Durham County Department of Public Health

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Connecting our Past to Our Present: How History Impacts Health

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September 30, 2026

DURHAM COUNTY DCO NC 1881 | Public Health

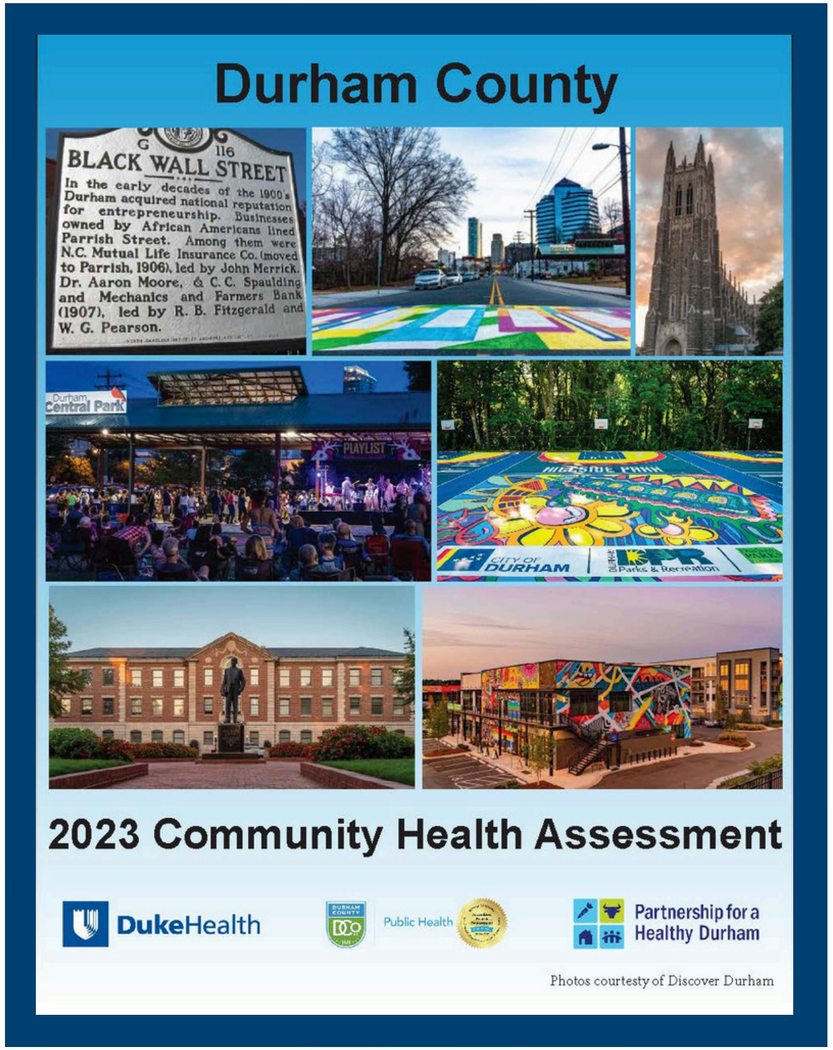
Presentation Overview



Photo courtesy of Discover Durham

- Background
- Why is history important?
- Using a historic lens in public health
- How housing impacts health
- How to apply a historic lens to your work
- Resources
- Acknowledgements
- Q& A

Story Time!



- Not a historian
- 2023 Durham County CHA section as launching point
- Connecting the dots
- Led to additional research and a written history
- Tied to ongoing workforce development efforts

Why is history important?



Photo courtesy of NC Digital Collections

Importance of History

- Undestanding our communities
- Understanding the field of public health
- Informing our current work and roles
- Teaching us about the relationship of our institutions with the community



Photo courtesy of NC Digital Collections

Importance of History

- Changing climate around history
- Accurate views of our communities and public health
- Correcting false narratives
- History as a determinant of health



Using a Historic Lens in Public Health

“The social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape the health of populations are not just the products of contemporary circumstance; they are part of an historical continuum.”

Boston University School of Public Health

https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2017/history-as-a-determinant-of-health/

Using a Historic Lens in Public Health

- Tell stories of resilience and empowerment
- Uplift community voice
- Build capacity
- Develop partnerships
- Analyze systems
- Understand reasons for differences in health outcomes

Housing and Health Durham Example



Photo courtesy of DCo Library Digital Collections

"The places where people live, work, learn, play, age, and pray can have significant effects on individual and community health outcomes. This includes, for example, homes, schools, workplaces, places of worship, grocery stores, transportation infrastructure, green spaces, and playgrounds."

Federal Policy to Advance Racial, Ethnic, and Tribal Health Equity report

American Indians in NC Piedmont Region

Home to American Indians since 13,000-8,000 BC

Successful stewards and managers of the land

Ways of life and traditions highly connected to the environment

Land belongs to the collective

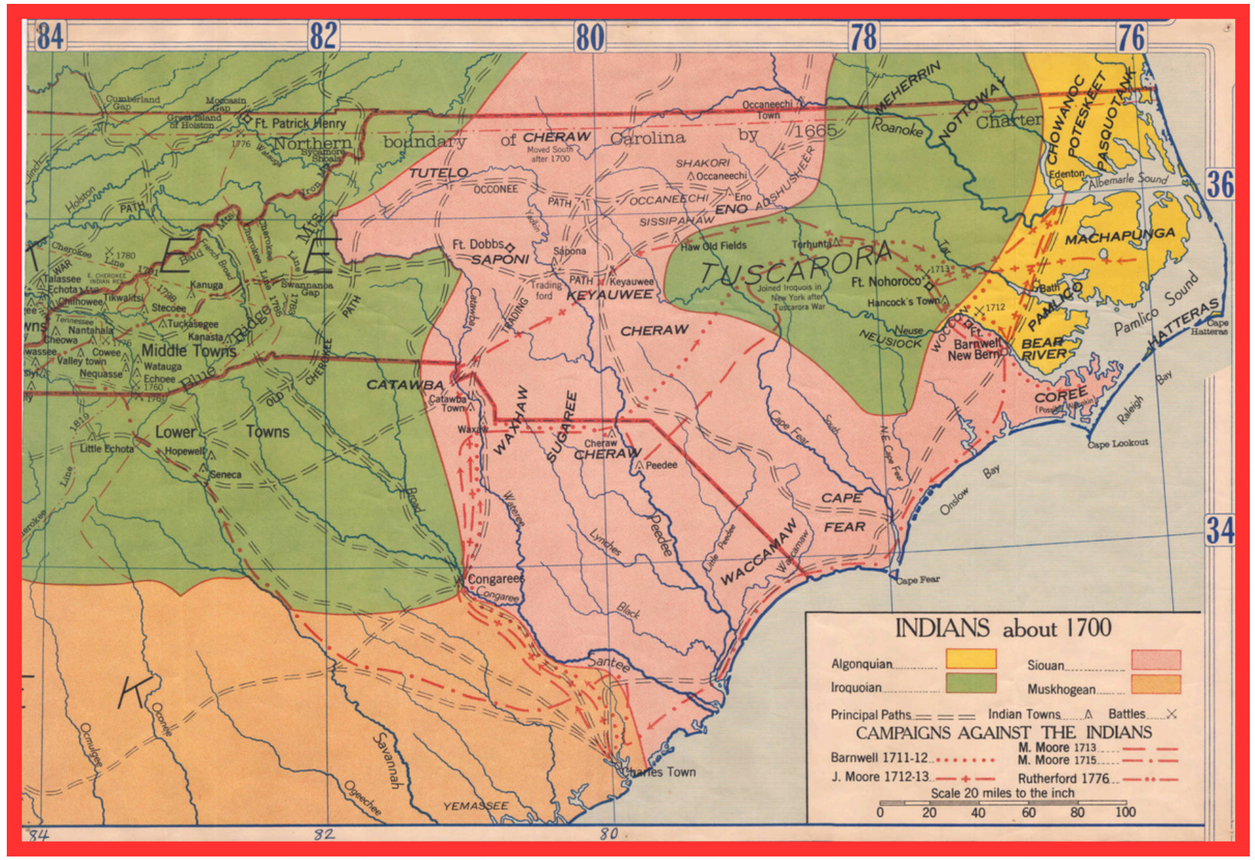
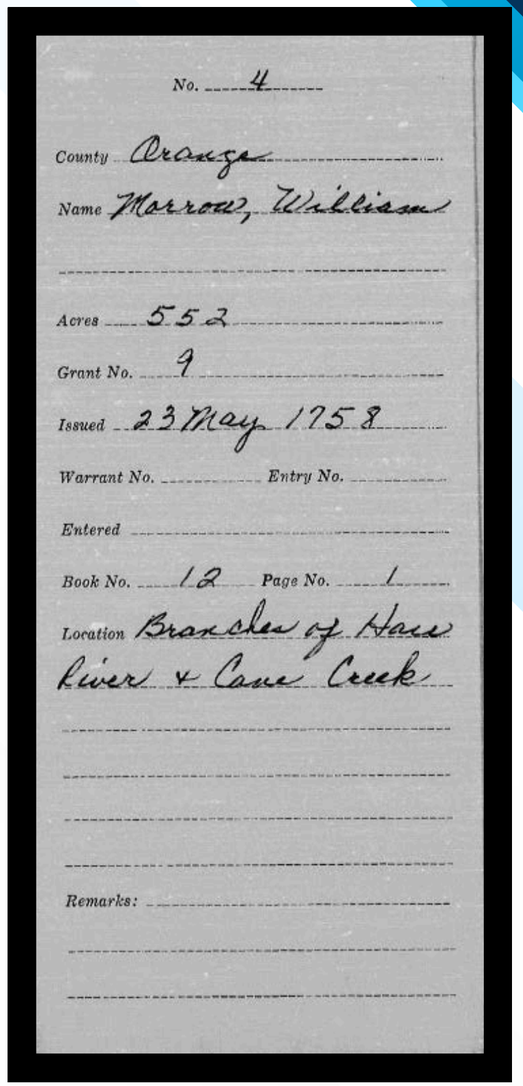


Photo courtesy of NC Digital Collections

Colonization and Land Grants

“With this legal document, all the land and its resources became private property.”

Uneven Ground, Bull City 150


No. 4

County Orange

Name Morrow, Williams

Acres 552

Grant No. 9

Issued 23 May 1758

Warrant No. Entry No.

Entered

Book No. 12 Page No. 1

Location Branches of Haw River & Cane Creek

Remarks:

Photo courtesy of the State Archives of NC

Decline of American Indian Population

- Displacement
- Captivity
- Disease
- War
- Resilience



Capture of John Lawson
Photo courtesy of North Carolina Archives and History

Laying the Durham Foundation

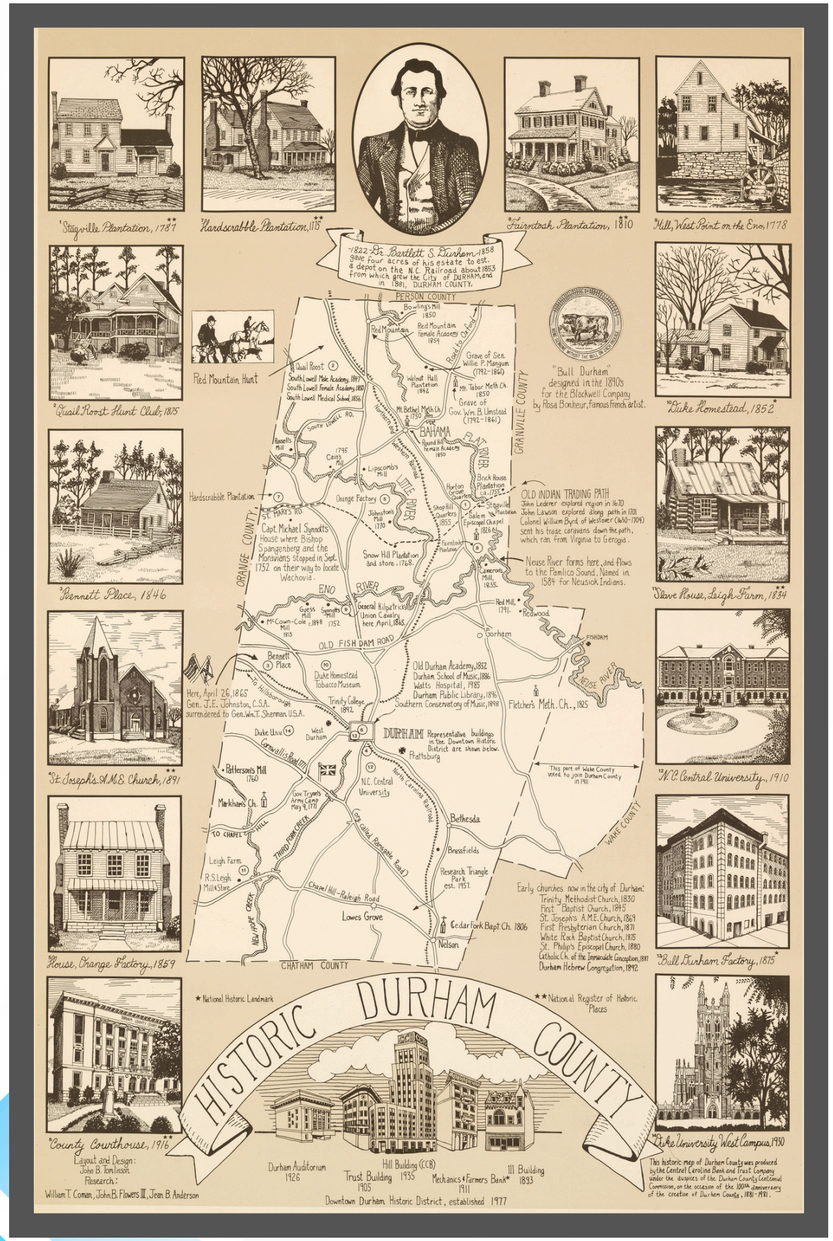
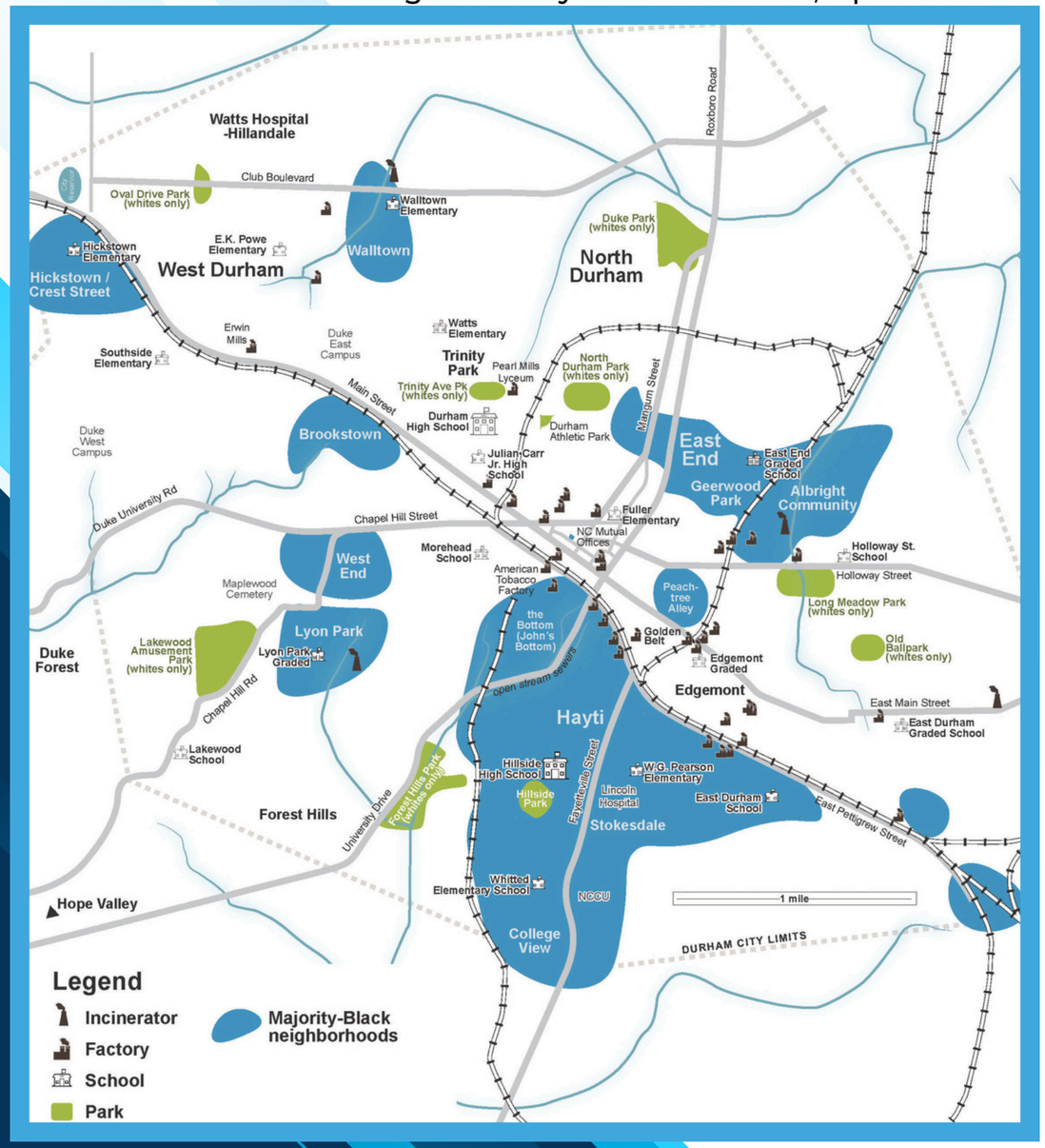


Photo courtesy of DCo Library/ NC Collections



Horton Grove Farm, part of Stagville Plantation
North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Image courtesy of Tim Stallman, Open Durham



Development of Durham Neighborhoods

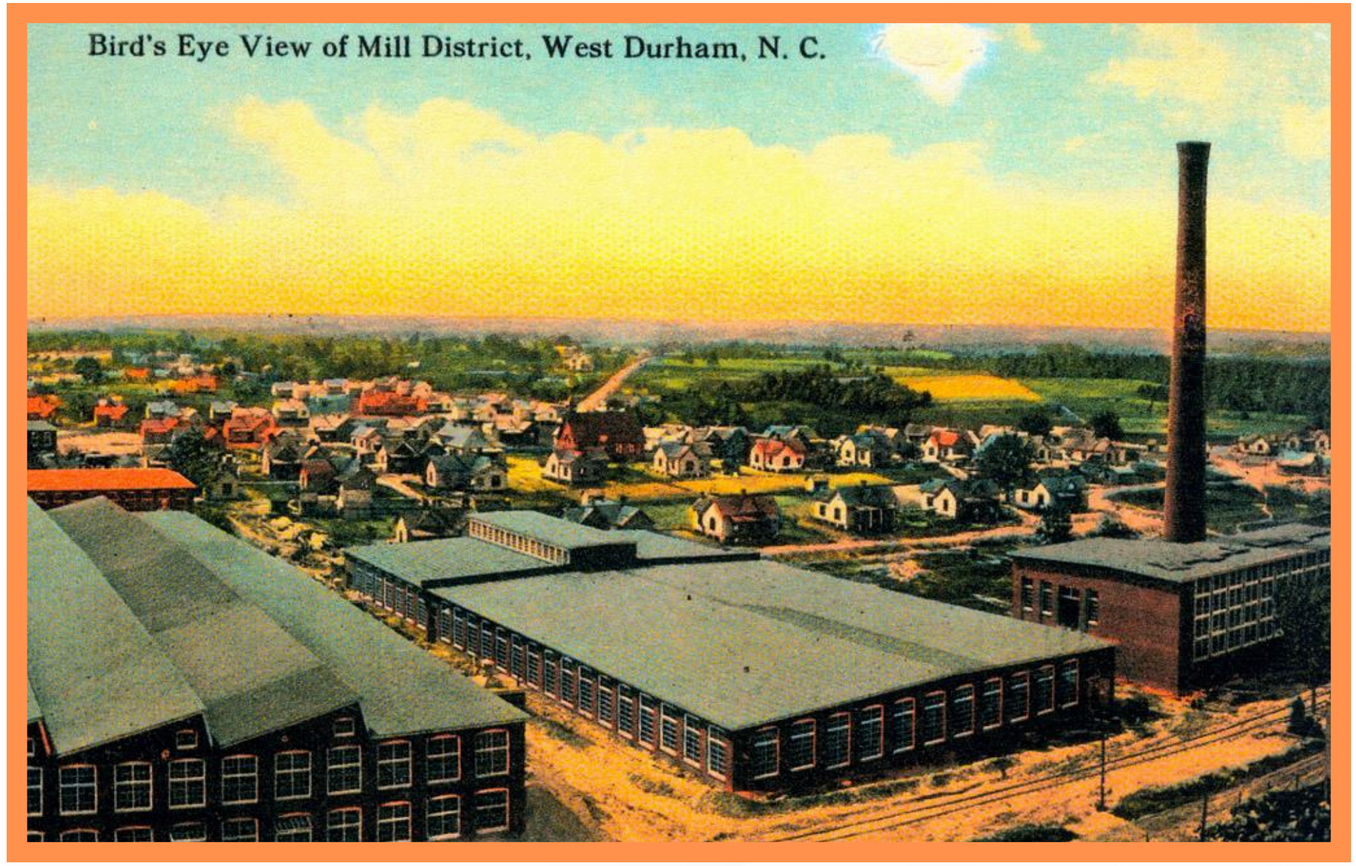


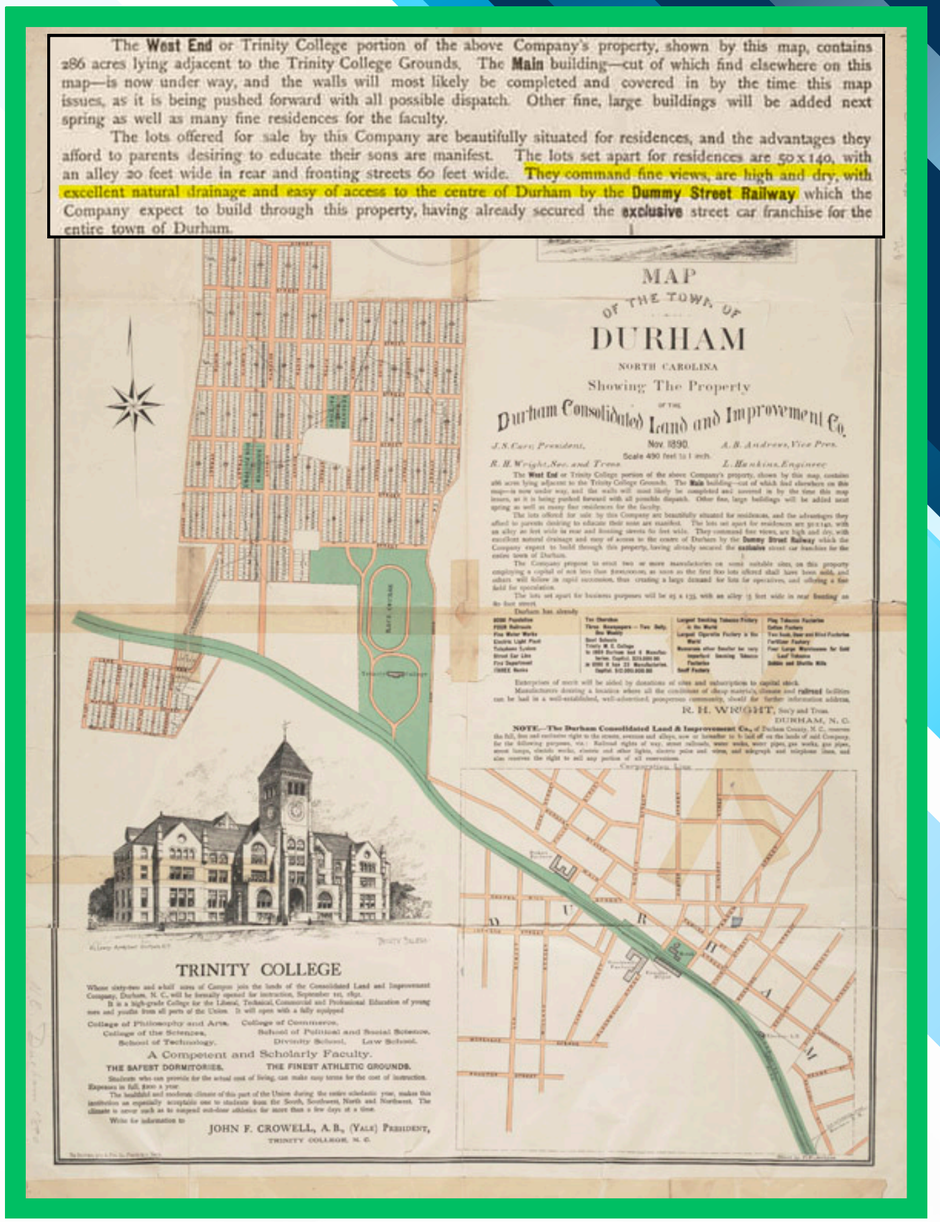
Image courtesy of Open Durham

Neighborhood Conditions

- High and Dry
- Parks and Trees
- Sewers & Infrastructure
- Investment



Images courtesy of Open Durham



The **West End** or Trinity College portion of the above Company's property, shown by this map, contains 286 acres lying adjacent to the Trinity College Grounds. The **Main** building—cut of which find elsewhere on this map—is now under way, and the walls will most likely be completed and covered in by the time this map issues, as it is being pushed forward with all possible dispatch. Other fine, large buildings will be added next spring as well as many fine residences for the faculty.

The lots offered for sale by this Company are beautifully situated for residences, and the advantages they afford to parents desiring to educate their sons are manifest. The lots set apart for residences are 50 x 140, with an alley 20 feet wide in rear and fronting streets 60 feet wide. They command fine views, are high and dry, with excellent natural drainage and easy of access to the centre of Durham by the **Dummy Street Railway** which the Company expect to build through this property, having already secured the **exclusive** street car franchise for the entire town of Durham.

MAP
OF THE TOWN OF
DURHAM
NORTH CAROLINA
Showing The Property
OF THE
Durham Consolidated Land and Improvement Co.

TRINITY COLLEGE

Unequal Housing Practices

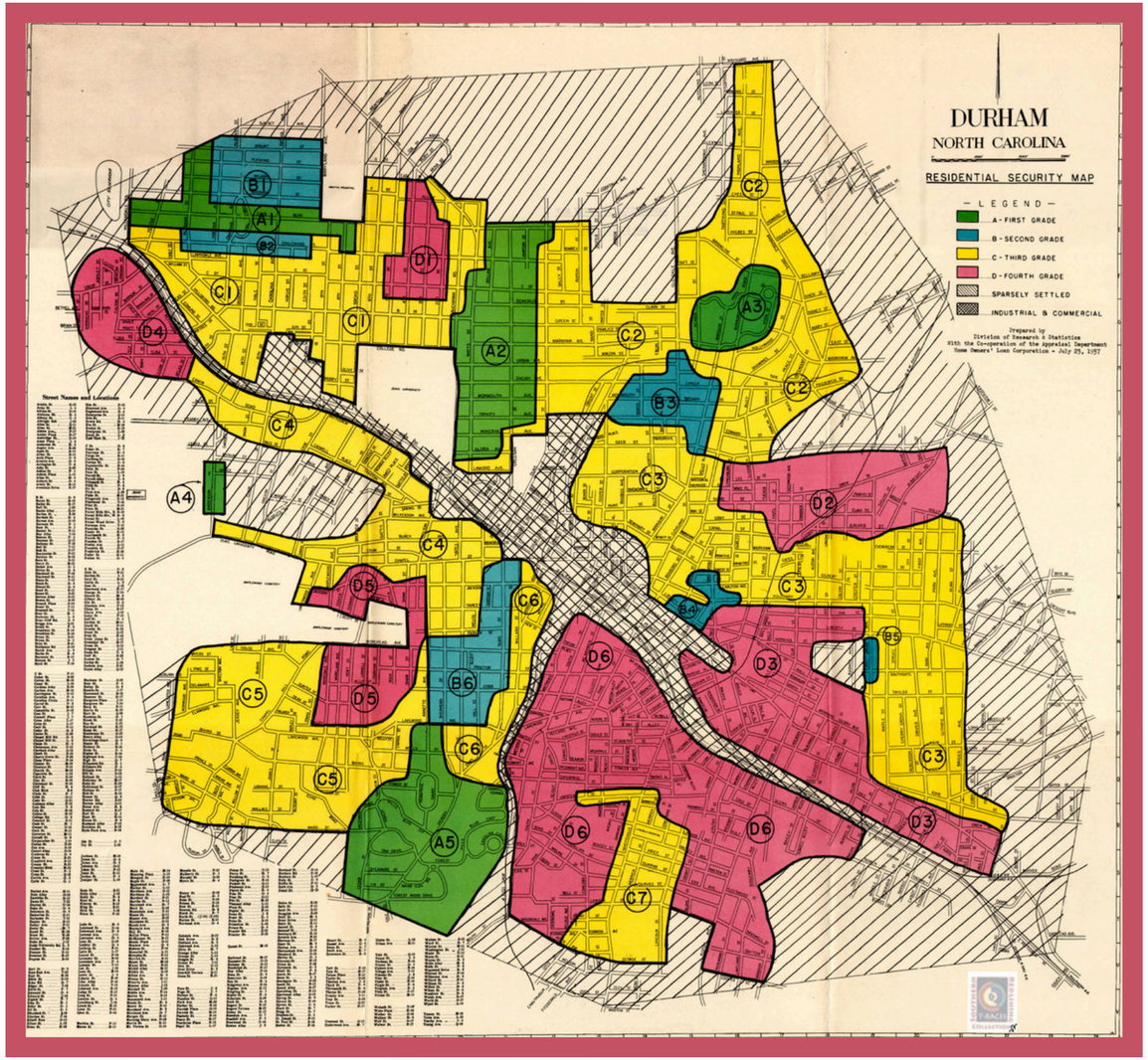


Image courtesy of Open Durham

- Restrictive Deed Covenants
- Redlining
- GI Bill
- Differences in Pay

Beging lots Nos. 3 and 4 in Block No. 10, as shown on the Map showing Hillcrest Addition situated on the North side of Holloway Street, East Durham, N.C., and owned by Durham Land and Security Company surveyed and plotted by S.M. Credle, surveyor, November, 1929, which said plat is duly recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds of Durham County in Plot Book No. 9, at page 20 and 21.

Negro Clause: That for a period of 99 years the said property, nor any part thereof, shall be sold or otherwise disposed of to a person of African descent, or to any person or corporation for the use of any person of African descent, except as a servant of a white person.

For further description see deed from the Durham Land and Security Company to J.P. Paschall, recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds of Durham County, North Carolina, in Deed Book 97, page 101, dated April 19th 1929. See also deed from J.P. Paschall to H.C. King, dated September 17th, 1930, recorded in Deed Book 99, page 721, office Register of Deeds aforesaid.

Public Housing

Federal Housing Act of 1949

Established a national housing policy to reach *“the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”*



Images courtesy of Open Durham

Urban Renewal

A program financed by the federal government for cities to raze "blighted" neighborhoods

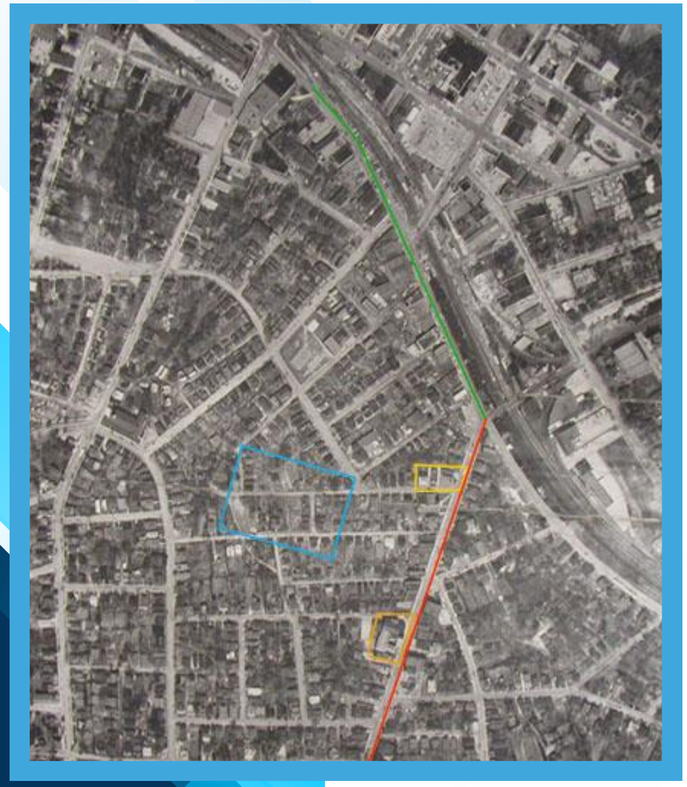
Highway 147

Promises Made

Displacement

Promises Broken

Urban Renewal Impact

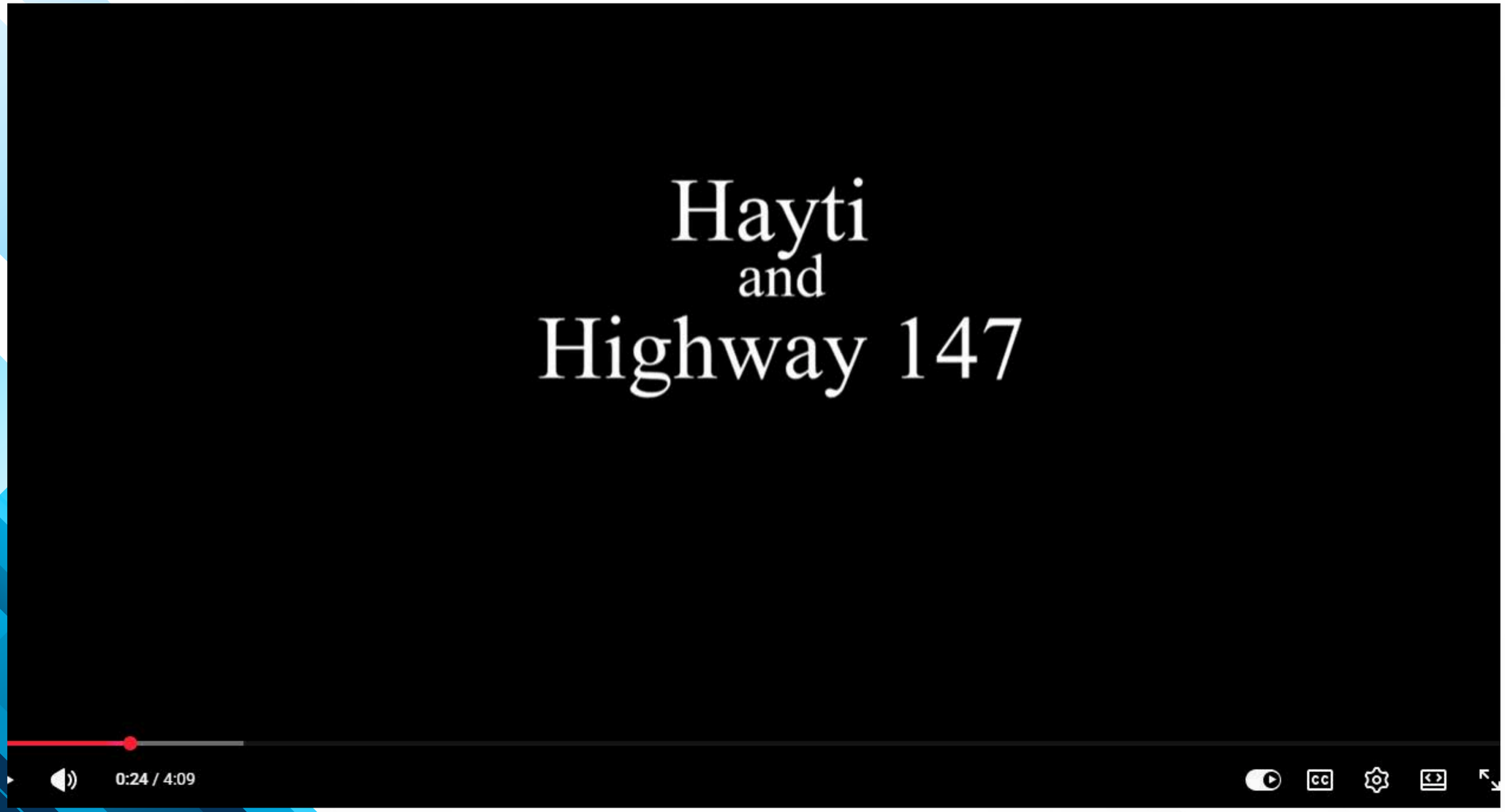






Left- Hayti in 1959;
Middle- Hayti in 2006
Right- Hayti Heritage Center
Images courtesy of Open Durham

Urban Renewal Impact



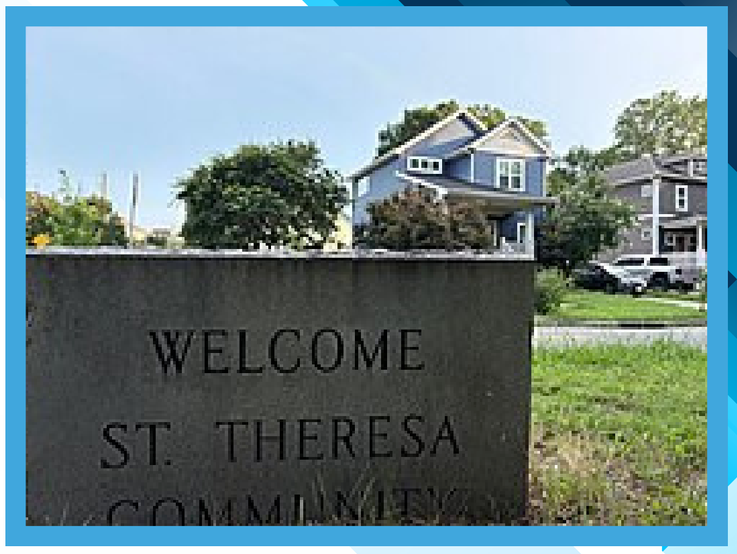
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYTcv2LAGdU

Neighborhood Revitalization Projects

Change in Population

Mixed Income Public Housing Model

Major Community Partnerships





Images courtesty of Discover Durham

Continued Change



Image courtesty of Durham County Government

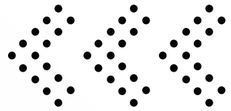
01 Great Recession

02 Gentrification

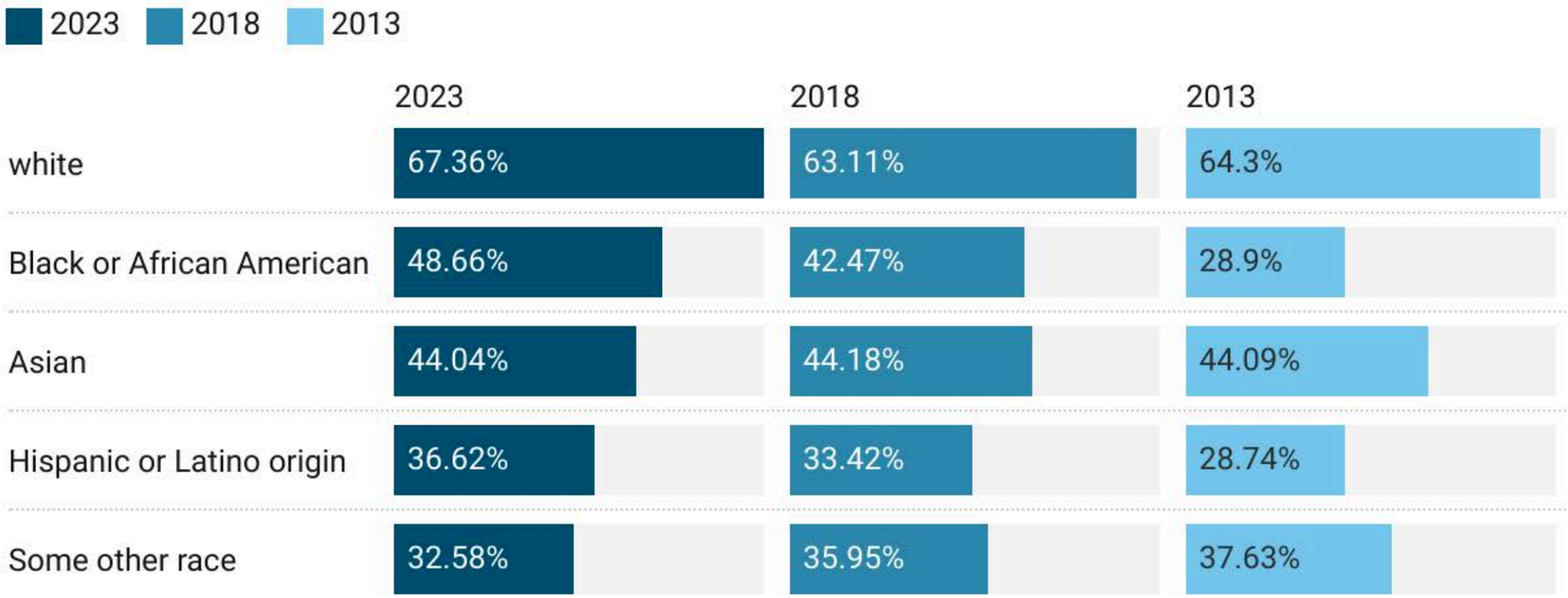
03 COVID-19 Pandemic

04 Push for Affordable Housing

Durham County Housing Data



Owner Occupied Housing Units in Durham County



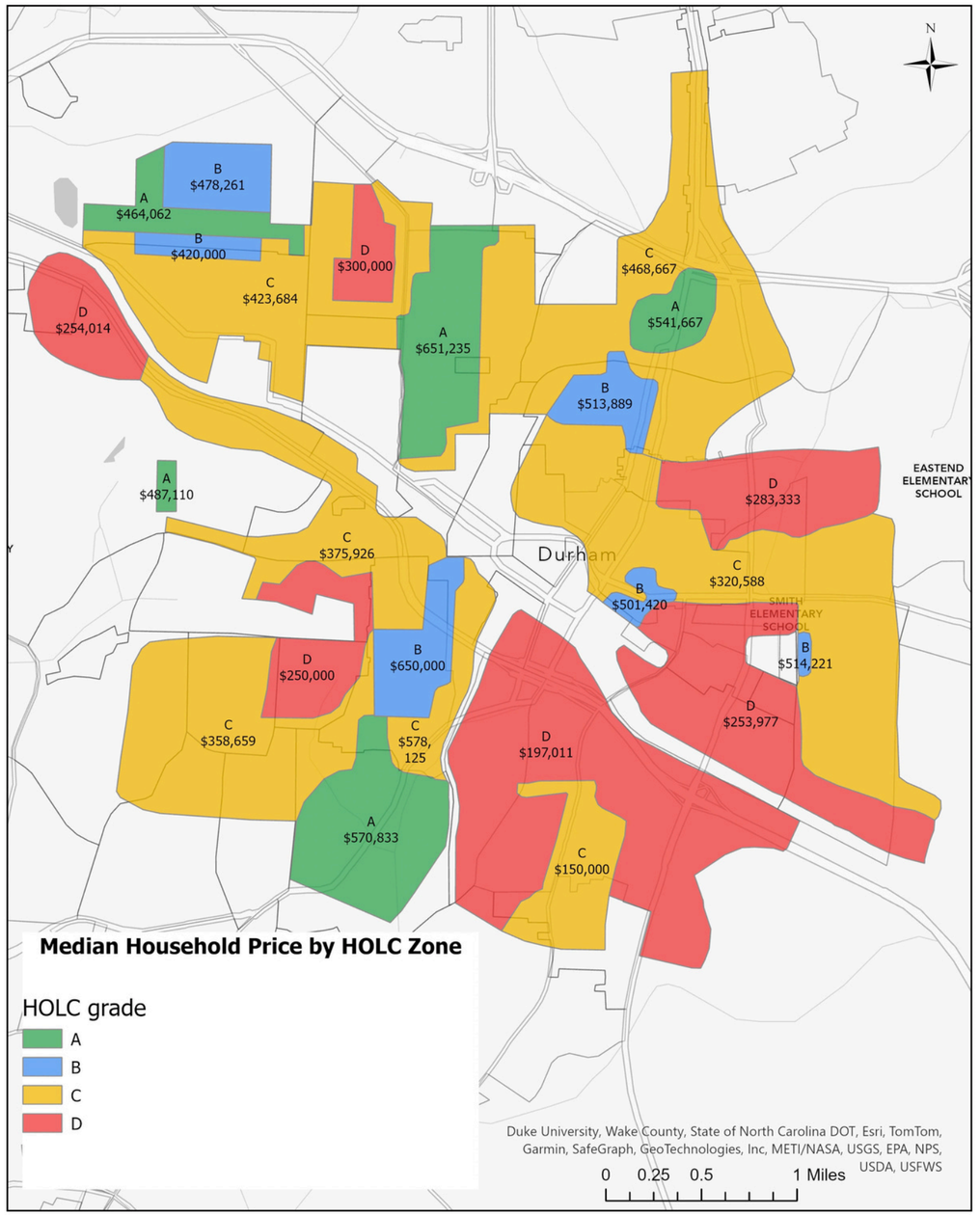
5-year estimates used in the above graph, Native American/ American Indians, two or more races and Alaskan Native data has been suppressed due to low counts.

Chart: Durham County Population Health • Source: Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Data courtesy of John-Paul Zitta

Durham County Housing Data

Durham HOLC relationship with Median Household Prices 2022



Data courtesy of John-Paul Zitta

What people, places, or things make Durham a good place to live?



Discussion Questions

How has Durham's history impacted today's community/population health?

In what ways does it feel important to know the history of the communities you serve?

How might we approach public health our roles differently with respect to history?

Applying a Historic Lens in Public Health

- Lunch and Learn Series (Planned)
- Historical Documents & Information
- Partnering with Local Library
- Working with Students
- Embedding History into the Community Health Assessment
- Obtaining Grants

A Pie in the Sky Idea...

In 2022, a workgroup formed to improve the onboarding process

Many staff at DCoDPH are from the Durham area, but MANY are not

What if all staff started with the same baseline understanding of Durham's history...



Image courtesy of NCIPH Photo Library

Health and History Learning Modules

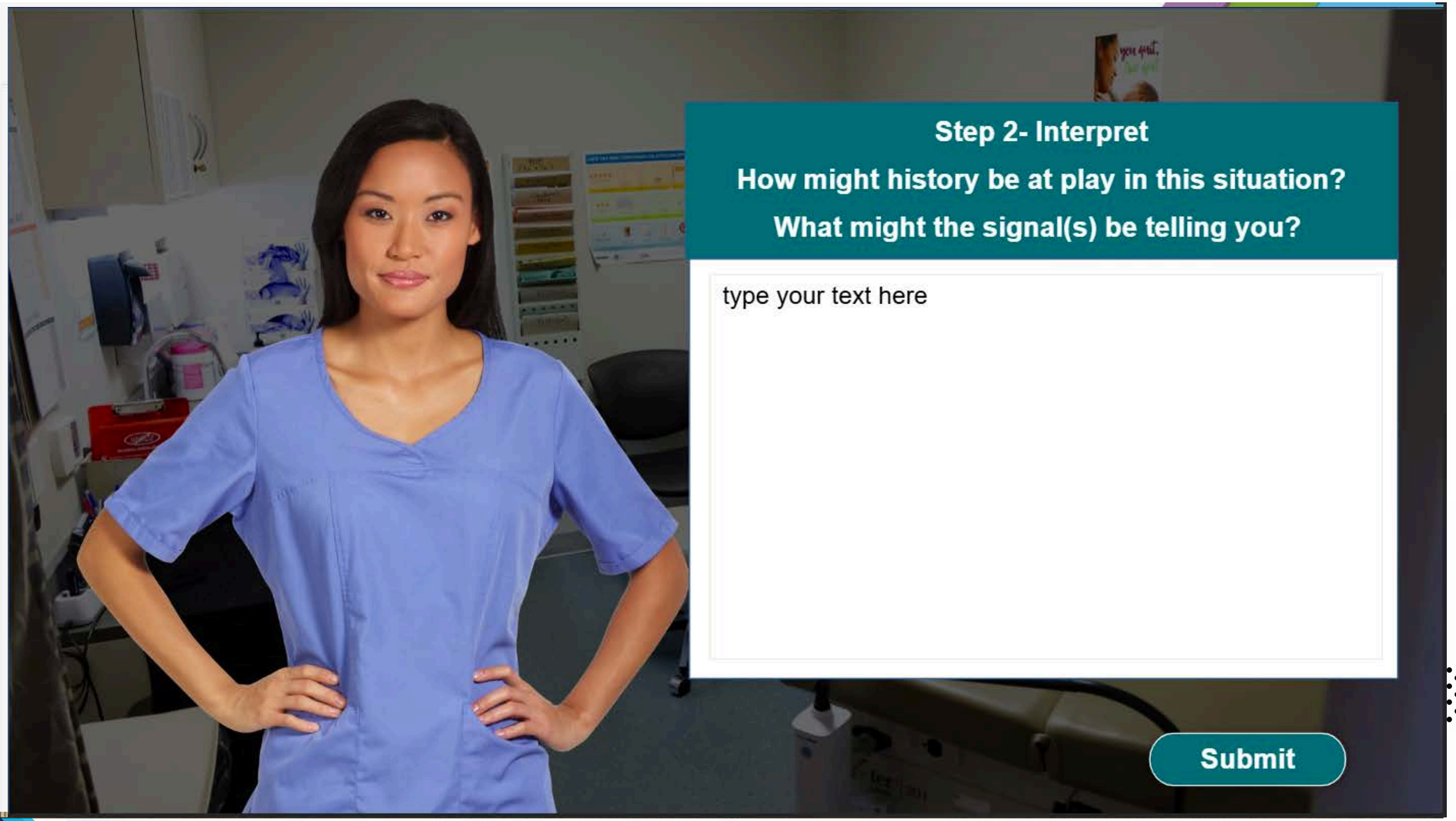
Expands access to health information

Supports interactive health education

Enables timely communication and updates

Improves reach to populations

Interactive Learning Platform



Activity

In one word, what is your thought about the information learned today?

https://www.mentimeter.com/app/presentation/alrdjbwfsi1cmjxtr2koz7taac7dapfj/present?question=o1w6pkuwd39g

Activity

How do you plan to apply the information learned today?

https://www.mentimeter.com/app/presentation/alrdjbwfsi1cmjxtr2koz7taac7dapfj/edit?question=op8o14smw25i

Acknowledgements

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- Durham County Department of Public Health
  - Onboarding workgroup, Leadership Team, Brilliant Editors- you know who you are!
- Durham County Government
  - Brilliant Editors- you know who you are!
- Durham County Library
- UNC American Indian Center
- Duke University School of Nursing
- North Carolina Institute of Public Health
- Partnership for a Healthy Durham
- Southern Alliance for Public Health Leadership
- UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health

Resources

Digital State and Local Archives

About the North Carolina History Project - North Carolina History

County Records Guide | NC Archives

Digital Collections | NC Archives

Government Records | NC Archives

Home | NC Historic Sites

Home | NCpedia

Major Repositories & Libraries | North Carolina Genealogy

Museum collections | NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

North Carolina's Digital Heritage · DigitalNC

Southern Oral History Program

Visit the State Archives of North Carolina | NC Archives

Resources

Readings

Durham County Health and History report

History as Determinant of Health- Boston University

Historical Perspectives on Public/Community Health

Federal Policy to Advance Racial, Ethnic, and Tribal Health Equity



Photo courtesy of Discover Durham

THANK YOU

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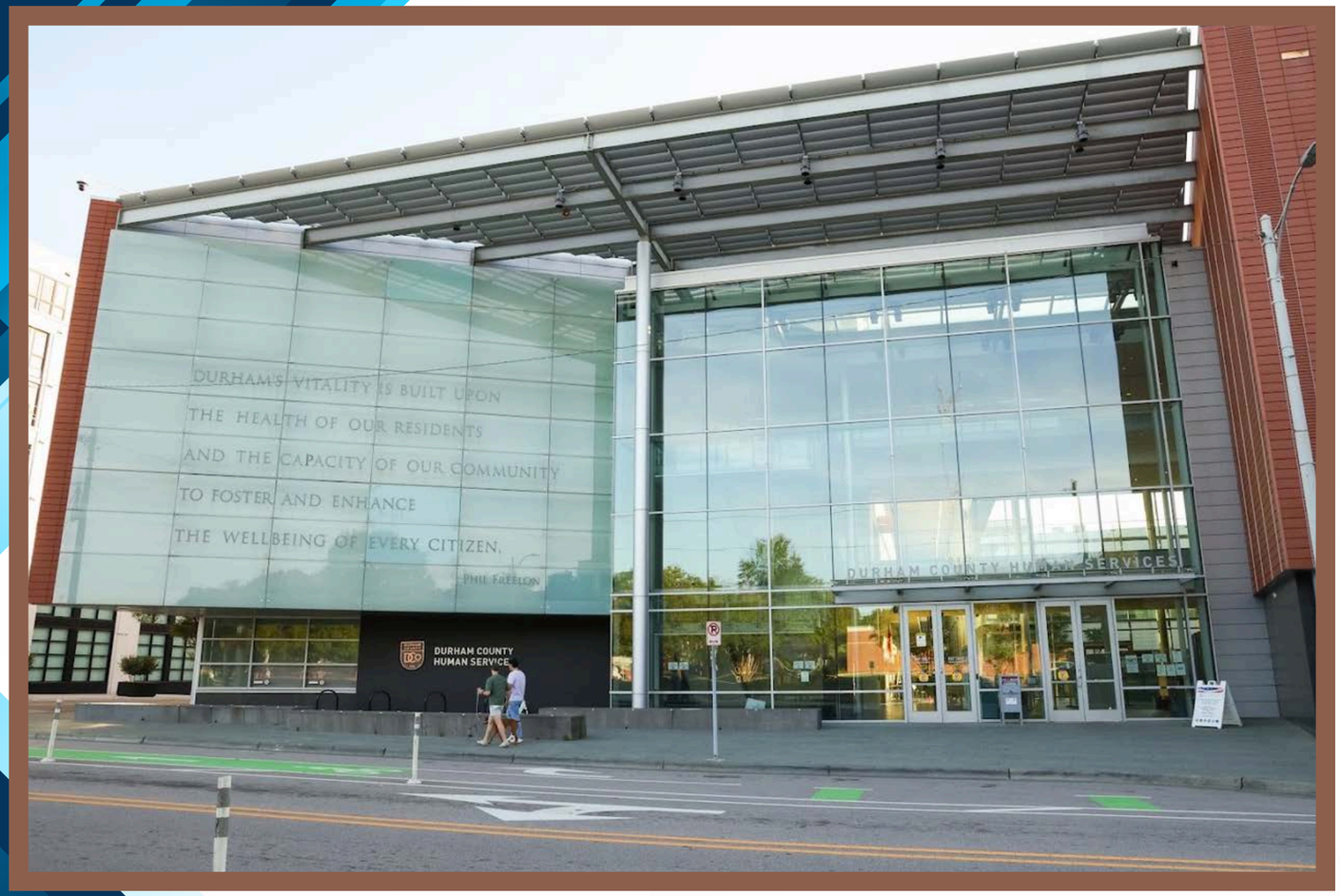

Photo courtesy of NCIPH Photo Library

Q&A