outside the community. This should never be tolerated. This area was targeted for its largely black demographic. There is no ignoring this.

“We’re saying that neighborhood that you destroyed was in fact the slums because you made it that way,” said Lanessa Chaplin, a lawyer and organizer with the American Civil Liberties Union. “So now you have to fix it.”

- Washington Post
Let's talk impacts

The (1) Benefit
- Shorter commute times from the suburbs to the city

The (many) Negatives
- Many residents have a highway literally in their backyards
- The hospitalization rate for children with asthma is 2x higher in the city than the suburbs
- The area surrounding I-81 lives in generational poverty
- Residents are at a higher health risk - the CDC states living near a highway and the exposure to traffic pollution is linked to asthma, heart and lung disease, and childhood cancer
- People lost their homes, businesses, and community when I-81 was constructed
With the upcoming redevelopment of I-81, the needs and concerns of the community, those previously displaced and underrepresented, must be heard and considered. If not, the same problem will be constructed under a different name.
Local Syr News
"Neighbors discuss health and physical impacts of I-81 reconstruction"
Lumen Learning
"The Rise of Suburbs"
Syracuse.com
"Hear how segregation, redlining shapes I-81 debate (Commentary)"
The Atlantic
"How to Decimate a City"
The Washington Post
"In Syracuse, a road and reparations"
ThoughtCo.
"The History of Redlining"