



EXPERIENCING WEST BALTIMORE

A PICTORIAL ESSAY

WEST BALTIMORE REIMAGINING AND REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

A Collaboration between the West Baltimore Redevelopment Council, the Economic Empowerment and Global Learning Project, Lafayette College, and the Imaging Research Center, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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PRODUCED BY WHITMAN FELLOWS

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We also extend our gratitude to all the Baltimore Icons who, over the course of the summer of 2021 and 2022, welcomed the Whitman Fellows into their homes and valued spaces, taking the time to share their perspective and resonance with Baltimore.

ENVISIONING OUR STORY

A BEGINNING NOTE ON THIS ESSAY



After a summer's experience in West Baltimore, Lafayette College Whitman Fellows desired a way to cultivate an expression of the people, places, and moments they encountered. The creation of a pictorial essay allows audiences, uninitiated with these spaces and their vibrancy, to immerse themselves in a visual medium that can be understood and digested at their own pace and interest. The visualness leads the feeling of the stories experienced, and it is complemented by context provided from the fellows' rich reflections. We want this essay to show you the profound insight we had into this community. Most essentially, this essay acts as a creation of joy primarily, celebrating the beauty we experienced. From our eyes and voices alone, we present our experience in West Baltimore.

THE HISTORIC ARCH SOCIAL CLUB



"Getting into the club felt like I was splashed with history and legacy. I looked at the historical items found in the club's building and realized that the club has been aiming for the betterment of the community for decades. The leaders we met were motivated by the harsh present and rich past."

- Khalid Al-Motaery

FINDING COMMUNITY



A location and interview that really stuck with the fellows was that of Marion Blackwell's in Henry Highland Garnet Park. Marion is a dedicated activist in her community, and this moment with her embodied the liveliness of the work she has done, and continues within West Baltimore. The atmosphere was welcoming and open, and she embraced us with a genuine warmth and excitement. Every one of our interviews was filled with a bright representation of joy and commitment that can't simply be put into words, and Marion's was a glowing example of that. She shared with us not only her visions and heart about the West Baltimore she knows now, but the ways in which she sees the community continuing to grow in the future. Our trips consisted of inexplicably beautiful moments, expressing of humanness and joy.

A LOCATION'S RESONANCE



"They say "a picture is worth a thousand words", and I say a place is worth even more. Experiencing those places made me have a much deeper realization of the situation each interviewee is in."

- Khalid Al-Motaery

STORIES WORTH TELLING



One of the many treasured interviews and experiences had was having the opportunity to sit down with former Matthew Henson Elementary School teacher, Margaret Powell. We learned of Margaret's fearless, compassionate nature, as well as her dedication to teaching. She told us of her soulful love of stories, extending from a childhood hearing stories that had been passed down. With immeasurable wisdom and wit, Margaret provided us a remarkable insight into her perspective and lived experiences in West Baltimore. Of the many things she talked about in relation to her community, she always circled back to her students and passion as an educator. She told a story of them, as much of herself. Her true dedication and joy for her students did not go unnoticed by the fellows. Margaret's deep, searing loyalty for West Baltimore is entirely admirable and impactful to witness.

A TASTE OF WEST BALTIMORE'S HISTORY



It is hard to miss Jim Hamlin's poignant black and white mural outside his Avenue Bakery on Pennsylvania Avenue. As an avenue that once was bustling with jazz and its biggest stars, Hamlin has chosen to commemorate some of that history in regards to the Civil Rights movement as it took place in Baltimore. He has dedicated himself to exceptional lengths in ensuring West Baltimore's rich history is not forgotten. The interior of his bakery is adorned with details on historical figures and locations that are significant. It highlights an immersive, truthful experience that Jim hopes to enlighten visitors with. The sincere dedication in which he has committed himself to keeping West Baltimore's history living is wonderful to experience firsthand.

LEARNING AND LOVING



"The motivation to drive the community to a better place, the determination to wake up every day and still believe in West Baltimore despite the ever-increasing pile of issues stuck with me the most."

- Yazdan Basir

THE JOY IN JAZZ



In every corner of the community, there is such a love present in West Baltimore. Experiencing a vibrant jazz concert at the Arch Social Club once in your life proves just that. The fellows valued getting to attend one of the club's annual event, and all of us were embraced by a warmth and joy that is so special and individual to the residents. This event clearly served as an outlet to celebrate each other, their community, and the culture they value. Dr. Phil Butts and his band's performance was an immersive, lively experience that was thoroughly enjoyed. We felt not only connected with the community, but ourselves as a group of students from various disciplines and backgrounds. From students sharing camera tricks, to expressing their groove on the dance floor, this evening emphasized the heart of what this experience meant to us. Quite simply, we were privileged to experience something so vivid and heartfelt, representing this community's true demonstration of joy.

GROWING TOGETHER



"I did not expect to find such humor, groundedness, and camaraderie between the fellows and I. I left comforted in the fact we got to share beautiful moments backdropped by Baltimore."

– Ashley King

HEALING AND VIRTUES



On our second trip in the summer, we found that our evening spent with Mama Kay, leading artist and community organizer at WombWork Productions, was an experience that resonated deeply. Mama Kay is a vivid storyteller, mainly through performance, and she works with the community's youth and adults. A notable expressive exercise she shared with us was her 'exercising virtues'. She does it with youth, to let them understand the power of the qualities they hold within themselves. One fellow noted that the exercise consisted of feeling as if she gave Mama Kay a piece of herself, and Mama Kay did in return for her, striking at the intimate power this experience held. The evening, filled with lessons and laughter, was appreciated deeply, and we left knowing more about not only the community, and the artists that cultivate conversation, but ourselves.

EMBRACING A COMMUNITY



"Service is the price you pay for the space you occupy; if you are not helping someone, you are behind on your rent."

- Cameron Miles

BUILDING UP, NOT BREAKING DOWN



"Failure is not an option," is the powerful mantra that Cameron Miles leads his mentees in his program, Mentoring Male Teens in the Hood, with. There is a grit and beauty in the work that Cameron does with his young mentee audience, teaching them the importance of living life fully and helping them to be the greatest they can be. In his program, he also focuses on teaching how the power of language can influence the way that these men position themselves in situations or conversations, all in the desire of instilling the meaning that lies behind every word and reaction. He looks at this as, "building them up with words, not breaking them down." Miles's tremendous insight and understanding of the community of West Baltimore, from such a deep, lived experience within it, was a wonder to see and hear of. As he detailed valuable stories and feelings for his community, the fellows felt the meaning in his words and missions deeply.

PRESERVATION



For the many times we valued being welcomed into the historic Arch Social Club, one particular conversation and moment meant a lot to the fellows. This was our interview with the club's first historian, Kaleb Tshamba. A brilliant, dedicated individual, Tshamba engaged with us about his thoughts on the importance of the active demonstration of love within a community, and his rich knowledge on the club's history and West Baltimore. Tshamba has devoted himself to consolidating the history of the Arch Social Club through documents, photographs, and even more recent experiences and support club members have provided. One cannot understate his dedication to preserving the club's history and guiding its revitalization and recruitment efforts. In being met with such wisdom and genuine desire for good change in the world, the fellows were left inspired and conscious of the importance of the smallest of efforts to do good in our communities and world.

GRATITUDE AND WARMTH

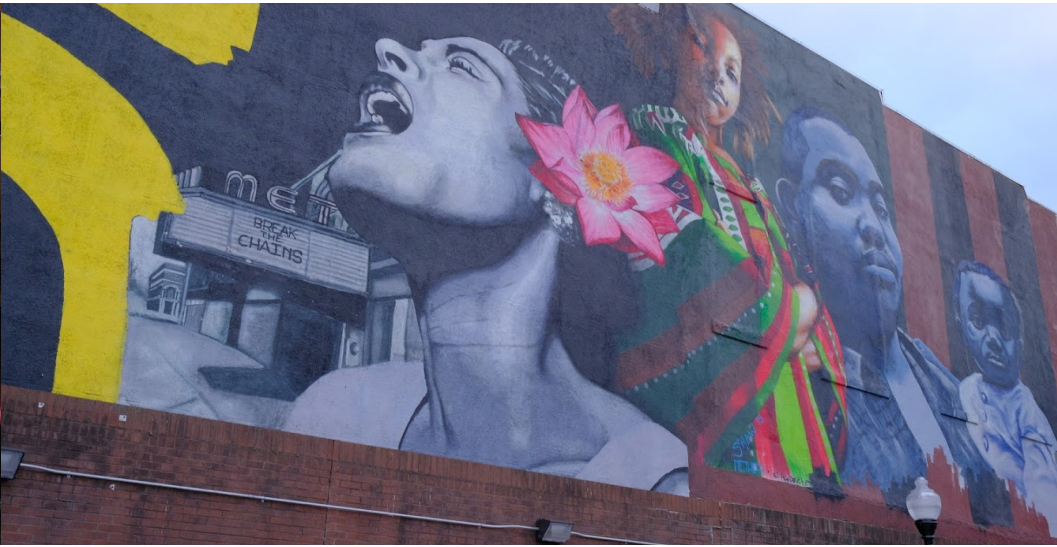


"I can say that the six days I spent in West Baltimore was the most impactful and immersive experience of my life. It made me see just how vital the narrative of the insiders are in understanding a place and why that must never be downplayed or belittled, for those stories are the backbone of place identity."

- QueSton Bell

A LIFE CHANGING MOMENT

THE HOPE IN THIS ESSAY'S IMPACT



As a conclusion, it is essential to acknowledge again, how deeply important and valued the experiences of the Summer 2021 trips have been to the Lafayette Whitman Fellows. It is also relevant to note and appreciate in these moments and conversations how many of the interviewees personally expressed the insight it will have for us in our lives as well, wherever we go. There couldn't be a truer declaration. The summer trips, the community members, and these moments have been unforgettable, invigorating, and life changing. In distributing this essay, it is our hope that people will understand a piece of the transformative, mutual learning experience that blossomed in West Baltimore. The photos on these pages may now be of the past, but the dedication, passion, and experiences live on in our hearts and minds. We thank you, West Baltimore, for everything you shared with us.

WEST BALTIMORE: A TAPESTRY OF EXPERIENCE

VIDEO ESSAY



Produced by Emily Mackin, the Summer 2022 experiences and interviews were compiled into a video document that can be both viewed and listened to, expanding on this essay's vibrancy. She and the contributing fellows to the project, Grace Ouko and Virginia Sacotingo, thank community members for the sharing of their time, spaces, and insights.

Emily Mackin with Erika Nally and Saidai Stuteley, September, 2021 (revised November, 2022): EXPERIENCING WEST BALTIMORE: A PICTORIAL ESSAY. A joint project and publication of the West Baltimore Reimagining and Redevelopment Council and the Economic Empowerment and Global Learning Project (EEGLP) at Lafayette College.

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