

# City People

**BLACK BALTIMORE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF JOHN CLARK MAYDEN**

OCTOBER 7, 2019–MARCH 1, 2020 | THE GEORGE PEABODY LIBRARY





John Clark Mayden, self-portrait, circa 1970.

**W**e are all photographers now. With a speed and an ease that would have astounded the first photographers 180 years ago, we capture and share images of our loved ones, our funny pets, our special occasions, and ourselves. But beyond the selfies and the “likes,” our screens full of images also enlist us in photography’s liberatory promise. Part fiction and part fact, a photograph can make a well-known sight surprising or a strange scene familiar. It can serve as a vessel for imaginative travels to the past or future, and it can change our ideas about the present. It can reveal what we don’t see. It can bear witness.

The photographs of John Clark Mayden deliver on this promise. Since the early 1970s, Mr. Mayden has been taking pictures the old-fashioned way: with film, printing images in his garage darkroom. Documenting the “city people” of his hometown of Baltimore during a tumultuous period of decline, transformation, and growth, his photographs show us how everyday life here has changed and not changed, especially for the Black citizens who are his main focus. These photos also remind us that everyday life can be beautiful to behold.

Here we offer some background for what you’ll see in *City People: Black Baltimore in the Photographs of John Clark Mayden*. A brief trip down the timeline of African American photography. A look at the geographic legacies that continue to shape this town. Some of the history behind the neighborhoods in Mr. Mayden’s photographs.

Please enjoy the exhibition, add your locations to our neighborhood map, and get back out there with your cameras!

**GABRIELLE DEAN, PhD**, *Exhibition Curator & William Kurrelmeyer Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, The Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries*

**CHRISTINA THOMAS**, *Exhibition Curator, Denis Family Curatorial Fellow & Doctoral Candidate in History, The Johns Hopkins University*

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

**T**he emergence of photography in the 1800s—notably, the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839, the tintype in 1853, and the silver print process in the 1870s—radically transformed the way people related to images. Photographs seemed to show the truth of real life, free from artistic idealization or distortion. And photographs were relatively inexpensive to produce, making it possible for ordinary people to own pictures or become photographers themselves. These two features of early photography—its “truth effect” and its democratic potential—made it an appealing medium for African American artists and viewers navigating the inequalities of the American republic.

The first African American photographers, like most photographers in the Americas and Europe, either established businesses specializing in portraiture in major cities or else traveled to smaller towns with portable studios to take and sell photos for as long as the local economy could support them. Entrepreneurs such as James Presley Ball and Augustus Washington were all the more remarkable in that they began their careers during the era of slavery. Their diverse subjects—free and enslaved Blacks, European and Asian immigrants—had one great goal in common: a **portrait** that could stand the test of time. These early sitters wanted to preserve for private memorialization their features and those of beloved children, parents, and siblings. For African Americans, the opportunity to present oneself authentically, on one's own terms, was also a welcome respite from prevailing racist stereotypes.



**Group portraits** served an additional purpose: to assert one's place in a larger community. Even when the group was the product of discrimination—segregated military units and schools, for example—its members often had some control over their self-representation. These images, especially when created by African American photographers such as Addison Scurlock, functioned as public declarations of Black belonging: visible evidence of civic participation, professional achievement, and collectivity.

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, as camera and printing technologies advanced, it became easier for non-specialists to take photographs and to reproduce them on paper. Pictures



ABOVE: Photographer unknown, 368th Infantry Band, A. Jack Thomas, bandmaster, 1918. Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.

LEFT: Photographer unknown. Real photo postcard of the John Wesley A.M.E. Church, circa 1940. Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Oriole Photo Gallery, Baltimore. Cabinet card portrait of an unidentified woman, circa 1890. Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.

of the people, places, and scenes that mattered to specific readerships could serve as illustrations in books, periodicals, pamphlets, and postcards. Thanks to the many local institutions that incorporated photography into their publications—such as churches, schools, and social clubs—Baltimore's Black citizens enjoyed an abundance of such images and leveraged the broad reach that **print publication** made possible.

A new genre with special value for African American photographers emerged in the early 1900s: street photography. Smaller cameras and more sensitive films made it possible to snap a picture spontaneously and quickly—and thus to capture candid moments in public places. African American photographers found in this

genre a powerful vehicle for artistic expression as well as a means to convey the daily realities of the Black experience.

Together, portraiture and street photography command pride of place in **the Black photo book**. Whether it is an anthology with many contributors or a single-artist volume, the photo book—as a collection of images shaped by individual and communal visions—is especially suited to embrace the great variety of Black perspectives.

While we know now that photographs can be falsified and can exert influence in ways that are dangerously anti-democratic, African American photography still extends its liberatory promise to its creators, subjects, and viewers.





*While Waiting, East Fayette Street, 2008.*

## **BALTIMORE: A CITY OF CONTRADICTIONS**

She sits with a few bags, talking on the phone while waiting for a bus in downtown Baltimore. On the bench appears the familiar phrase, “Baltimore: The Greatest City in America.” John Clark Mayden captured this moment in 2008. Since the 1970s, Mayden has documented “The Greatest City in America” through photographs of its people and their neighborhoods—especially its African American residents.

Today one still sees the phrase, although often faded, on benches across the city. This great city of Baltimore is the product of a rich and complex history. Baltimore is the city where Francis Scott Key penned “The Star-Spangled Banner,” where the first common carrier railroad was constructed, and where millions of immigrants entered the United States. It is home to Lexington Market, the oldest operating

public market in the nation, and the *Afro-American*, the oldest family-owned African American newspaper. Right alongside these civic achievements, however, lies a record of painful failures. Especially when it comes to race, Baltimore’s contradictions are conspicuous.

Prior to the Civil War, the largest free Black population in the nation lived in Baltimore. Nevertheless, over 15,000 enslaved people were sold in the domestic slave trade from the city’s port to New Orleans. Distinguished African American institutions—universities, museums, churches, cultural organizations, and clubs—were founded here, and we celebrate the legacies of civil rights pioneers such as Lillie May Carroll Jackson and Thurgood Marshall. But phases of progress have always been accompanied by health crises, opportunity gaps, and geographic displacement, especially when it comes to the lives of poor Black citizens. The city’s illustrious past has also led us to a present impaired by gun violence, drugs, and poverty, all of which disproportionately affect African American neighborhoods.

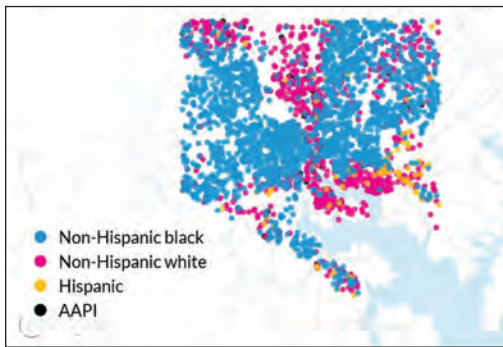
**Nonetheless, there are two Baltimores, and your zip code determines whether or not you live or die.** – Kondwani Fidel, “How A Young Boy Has Been Decaying in Baltimore Since Age 10: A Death Note”



*Untitled, Reservoir Hill, 1977.*

## IS GEOGRAPHY DESTINY?

Baltimore's racial geography is hyper-segregated, meaning predominantly Black neighborhoods are both racially concentrated and isolated from other neighborhoods. It also means that low-income Black people are separated from middle- and high-income people of their own and other races. Hypersegregation has produced "two Baltimores," or what Morgan State University Professor Lawrence Brown calls the "White L" and the "Black Butterfly."



**Population distribution of residents by race or ethnicity.**

Source: 2012–16 American Community Survey data.

Notes: Each dot represents 200 residents. AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander. © MapBox  
© OpenStreetMap, via the Urban Institute.

Our city's new building developments, jobs, walkable neighborhoods, and other amenities are concentrated in the "White L." Meanwhile, the "Black Butterfly" suffers from underinvestment and over-policing, within a landscape of abandoned rowhouses, food deserts, and rundown school buildings.

How does this kind of segregation exist today, given the advances of the civil rights movement in terms of voting rights, school integration, and fair housing? Brown's research has revealed that

"Baltimore's current hypersegregation is the fruit of a long litany of policies and practices deployed and perfected between 1910 and 1950." The way we live now has everything to do with this past.

In the nineteenth century, Baltimore's many Black residents lived in each of the city's twenty wards and eight districts. Segregation—in housing, schools, and public spaces—was gradually incorporated into the city structure through municipal and federal actions. In 1902, a Confederate monument (the first of four) was erected on Mount Royal Avenue, a clear symbol of white supremacy. In 1911, Baltimore's city council enacted an ordinance that prohibited African Americans from moving into white residential areas—the first such law in American history. Electric streetcars, the first in the nation, connected downtown to majority white neighborhoods. Racially restrictive covenants furthered residential segregation by allowing white homeowners to control whom their homes were sold to and, in the 1930s, the Federal Housing Administration refused housing loans to African Americans. White residents enforced residential segregation through violence—intimidating Black residents and destroying Black-owned homes.

Even after the Supreme Court ruled against restrictive covenants and redlining, ending legal housing segregation, the geographic patterns continued. In fact, the "Black Butterfly" adheres closely to the redlined maps of the mid-1900s. Baltimore's current hypersegregation is a product of both the racial restrictions of the last century and the economic, law enforcement, and investment trends of recent decades.

## EAST BALTIMORE

**I'm from the east side of town—my neighborhood is called DDH, short for Down Da Hill, or what many of us call Down Bottom. The row homes in my neighborhood cascade downward on a series of sloping hills. Like most of East Baltimore, or Baltimore in general, every family isn't poor or soaring below the poverty line, but the drug trade has affected us all, creating many different realities. Some of us fell, while others were able to fly.** – D. Watkins, *We Speak for Ourselves: A Word From Forgotten Black America*

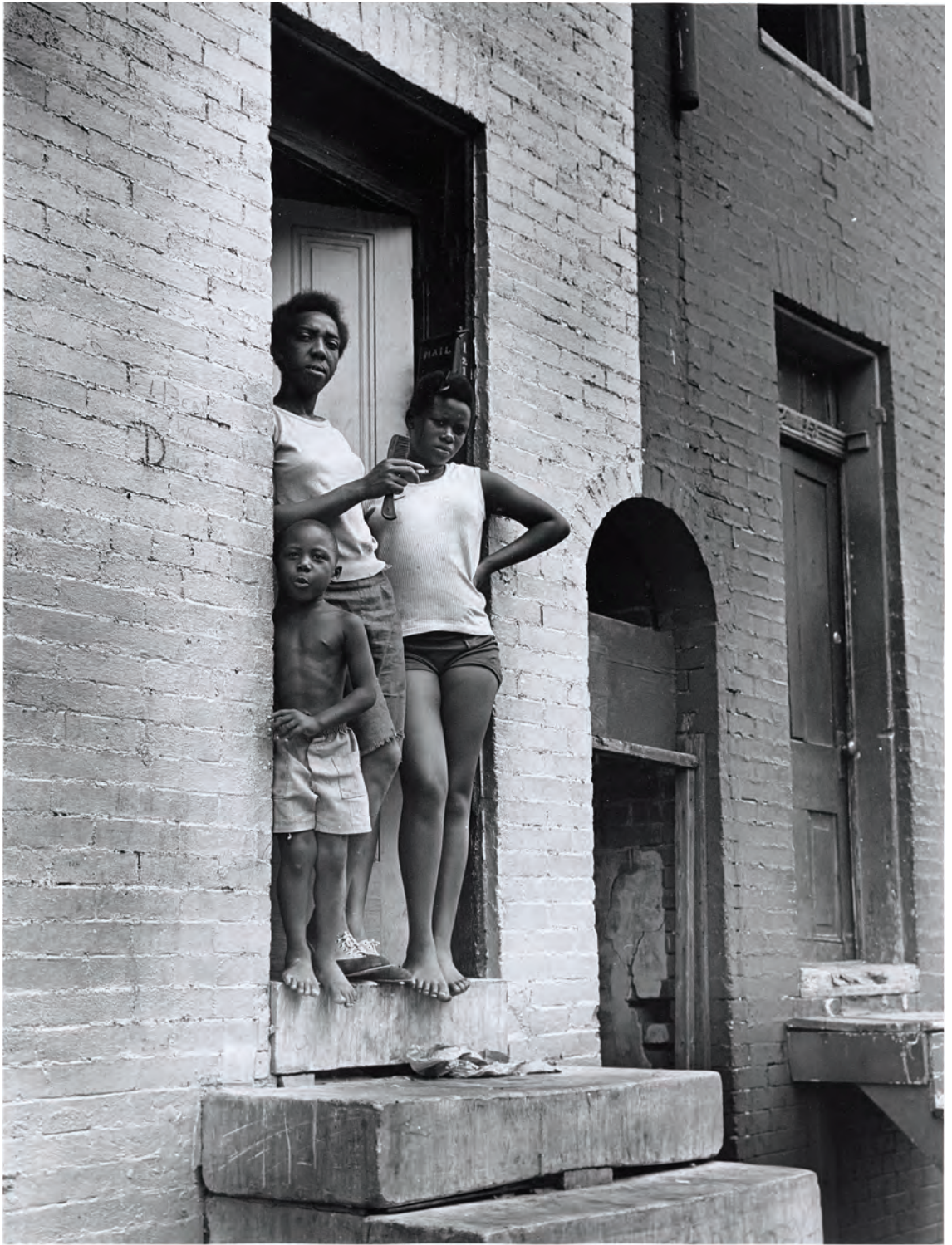
Fells Point. Butchers Hill. McElderry Park. Oliver. Middle East. Gay Street. These East Baltimore neighborhoods wrap around Patterson Park, near the waterfront, and abut Clifton Park to the north. The east side proudly hosts Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, the second high school in Baltimore established for African American students, which has produced numerous championship basketball teams and notable alumni such as businessman Reginald F. Lewis and musicians Ruby Glover and Tupac Shakur.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, East Baltimore's population was largely composed of working- and middle-class European and Jewish immigrants. During the Great Migration, the mass exodus of Black Southerners to the North and Upper South, East Baltimore's African American population increased with the availability of nearby industrial jobs. The area's new Black residents were not welcomed by their white neighbors; through the process of blockbusting, many German, Polish, Italian, and Czech families moved to the suburbs. For those who stayed, restrictive covenants and redlining

produced block-by-block segregation. As white flight continued and the racial composition of East Baltimore changed, Black churches followed their congregants. In 1929, Grace Memorial Baptist Church purchased a Gothic building at Eden and Chase Streets from a white Episcopal church and, in 1931, Baltimore's oldest African American Roman Catholic congregation, St. Francis Xavier, moved to the Madison Square Methodist Episcopal Church.

By the 1970s, many east side neighborhoods were predominately Black. These residents were especially vulnerable to displacement, as the Johns Hopkins Hospital, constructed in 1889 on North Broadway, expanded its campus every few decades. At times, the hospital bought up local houses cheaply but left them vacant for long years. Crime rose in these depopulated neighborhoods, and community cohesion suffered drastically. Today, as development continues, the Johns Hopkins Hospital and its neighbors still wrestle with a long-standing dynamic of distrust.





Untitled, East Baltimore, 1972.





Knuckle Greeting, Eutaw Street, 2008.

## WEST BALTIMORE

The Village, a.k.a. Edmondson Village. Rosemont. Upton. Sandtown-Winchester. Franklin Square. Harlem Park. West Baltimore lies below and between Druid Hill Park and Gwynn Falls / Leakin Park, neighborhoods that have nurtured the careers of prominent African American performers like Cab Calloway and Ethel Ennis and activists like Lillie May Carroll Jackson and Clarence Mitchell Jr.

In the 1880s, African Americans were displaced from their homes in the downtown area by the expansion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the construction of public plazas and parks. Many relocated to West Baltimore and built a vibrant community that included affluent and middle-class residences and businesses. Frederick Douglass High School—the second oldest high school in the nation for African American students, established in 1883—moved to West Baltimore in 1900, the same year that the historically Black college Coppin State University opened at its original location on Pennsylvania Avenue. But, like their neighbors to the east, Black West Baltimoreans also grappled with the detrimental effects of segregation and poverty. Many of the benefits of modern American life continue to pass these citizens by. In parts of “Old West Baltimore,” Ron Cassie reports,

**infant mortality rates ... are more than 3.5 times the national average. Life expectancy is more than 10 years below the statewide average, almost 20 years shorter than in Roland Park, which sits just a few miles away—ranking below famine-afflicted North Korea. ... [I]n Sandtown-Winchester ... poverty rates surpass 30 percent.**

Community resilience has been tested and renewed by periodic uprisings, following the deaths of Private Thomas Broadus (1942), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), and Freddie Gray (2015). These uprisings, responses to specific losses, have also been directed at structural inequalities, with calls for better schools, jobs, and housing, as well as an end to police brutality.

## BLACK ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

As Black neighborhoods took root in West Baltimore, its main business thoroughfare, Pennsylvania Avenue, once populated by German immigrants, transformed into a shopping and entertainment district lined with Jewish- and Black-owned businesses. Anchored by the Royal Theater, the Sphinx Club, and the Arch Social Club, and gilded with numerous jazz clubs, the Avenue served as the Baltimore backbone of the Chitlin Circuit, a network of Black entertainment spaces across America.



*End of an Era, Royal Theater, Pennsylvania Avenue, 1972.*



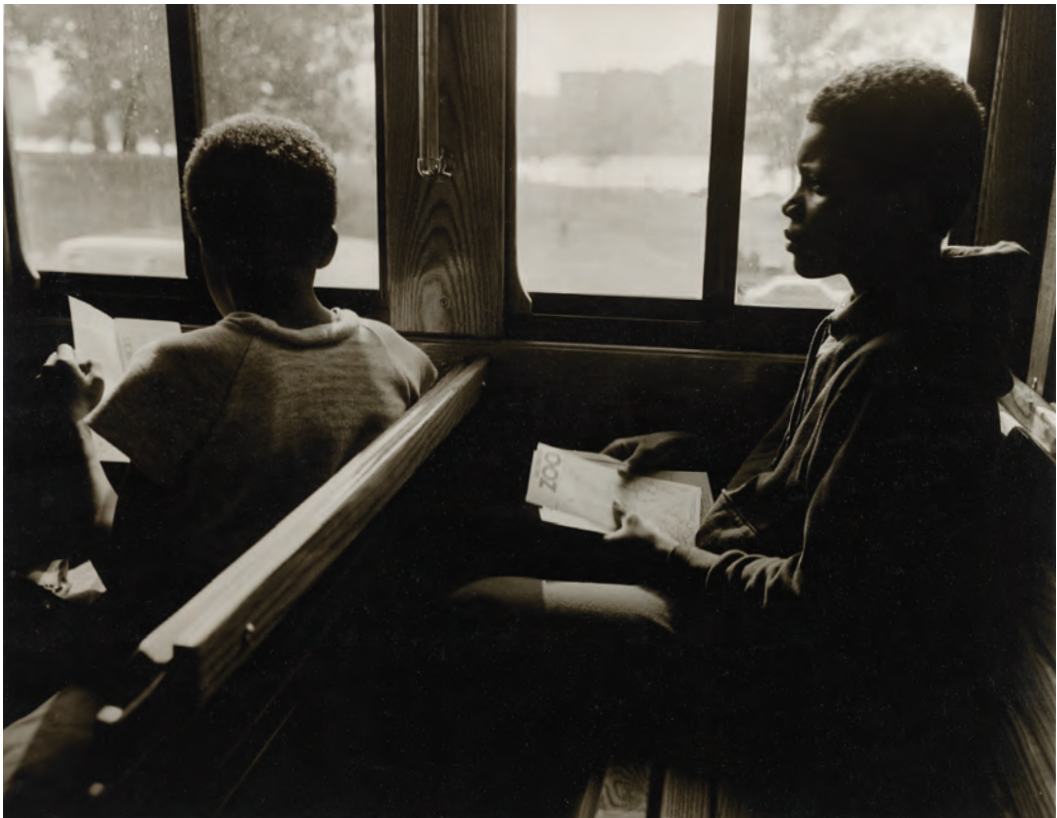
In 1968, in the Holy Week Uprising that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., many Pennsylvania Avenue businesses were damaged, looted, or closed, triggering economic deterioration in the surrounding neighborhoods. In 2015, Pennsylvania Avenue was again a site of civil unrest after the death of Freddie Gray in police custody. Today, after decades of decline, the Avenue is making a comeback through the re-establishment of Black-owned businesses and its recent designation as one of the state's official Arts and Entertainment Districts. ♦

## FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

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Scenic Trolley Ride, Downtown Baltimore, 1985.

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## Publication

A new book by the artist, *Baltimore Lives: The Portraits of John Clark Mayden*, featuring 101 of his Baltimore photographs and an essay by art historian Michael D. Harris, accompanies the exhibition. Visit the Johns Hopkins University Press online to purchase the book: [jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu](http://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu).

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## Events

Join us at these related events, and visit us online for complete, up-to-date information: [library.jhu.edu/city-people](http://library.jhu.edu/city-people).

### EXHIBITION CELEBRATION & BOOK SIGNING

**SUN, OCT 27 | 4:30 PM**

Featuring remarks by John Clark Mayden and Bloomberg Distinguished Professor Lawrence Jackson, a book signing for *Baltimore Lives*, and a reception.

### CITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

**SUN, FEB 23 | 1–5 PM**

To mark the closing of the exhibition, enjoy a special afternoon of activities for all ages learning about and celebrating Baltimore neighborhoods.

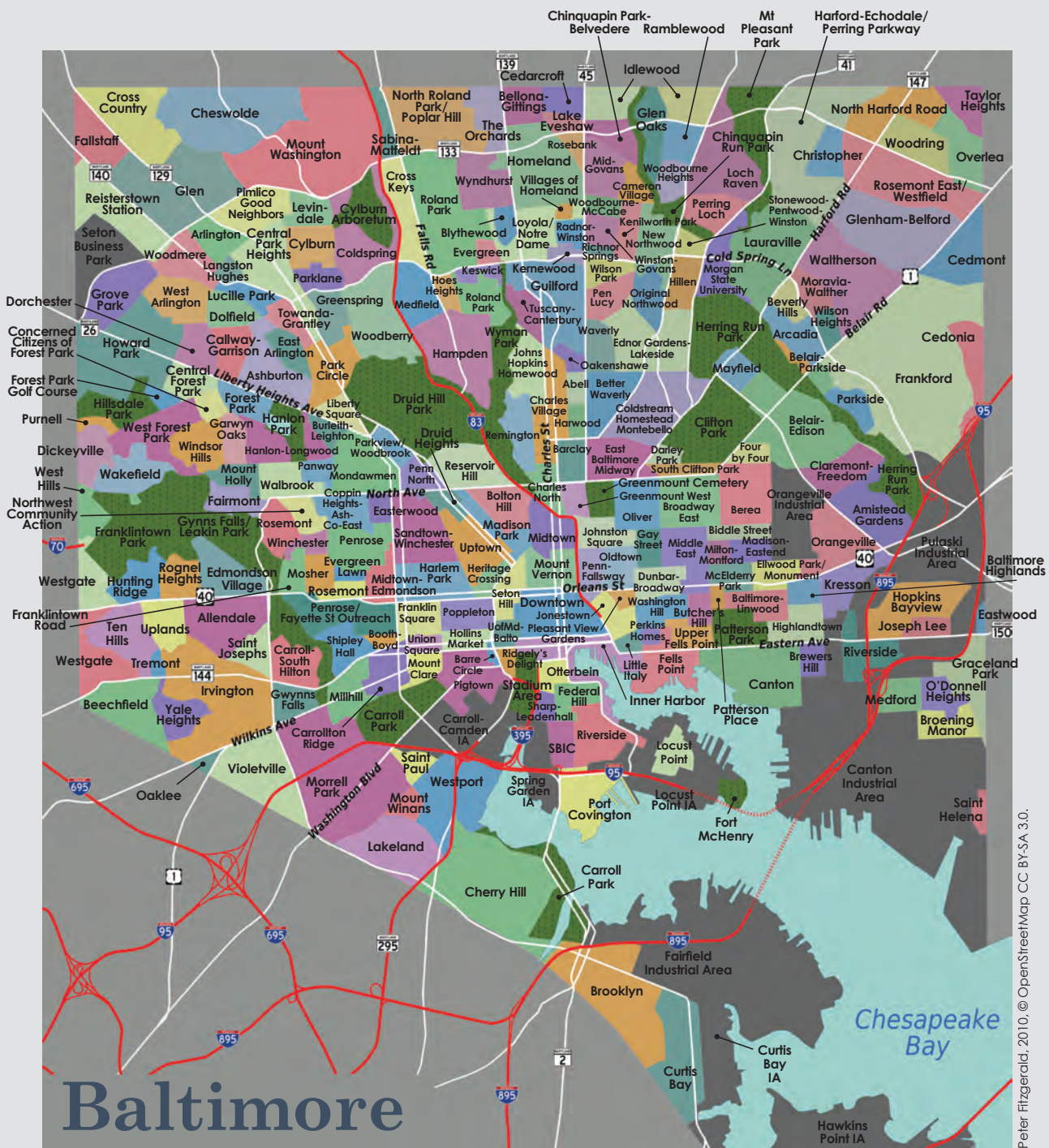
## NEIGHBORHOOD STORIES

**Neighborhood Stories** is a forum for collecting and sharing stories about everyday life in Baltimore's historically African American neighborhoods—memories, anecdotes, poems, fiction, and photographs. This community engagement initiative honors and extends the spirit behind John Clark Mayden's photographs.

Do you have a neighborhood story you'd like to share? To learn how you can participate, email [specialcollections@lists.jhu.edu](mailto:specialcollections@lists.jhu.edu).

We thank our Johns Hopkins University programming partners, the Billie Holiday Project for Liberation Arts in the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences and the Center for Social Concern.





Baltimore is often called a “city of neighborhoods” thanks to the 278 “Neighborhood Statistical Areas” within its 92 square miles. Please add your locations to the wall map.

John Clark Mayden’s photographs focus on some of Baltimore’s historically Black neighborhoods. You can explore the settings of his images through the digital storymaps in the gallery.



*Roller Skates, South Monroe Street, 1984.*

**JOHN CLARK MAYDEN** is a photographer of and from Baltimore. His work has been exhibited at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center, the Walters Art Museum, and the Baltimore Museum of Art, among other venues.

### VISIT THE EXHIBITION

**October 7, 2019–March 1, 2020**

The George Peabody Library  
17 E. Mount Vernon Place  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Tuesday–Thursday, 10 AM to 5 PM

Friday, 10 AM to 3 PM

Saturday, 10 AM to 1 PM

Sunday, 1 to 5 PM

Closed Mondays, November 28–29  
(Thanksgiving), and December 22–  
January 3 (Peabody campus winter break).

**We extend special thanks to John Clark Mayden and Bronwyn Mayden, along with their family, for their significant gift of the John Clark Mayden Collection to the Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries.**

The collection was acquired through the Africana Archives Initiative, a partnership between the Sheridan Libraries and the Billie Holiday Project for Liberation Arts in the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences.

To learn more visit: [sites.krieger.jhu.edu/billie-holiday-project](https://sites.krieger.jhu.edu/billie-holiday-project).

Major support for *City People: Black Baltimore in the Photographs of John Clark Mayden* and related programming is provided by contributors to the Sheridan Society, the Friends of the Johns Hopkins University Libraries, and the Winston Tabb Special Collections Research Center.

Support for the related publication, *Baltimore Lives: The Portraits of John Clark Mayden*, is provided by the Sheridan Libraries and the Office of the Provost.

COVER: Unfiled, Patterson Park, 2005.

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