**"‘The Show of Strength Such Has Seldom Seen:’ Blockbusting and the Black Voting Bloc in 1950s Baltimore’s West Side."**

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In October 1958, a black voting canvassing organization called WomenPower endorsed Fourth District Coalition Ticket, an all-black political ticket led by incumbent Maryland State Senator Harry Cole. WomanPower embarked on a city-wide campaign to register close to one thousand new African American voters. The campaign focused on neighborhoods in the Fourth District where the racial makeup changed from white to black.[[1]](#footnote-2) Businesswomen and politicians witnessed the strength of black voting turnout at a luncheon hosted by WomanPower co-founders Victorine Adams and Ethel P. Rich in the Sheraton Belvedere Hotel in downtown Baltimore. Erla McKinnon, the treasurer of WomanPower, said: “No black group has ever had an activity in the Belvedere Hotel.”[[2]](#footnote-3) The luncheon desegregated the hotel and encouraged three hundred and eighty women in attendance to vote in the November 1958. *Baltimore Afro American* newspaper reporter Lula Jones Garret called the WomanPower luncheon a “show of strength such as Baltimore has seldom seen.”[[3]](#footnote-4) Maryland’s political figures paid close attention to the black voting constituency and the potential turnout for candidates in favor of the Fourth District’s issues. White political bosses objected to an all-black political ticket. James H. “Jack” Pollack, a white political boss of the Fourth District, wrote an editorial in the *Baltimore Morning Sun* and expressed his opposition to the Fourth District Coalition Ticket. Pollack wrote: “…while some individuals citizens show preference on basis of geography, relation or race, it is unheard of in Maryland for a group to promote a racial ticket by urging a local newspaper exclusive newspaper publisher [Carl Murphy Jr,] N.A.A.C.P. (supposedly nonpartisan and nonpolitical), and a ministerial alliance preaching from the pulpits and monopolizing available forums.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

Why did Maryland politicians and white political bosses play close attention to elections in the Fourth Councilmanic District? Why did population changes in Baltimore’s district matter to the strength of black voting? For many years, white political bosses and politicians successfully controlled black votes and elections in the Fourth District through gerrymandering and residential segregation. After World War II, black homeowners participated in blockbusting and moved into formerly white neighborhoods through the Fourth District. Independent black politicians undermined Pollack's power over the area. This article is a study of the relationship between blockbusting in West Baltimore and electoral politics in the African American community in the form of civil rights and political empowerment.

Many historians had taken the position that blockbusting in American cities exploited black and white homeowners, and rarely promoted racial progress. Authors W. Edward Orser and Antero Pietila distinguished Baltimore as a starting point to understanding the historical impact of blockbusting upon neighborhoods and how the process racially shaped American cities through discriminatory real estate practices. The legacy of blockbusting in Baltimore’s Edmondson Village community, according to Orser, was the “resegregation of racially mix neighborhoods and the migration of black and white middle class to the suburbs.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Yet, during racial and financial exploitation, blockbusting helped African Americans gained access to city public and private spaces. David Terry quoted, through blockbusting, black Baltimoreans “pushed their way into new neighborhoods and gained access to homes, neighborhood facilities, parks, and schools.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

This article expands on Terry's argument and explores another view of blockbusting as assisting African Americans in the empowerment of black politicians. Using West Baltimore as a vantage point, the article argues that blockbusting benefited African Americans as a civil rights strategy to gain power over limited urban spaces. Blockbusting helped African Americans expand their population into communities in different wards, desegregation white neighborhood blocks, and becoming the majority population in the Fourth District. African Americans had a higher chance of competing with white political bosses for political power in the wards. Thus, the election of black politicians in Baltimore since the 1950s would not be possible without blockbusting. This article begins with methods of controlling the black population and electoral politics in Old West Baltimore, the city’s largest black community before 1945. Then the article highlights how population changes and blockbusting helped professional and middle-class African Americans gained access to white neighborhood blocks. The other section of the article details how black political figures challenged white political bosses after blockbusting had taken place. The article ends with how the city and state politicians and white political bosses responded to blockbusting and black voting power.

**Old West Baltimore Before Postwar Blockbusting**

The power in the black vote occurred with African Americans having the right to vote and living areas concentrated by a black majority population. During the post-Reconstruction era, as Garrett Power highlighted, black Baltimoreans lived in every ward in the city. Black and white people lived among each other as neighborhoods; no highly concentrated black communities existed.[[7]](#footnote-8) Segregated neighborhoods emerged during the 1880s, as some black residents, their schools, churches, and other institutions moved across the city to white and Jewish communities in the 14th ward and later the 17th ward, located west of downtown. For example, by 1905, the expansion of the Camden Railroad Station in South Baltimore forced over 200 black families to be removed from the Pigtown neighborhood. Black families relocated to Seton Hill’s St. Mary Orchard, Upton, and Madison Park neighborhood.[[8]](#footnote-9) Both professional and poor blacks lived together in the alley homes of Biddle Alley district in West Baltimore.[[9]](#footnote-10) A robust black population became concentrated and later expanded once professional African Americans moved into white neighborhoods in the Madison Park community and purchased homes. White residents in Madison Park West Baltimore interpreted black families buying homes in white blocks as invaders, and some formed mobs and vandalized black homes.

The Baltimore City Council passed three residential segregation ordinances from 1910 to 1913. These ordinances outlawed the sale of homes to black people in white neighborhoods, prohibited the sale of homes of white people in black areas, and segregated the use of buildings in public events. These laws attempted to not only preserve segregation, but it also dictated where black people could live and prevented the black community from expanding into white neighborhoods. Ultimately, the residential segregation ordinances attempted to determine where black people lived, and they could not live in white areas. City Solicitor Edgar Allan Poe wrote a letter to Mayor J. Barry Mahool expressing support for the segregation ordinance in 1910. Poe gave two reasons for residential segregation: "preserving order" and “secure property values”[[10]](#footnote-11) Poe's reasons for supporting residential segregation referred to stopping black families from moving into white neighborhoods blocks in Madison Park that would cause white residents to flee while expanding the black community beyond the Biddle Alley District.

Within the concentrated black population in the 14th ward, black voters established a sizeable black voting bloc.[[11]](#footnote-12) From 1890 to 1933, black voters from the 11th ward and the 14th ward voted for six black Republicans to the Baltimore City Council - Harry Sythe Cummings in 1890, Dr. John Marcus Cargil in 1895, and Hiram Watty in 1899 and 1901, Warner T. McGuinn in 1919, William Fitzgerald in 1919, and Walter S. Emerson in 1927. Suzanne Ellery Greene stated the election of these men in the Baltimore City Council is significant because they hold office in the era of Jim Crow. State and municipal laws created laws that drew the color line in marriage, public schools, playgrounds, parks, fraternal and recreational organizations, health care facilities, hospitals, theaters, schools, as well as the workplace.[[12]](#footnote-13) From 1904 to 1910, Maryland's most influential conservative Democrats used every effort to undermine the fifteenth amendment to stifle black voting power with a series of disenfranchisement amendments. African Americans, and the newly formed Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, created grassroots efforts to defeated the disenfranchisement amendments.[[13]](#footnote-14) Over forty years, the six black city councilmen did not have political control in the Baltimore City Council to push for any legislative proposals that supported civil rights for their black constituents.[[14]](#footnote-15) Republicans failed to advocate for civil rights for African Americans in Maryland. Dennis Doster argued that black voters in Baltimore engaged independent political movements while pressuring the Republican Party to comply with their civil rights agenda by supporting William Ashbie Hawkins’s run for the U.S. Senate of Maryland.[[15]](#footnote-16)

By the 1920s, the city’s political elite used various efforts to maintain racial control over black residents and their votes through the following: racially restrictive covenants, gerrymandering, and undermining black issues. By the early 1920s, Mayor James Preston implemented restrictive racial covenants after white homeowners in West Baltimore neighborhood sent complaint letters and petitions.[[16]](#footnote-17) Between 1910 and 1920, the city’s black population increased to 108,390 or 14.8 percent.[[17]](#footnote-18) African Americans continued to move into white neighborhoods in West Baltimore, including Harlem Park, Upton, and Sandtown-Winchester. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled residential segregation ordinances no longer maintained racial exclusion of black homeowners and renters after the Supreme Court ruled in 1917 the case of *Buchanan v. Waverly* that deemed residential segregation ordinances unconstitutional. Restrictive covenants empowered white homeowners and real estate boards to discouraged non-white people from living in white neighborhoods through housing leases. Housing deeds kept black people from living in white areas. They enforced racial barriers around Old West Baltimore, which consisted of North Avenue at the north, Franklin Street at the south, Madison Avenue at the east, and Fulton Avenue at the west.[[18]](#footnote-19)

While restrictive covenants kept black residents in Old West Baltimore, the Maryland State Government passed a home rule amendment in 1923 to grant the Baltimore City Council self-governance over the city. The City Council reduced Baltimore’s seventeen election districts to six districts and gerrymandered Old West Baltimore into the Fourth Councilmanic District with other white wards.[[19]](#footnote-20) White Democratic political bosses controlled electoral politics in Old West Baltimore, defeating black liberal Republicans in all elections. McGuinn served as the city’s last black city councilman upon his defeat in 1933.[[20]](#footnote-21) Many white politicians offered themselves to the Fourth District as candidates to represent the black community in public office.[[21]](#footnote-22) Matthew Crenson quoted, “[p]atronage and favors attracted a minority of black Baltimoreans to the Democratic Party. The party focused its resources on keeping black Republicans away from the polls on election day.”[[22]](#footnote-23) Many black political bosses escorted white politicians through West Baltimore’s black communities to for endorsement for votes.

White political bosses manipulated black political bosses to get their support in elections without offering patronages or making appeals to racial issues concerning African Americans. Only white political figures received sponsorships by being appointed as judges in the city circuit court, courthouse clerks, and membership on the city liquor boards. Matthew Crenson stated, “the ability to mobilize African American voters without making appeals to race enabled black politicians to form an alliance with white politicians and deliver black votes for white candidates.”[[23]](#footnote-24)

James H. “Jack” Pollack, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, controlled and manipulated electoral politics in the Fourth District since 1945, through his all-white political machine called the Trenton Democratic Club.[[24]](#footnote-25) Pollack ran white politicians and won elections through bribery, distributing racist literature, and white running candidates with names like other black candidates.[[25]](#footnote-26) Pollack's power over the city grew after he allied with Thomas D’Alessandro Jr., an Italian-American politician and New Deal Democrat. After D’Alesandro Jr won the city’s mayoral race in 1947, Jack Pollack controlled city-wide politics and ignored the social issues in the black community.[[26]](#footnote-27) In an interview, Juanita Jackson-Mitchell stated: "Jack Pollack was not a friend of the black man's progress, and non-independent black politicians would only serve Pollack's interests instead of the social ills facing the black community."[[27]](#footnote-28)

As many black politicians shift to the Democratic Party, some remained in the Republican Party to challenge the Democratic political bosses by engaging in independent politics to carry out a civil rights agenda. These political figures identified as Republicans but formed all-black political tickets and ran for office in the Baltimore City Council. For example, Marse Callaway, a black liberal Republican and president of Maryland's Colored Republican Voters League, created an all-black Republican ticket running for the Baltimore City Council in 1939 and 1943. Callaway allied with liberal Republican Theodore McKeldin and Dr. Carl Murphy Jr. to gain political support. Both of Callaway's political tickets lost the campaign bid for the Baltimore City Council to white Democratic candidates. Callaway blamed the 1939 and 1943 election failures to Democrats on factionalism among black political figures over who will lead the city’s Fourth District and the interference of white political bosses in effecting black voter turnout.[[28]](#footnote-29) Harry Cole, a lawyer, also challenged the Democratic machine by running for office in municipal and state government as a liberal Republican. Cole allied with Carl Murphy Jr., and the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP chapter and other black civic leaders to make himself electable.[[29]](#footnote-30) William “Willie” Adams, a black political boss in Old West Baltimore, and his wife Victorine Adams, also supported Harry Cole. Cole gained the endorsement of Victorine Adam’s Colored Women’s Democratic Campaigning Committee for Maryland.[[30]](#footnote-31) Cole ran for a Maryland House of Delegates seat as a Republican in 1949. But he lost by 1,000 votes. He then ran for the Baltimore City Council seat in the 4th city district in 1950 and lost by 400 votes.[[31]](#footnote-32) Since the Great Depression, black politicians with a civil rights agenda such as Callaway and Cole failed to rupture the control of white political bosses in the Fourth District.

The use of a racially restrictive covenant, gerrymandering, and manipulation of the black voting block illustrated the various steps it took the city's political structure to exercise political power over the black community. Although much of the black population lived in Old West Baltimore, politicians and political bosses needed to exploit residential segregation and gerrymandering to thwart any chances of the election of black politicians.

**Blockbusting and Claiming New Neighborhood Blocks**

Since 1945, changes in Baltimore’s population created the opportunity for African Americans to expanding their community into white neighborhoods. First, the use of extended term-low mortgage guarantees from the Federal Housing Administration/Veterans Administration helped white residents move away from older industrial cities to new suburban areas. From 1950 to 1960, the following Baltimore counties increased in population and white-collar jobs: Catonsville, Loch Raven, Arbutus, Parkville, and Woodlawn. Meanwhile, Baltimore city’s population numbers decreased from 949,034 to 939,024. From 1950 to 1960, the percentage of white residents dropped from 76.2 percent to 65 percent of Baltimore residents, at a total of 610,608. Meanwhile, Baltimore's African American population rose from 225,000 or 19 percent to 325,589 or 34 percent.[[32]](#footnote-33) Along with population changes, the 1948 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Shelley v. Kraemer* deemed restrictive covenants supported the municipal and state governments unconstitutional. If white homeowners decided to sell their home to a black family in a white neighborhood, the state and city government could not intervene because it would violate the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment. African Americans wanted to move out of old congested neighborhoods, overcrowded schools, that were exploited by slum landlords with expensive rent payments. For relief from old crowded areas and better housing, black Baltimoreans turned to real estate speculators and participated in blockbusting for better housing options.

Participants in blockbusting unofficially designated Baltimore's westside as an area for expanding the black community. White residents started to move out of Easterwood Park community, beginning in 1945, and they continued to do so as black residents moved further west, past the Fulton Avenue and North Avenue racial boundaries. The new black residents purchased and rented homes in Easterwood Park and created the Fulton Avenue Protective Group in 1945 to protect black families from potential white mob violence.[[33]](#footnote-34) By 1950, blacks outnumbered whites in residency in Easterwood Park by 6,269 to 1,039.[[34]](#footnote-35) After 1950, black residents trekked further west of the city, purchasing and renting private homes in formerly white neighborhoods in the Fourth and Fifth Councilmanic Districts. Black residents moved into the following communities: Reservoir Hill, Penn-North, Ashburton, Windsor Hills, Panway, and Mondawmin, all totaling to 13,000 residents.[[35]](#footnote-36) A research committee headed by Baltimore Urban League and Benjamin Quarles, a historian and college professor at Morgan State College, published a pamphlet about the status of black homeowners. They lived in the Walbrook and Panway communities in the Fifth Councilmanic District. The pamphlet stated that the residents worked professional jobs and paid above the market value for their homes with an income above average.[[36]](#footnote-37)By the 1960s, the black professional and middle expanded the black community into other wards throughout the entire Fourth District and various parts of the Fifth District.

Housing speculators assisted the black homeowners tremendously in blockbusting. Although many housing speculators took part in blockbusting to accumulate profits through faulty installment policies, they helped many African Americans move into new neighborhoods and claimed power over the population of formerly white neighborhood blocks. For example, many scholars credit Morris Goldseker, a Polish-Jewish immigrant and Baltimore’s most famous blockbusting housing speculator, became the symbol of blockbusting and the racial turnover of white neighborhoods to black.[[37]](#footnote-38) Sherry Olson stated “of seven thousand black families who became homeowners in the 1960s, a third dealt with speculators following the same strategy of neighborhood turnovers in a particular ring of the city.” White housing speculators, in particular, passed out leaflets, made telephone calls and visited the homes of white families to talk about black families purchasing a property in the neighborhood and the potential decline of the property value.[[38]](#footnote-39) Jewish residents sold their homes to white speculators and moved away to other areas of the city. Black residents took their place as the new residents as housing speculators sold or rented black people's homes. Although the homes were old and in need of repairs and plumbing, the properties had more space and lighting as well as small lawns, unlike the houses in Old West Baltimore. Housing speculators also financed homes through lending companies when black homeowners were unable to secure home loan mortgages from banks. The tactics used by housing speculators essentially helped black residents gaining population power in the Fourth District. Although housing speculators exploited racial prejudice among white residents, this tactic removed white from the area.

African Americans did view blockbusting as a civil right by providing housing for African Americans. Warren S. Shaw, a black housing speculator, viewed his participation in blockbusting as a civil rights act for offering housing opportunities to African Americans when the government failed to create equitable legislation to allow blacks to purchase homes wherever they chose. In 1966, Shaw wrote a letter in the *Baltimore Morning Sun*, criticizing the Baltimore City Council and the Maryland State Legislator for supported anti-blockbusting ordinances but failed to pass an open housing law to end housing discrimination. Shaw stated “[w]ere it not for blockbusting, colored people would be living three to a room hopelessly mired in ghetto housing in the lower reaches of Pennsylvania Avenue, or ten-story houses up and down Druid Hill.”[[39]](#footnote-40) From 1952 to 1960, Shaw opened the Manning-Shaw Realtor Company with his business partner, M. Manuel Bernstein. Shaw worked with the Baltimore NAACP to provide homes for African Americans and ran advertisements in Baltimore’s *Afro-American* newspaper.[[40]](#footnote-41) Shaw helped to bust the blocks of Jewish neighborhoods in the Fifth Councilmanic District, including Ashburton neighborhood. Melvin Sykes, a lawyer who lived in Ashburton, filed a lawsuit against Warren Shaw and the Manning Realty company, which led to the suspension of Shaw's real estate license and the beginning of three anti-blockbusting ordinances was passed in the Baltimore City Council since 1960.[[41]](#footnote-42)

During the early 1940s to mid-1950s, civil rights leaders and city politicians never discussed race and the changing population of communities impacted by blockbusting and white flight. Moreover, city politicians never passed any laws against blockbusting before 1960. Even though some housing court judges issued fines to white housing speculators for deplorable housing conditions, city leaders did not create any laws prohibiting the practice of blockbusting.[[42]](#footnote-43) David Terry’s work noted how white homeowners wrote letters to Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro Jr. to stop blockbusting in white neighborhoods. Instead, both Carl Murphy Jr. corresponded with Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro Jr. in 1948 about the constructing a new school in the Easterwood Park community. By 1950, city urban development authorities built the Carver Vocational High School in the Easterwood Park neighborhood. In 1953, city planners closed the Frederick Douglass High School in the Upton neighborhood and moved the school to the Mondawmin neighborhood with a new building. In 1955, a national developer and Greater Baltimore Committee member James Rouse developed the Mondawmin Mall in the Mondawmin community.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Although Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. accommodated black homeowners in West Baltimore, black residents mobilized their community to demand a black representative in the Baltimore City Council. In 1952, voters in the Fifth Councilmanic District elected Samuel Freidan to the U.S. House of Representatives. Black residents in the Fifth Councilmanic District claimed their voting bloc in the 15th ward assisted Freidan's victory in Congress. The Association demanded Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. to appoint Vivian Alleyne, a black schoolteacher, to Freidan’s vacant seat on the city council. Businessman and political activist Leon Raymond mobilized voters in the Fifth District to form a political organization called the Plain People's Protective Association. The Association worked with the Baltimore NAACP chapter, Colored Women’s Democratic Campaign Committee for Maryland, and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance to appeal to Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. to appoint Alleyne to the city council. Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. told the Plain People's Protective Association that he lacked the power to appoint people to the city council. Baltimore’s *Afro American* newspaper reported that Pollack-D’Alesandro machine wanted to support the appointment of Henry Miller, a former traffic court magistrate, to fill Fredian’s vacant seat in the city council.[[44]](#footnote-45) Victorine Adams presented Mayor D'Alesandro with a petition with 5,000 names of black registered voters supporting the appointment of Alleyne. D’Alesandro Jr. refused to comply with the appeal and stated, “My motto is evolution, not revolution.”[[45]](#footnote-46) Raymond referred to the decision as "political suicide." He threatened to vote for the Republican Party, and the Plain People's Protective Association issued an ultimatum to Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. Raymond stated: "If Alleyne or any black person were not appointed to the city council, it would lead a revolt against the 'hardheaded' Democratic leaders by switching to the Republican Party."[[46]](#footnote-47)

Baltimore’s population changes and black voting power in previous white wards caught the attention of the Maryland state government. In 1953, an all-white political organization called the Citizens Committee for Re-Districting sponsored a bill in the Maryland General Assembly to redistrict the city of Baltimore. The committee had six members, including State Senator Francis Dipple and Mrs. R. Hall Cooper, who authored the bill.[[47]](#footnote-48) The redistricting bill would merge the three councilmanic districts – the Fourth, Fifth, and Second, into the lily-white Third Councilmanic District. Democratic politicians supported redistricting all of Baltimore's six districts. They argued that changing the boundaries in all the areas would create an equal number of residents for similar representation of delegates in the Maryland state government. According to the *Baltimore Morning Sun*, some Democrats feared that the Third and Fifth District would be a battleground between Democrats and Republicans.[[48]](#footnote-49) Yet, many politicians carefully did not refer to mentioning race, white flight, or blockbusting in the Fourth and Fifth Districts.

Harry Cole and Vincent Tubbs, a reporter for the Baltimore’s *Afro American* newspaper, opposed the Citizen’s Committee’s redistricting plan and accused the committee of attempting to gerrymander the fourth councilmanic district. In his article in the *Afro* newspaper, Tubbs argued that the bill intended to dilute black voting bloc by gerrymandering the predominately black Fourth District into other white populated districts. Tubbs stated, "if the Citizens' plan becomes law, black people in the fourth district would not have electoral representational for another 25 years."[[49]](#footnote-50) Cole and Tubbs formed the Ballot League of the Fourth District to create an alternative plan for redistricting in Baltimore city. In January and April 1953, Cole and Tubbs traveled the Maryland State House in Annapolis to challenge the Citizens Committee redistricting plan, with two different methods. The redistricting plan created by Harry Cole expanded the Fourth Councilmanic District enough to balance the political competition between black and white voters for the representation of all areas. Vincent Tubbs' redistricting plan shrunken the Fourth Councilmanic District to give black voters a better chance to elect a black politician in the Baltimore City Council and Maryland State government. Tubbs insisted that black voters in the city’s Fourth District could use segregation in their favor to elect black politicians in office and end discrimination through legislation. Tubbs' stated, "As long as our white neighbors talk democracy to use but give us segregation, we are being bamboozled-that is the Baltimore way of treating black folks."[[50]](#footnote-51) Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. traveled to the Maryland State House in Annapolis to lobby support for a redistricting plan for Baltimore and trusted the state senators and delegates that represented Baltimore to create a plan. Maryland state government never passed the redistricting bill; instead, the state senators and representatives admitted that it needed more time to study and create an effective redistricting bill.[[51]](#footnote-52)

The controversy over Maryland's redistricting bill characterized how the changes in populations in the city districts created anxiety among city and state politicians and the potential for these districts to desegregate municipal and state government with black politicians elected to the city council or the state government. Carl Murphy Jr. and Harry A. Cole took advantage of Tubbs’ strategy race and blockbusting to take advantage of the change in population in the Fourth District to elect a black elected official in municipal or state government.

**Challenging the Pollack Machine After Blockbusting**

In 1954, Carl Murphy Jr. and Harry A. Cole revived the all-black political ticket to challenge Pollack’s political control in the Fourth District in the Maryland state government, not the Baltimore City Council. The political ticket ran politicians in both the Democratic and Republican Parties, with Harry Cole as a Republican for the Maryland State Senate, Emery Cole as a Republican for the Maryland House of Delegates, and Truly Hatchett as a Democrat for the Maryland House of Delegates. The ticket did not run candidates in the Maryland State government instead of the Baltimore City Council. Emery Cole and Truly Hatchett won their party's nomination and their elections to the Maryland House of Delegates. Harry Cole won the Republican nomination and defeated Democratic incumbent Bernard Melnicove for the Maryland State Senate by thirty-seven votes. Melnicove refused to concede the Senate race and protested Cole’s election, accusing his lost to voting irregularities in the fifteenth ward.[[52]](#footnote-53) In January 1955, Melnicove conceded the race to Cole after State’s Attorney Anselm Sodaro and Deputy State’s Attorney J. Harold Grady launched a grand jury investigation of “ghost voting,” a political trick of listing former white residents of the fourth district as registered voters in homes currently owned or rented by new black residents.”[[53]](#footnote-54)

The victory of Cole’s political ticket demonstrated the impact of blockbusting in the election victory for black candidates, undermining Jack Pollack's political machine, proving African American politicians could compete with his political machine. Without blockbusting, the success of Harry Cole, Emery Cole, and Truly Hatchett in electoral politics could not be possible without white flight and the expansion of the black community.

The 1954 election forced Pollack to integrate his political machine with black men running for office in the Fourth District as Democrats. Walter Dixon, a teacher, and president of the Cortez Business School, realtor Calvin Douglass, and J. Alvin Jones, member of the Maryland Park Board and the State Employment Security Board, all joined Pollack’s machine. In 1955, Pollack succeeded after black voters elected Walter Dixon as the first black city councilman in the Baltimore City Council in the Fourth District since Walter McGuinn held office. Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. appointed Calvin Douglass as the first black assistant city solicitor. In 1958, Pollack created an integrated Democratic ticket to challenge Carl Murphy- Harry Cole's political ticket for control over the Fourth Councilmanic District. Pollack’s ticket included J. Alvin Jones to run for the Maryland State Senate, and four white incumbents for the House of Delegate: Murray Abrahamson, Solomon J. Freidman, Jerome Robinson, Richard Rombro. Pollack added a black man named Arlington Phillips to the ticket to run for the Maryland state delegate, but no women serve in the machine.[[54]](#footnote-55)

Harry Cole countered Pollack’s integrated ticket by creating the Fourth District Legislative Coalition Ticket with black women as both Democratic and Republican candidates. Harry Cole ran for re-election as a Republican for the State Senate. Daniel Spaulding, Emery Cole, and Harry Dixon ran for the Maryland House of Delegates as Republicans. Cole included three black women on the ticket for the House of Delegates Verda Welcome and Irma Dixon as Democrats, and Bertha Winston as a Republican. Carl Murphy, Jr, supported the all-black ticket and wanted to mobilize black voters in the fourth district. According to Erla McKinnon, Carl Murphy invited Victorine Adams and Ethel Rich to his office in the Baltimore’s *Afro American* newspaper. He asked for help to register black voters and mobilize support for black candidates.[[55]](#footnote-56) In 1958, Victorine Adams schoolteacher and social worker Ethel Rich created the WomanPower organization. They registered black voters throughout the city with the assistance of Bowen Jackson of the Baltimore NAACP chapter, the Rev. John L. Tilley of Ministerial Alliance, and the Baltimore’s *Afro American* newspaper.[[56]](#footnote-57) [[57]](#footnote-58) WomanPower and the Baltimore’s *Afro American* endorsed the Fourth District Legislative Coalition Ticket, and the coalition used their luncheon at the Sheraton Belvedere Hotel to promote black women candidates and to mobilize black women to vote for the ticket. Carl Murphy stated "WomanPower has the opportunity to elect three women in the next legislature along with Harry Cole. More power to women.”[[58]](#footnote-59)

To win the 1958 election, Pollack neutralized the Fourth District Legislative Coalition Ticket by labeling black solidarity as racial prejudice. Irma Dixon left the Fourth District Coalition Ticket and joined the Pollack-D’Alesandro Jr machine. No published documentation existed to determine whether Irma Dixon infiltrated the Murphy-Cole political machine on behalf of Pollack to create negative publicity for Cole’s coalition. Irma Dixon told the *Baltimore Morning Sun* that she supported the Democratic Party and called the Murphy-Cole call-black political machine “an act of segregation of the worst form.”[[59]](#footnote-60) In the *Baltimore Morning Sun*, Irma Dixon denounced the Fourth District Coalition Ticket for promoting segregation and attacking Mayor D’Alesandro Jr. She stated that the all-black coalition ticket was “anti-D’Alesandro, anti-white liberal, anti-democratic.”[[60]](#footnote-61) Dixon stated that she “strongly condemned any unwarranted attack against Mayor Thomas D’Alesandro Jr. She defended D’Alesandro Jr. by calling him a “liberal American and Democrat who had always been at the forefront for equal rights and opportunities for people of all colors and classes.”[[61]](#footnote-62) Harry Cole responded to Dixon's comments, “I [Harry Cole] could not understand how she [Irma Dixon] could disavow support from the colored brethren." Cole added: "Certainly, the interest of her people should rise above any commitment to her party and by all means to Jack Pollack."[[62]](#footnote-63) Jerome Robinson, a member of Pollack's machine, also criticized the Fourth District's all-black ticket. Robinson accused his opponents of promoting factionalism for having both Democratic-Republican party candidates and charged the Baltimore’s *Afro American* of racism for not printing his name in their newspapers because he was a white man.[[63]](#footnote-64) J. Alvin Jones defeated Harry Cole for the Maryland State Senator race, and all of the Republican candidates on the Fourth District Coalition Ticket were unsuccessful.[[64]](#footnote-65) After the election, Pollack referred to Cole and the all-black political machine as “racist” after the 1958 election. Cole disbanded his all-black ticket to maintain their allegiance to their white liberal allies.[[65]](#footnote-66)

Verda Welcome emerged as the only victor in the Fourth District Coalition Ticket to win a seat in the Maryland House of Delegates, became the first woman ever to be elected in the Maryland House of Delegates. In 1962, Carl Murphy advised Verda Welcome to run for the Maryland State Senate to run against J. Alvin Jones. In 1962, Welcome won the race for Maryland State Senate for the Fourth District.

**Responses to Blockbusting and the Black Voting Bloc**

Since the late 1950s, many political figures, white civil rights activists, and business leaders began to address the changes of the city’s population, black electoral power, and the changing racial landscape created after blockbusting. In 1959, Frances X. Gallagher, Maryland House delegate of the city’s Third District, sponsored gerrymandering bill in the Maryland state government to "change the boundaries of the Fourth City District" to divide the population evenly among the regions. Political bosses Paul J. Reed Jr., Thomas D’Alesandro Jr., James H. “Jack” Pollack, Fourth District councilman Richard T. Rombro, and Fifth District councilman Alexander Stark, all supported Gallagher’s bill. The Baltimore’s *Afro American* suspected Gallagher created the redistricting bill to assert the control of white political bosses over one-third of the black population in Baltimore.[[66]](#footnote-67) The bill failed to pass in the Maryland state government.

Black politicians continue to experience a lack of support for their civil rights legislation, as the Maryland General Assembly and Baltimore City Council denied many of the public accommodations proposals.[[67]](#footnote-68) In the Maryland General Assembly, Cole's civil rights bills did not gain any support. In 1957, Harry Cole presented six civil rights proposals to the Maryland General Assembly, including a plan to establish a committee to investigate racial discrimination in employment, open public accommodations, and supply mortgage lending to African American homebuyers. The civil rights laws garnered little to no support and were ultimately defeated. Truly Hatchett and Harry and Emery Cole could not control the votes in the Maryland State Legislator; there were not enough black politicians.[[68]](#footnote-69) In the Baltimore City Council, William T. Dixon presented proposals for open public accommodations in 1958 and 1960 and gave another in 1963 for the integration of public and private housing. But the civil rights laws garnered little to no support and were ultimately defeated.

In June 1962, the Baltimore City Council finally passed an open accommodations ordinance, outlawing discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and parks based on race; however, black patrons were denied service in restaurants that served alcoholic beverages and in movie theaters.[[69]](#footnote-70) It took the 1963 Public Accommodations Act and the 1964 Civil Rights Act to guarantee open accommodations to all citizens. Also, in 1964, following a national trend of civil rights legislation, Baltimore’s city council signed an Omnibus Civil Rights ordinance three months before U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law.[[70]](#footnote-71) In1968,President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act (also known as the 1968 Civil Rights Act) and discriminated in public, and private housing was deemed unconstitutional. Also, blockbusting was considered illegal.

**Conclusion**

Blockbusting is full of complexities and contradictions. On the one hand, housing speculators used blockbusting to exploit black and white homeowners for profits and promoted racial segregation. One the other hand, blockbusting provided African Americans the best opportunity to expand the black community and offered many chances to elect a black politician to serve the interests of the black community. Blockbusting undercut how the city political structure attempted to use residential segregation and gerrymandering to control the black community and its voting power. Although only a few black elected officials won elections in the 1950s, it significantly challenged white political bosses.

1. “Women Seek 1,000 New Voters in City-Wide Canvass Monday,” *Baltimore Afro American*, September 20, 1958: “Baltimore Registers 101,771 Tan Voters,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 4, 1958. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. McKinnon, Erla, interviewed by the author, Baltimore, Maryland, April 17, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Women Seek 1,000 New Voters in City-Wide Canvass Monday,” *Baltimore Afro American*, September 20, 1958: “Baltimore Registers 101,771 Tan Voters,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 4, 1958.

   “Lula Jones Garrett, “380 Attend Womanpower Luncheon in Baltimore,” *Baltimore Afro American*, October 4, 1958; Ida Jones, *Baltimore Civil Rights Leader Victorine Q. Adams: The Power of the Ballot*. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2019), 114-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. James H. Pollack, Mr. Pollack Replies, *Baltimore Morning Sun*, October 4, 1958. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting In Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story.* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 160-181; Antero Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped A Great American City.* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010)

   ; ix. Scholars argued that under blockbusting, housing speculators initiated a racial fear campaign towards white residents to convince them to sell their homes at a low price, then sold the property to aspiring black homebuyers above market value. Blockbusting benefited only housing speculators who profited from faulty land installments. For other comments on blockbusting, see Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*: *Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 93; Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 48-49. For other works that mention blockbusting as a form of racial segregation and economic exploitation of African Americans, see Amanda Seligman, *Block By Block: Neighborhood and Public Policy in Chicago’s West Side*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 150-154; Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History Of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Company, 2017), 98-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. David Terry, "Trampling For Justice: The Dismantling of Jim Crow In Baltimore, 1942-1954." (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 2002)216. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Garrett Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913,” *Maryland Law Review*, 42, no.3 (1983): 298-90 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Harold A. McDougall, *Black Baltimore: A New Theory Of Community.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 38-41; Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, “Black Housing Patterns in Baltimore City, 1885-1953,” *Maryland Historian* 16 (Spring-Summer 1985): 25-26; Garrett Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style, 290-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The alley streets were known as Greenwillow (Union), Stockholm Alley, and Nusem Alley. The boundaries of Biddle Alley District were Preston Street at the north, Biddle Street at the south, Druid Hill Avenue at the east, and Pennsylvania Avenue at the west. See Stephen G. Meyer, *As Long As They Don’t Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict In American Neighborhoods.* (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000), 15-22; Janet Kemp, *Housing Conditions In Baltimore: A Special Report of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor and the Charity Organization Society.* (Baltimore, Maryland, 1907), 82-84; Sherry Olson, *Baltimore: The Building of an American City*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, reprinted in 1997), 255-277. For an alternative view of black life in alley-homes, see James Borchert, *Alley Life In Washington: Family, Community, Religion, And Folklife In The City, 1850-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Letter from City Solicitor Edgar Allan Poe to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, December 17, 1910, Folder 451(1), Mayor J. Barry Mahool Mayoral Files, Box 118, Series 14, RG 9, Baltimore City Archives [hereinafter BCA]; Gretchen Boger, "The Meaning of Neighborhood in a Modern City; Baltimore Residential Segregation Ordinances, 1910-1913," *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 2 (January 2009); Roger L. Rice, "Residential Segregation By-Law, 1910-1917," *Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 2 (May 1968): 180-81, 185-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Suzanne Ellery Greene, “Black Republicans on the Baltimore City Council, 1890-1931,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 74. no.3 (September 1979), 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Suzanne Ellery Greene, “Black Republicans on the Baltimore City Council, 1890-1931,” 203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. From 1904 through 1911, Maryland conservative Democrats attempted to implement three disenfranchisement amendments to restrict black Marylanders from voting. The first amendment was named after the University of Maryland Law School Dean John Prentiss Poe from 1904 -1905. The second was named after Maryland Attorney General Isaac Lobe Strauss from 1908 to 1909. The third was named after Charles Country Democratic figure Walter M. Diggs, from 1910-1911. See Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 114-143; Margaret Law Calcott, "The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912." (Ph.D. diss. University of North Carolina, 1967); William George Paul, Shadow of Equality: The Negro In Baltimore, 1864-1911 (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1972); Matthew A. Crenson, *Baltimore: A Political History*. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 331-334. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Suzanne Ellery Greene, “Black Republicans on the Baltimore City Council, 1890-1931,” 203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Dennis A. Doster, “This Independent Fight We are Making Is Local: The Election of 1920 and Electoral Politics in Black Baltimore,” *Journal of Urban History 44*, no.2, 2018, 134-152. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. An anonymous letter to Mayor James H. Preston, June 21, 1918, Folder 106, Mayor James Preston Files, Box 156, Series 15, RG 9, BCA; Letter from Alice C. Reilly to Mayor James H. Preston, June 22, 1918, Folder 106, Mayor James Preston Files, Box 156, Series 15, RG 9, BCA. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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20. Suzanne Ellery Greene, "Black Republicans on the Baltimore City Council, 214-219; "Differences Between Baltimore and Chicago," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 25, 1933. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Mark Bowden, Bossin' Around: A History of How Things Got Done In Baltimore, *Baltimore City Paper*, June 29, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Matthew Crenson, *Baltimore, A Political History*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 396 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Mathew Crenson, *Baltimore, A Political Story*, 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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26. Harvey Wheeler, “Yesterday’s Robin Hood: The Rise and Fall of Baltimore’s Trenton Democratic Club,” *American Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1955): 335-6; Joseph L. Arnold, "The Last Of The Good Old Days: Politics In Baltimore, 1920-1950," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71, no. 3 (Fall 1976): 446; Antero Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood*, 116-118; Robert Goldberg, “Party Competition and Black Politics in Baltimore and Philadelphia” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1984), 49, 61-2; William Adams, interviewed by Charles Wagandt, 28, TMK-LJDP-MHS. During an interview with Willie Adams, Wagandt, the interviewer quoted a statement in regards to Pollack’s power as a political boss, “While coming into power, if one did not buy insurance from any company not associated with the Pollack machine, officials would find violations with a tavern.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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29. Ida Jones, *Baltimore Civil Rights Leader Victorine Q. Adams*, 84-85; “Cole Named Assistant to Atty. General,” *Baltimore Afro American*, May 16, 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Jones, *Baltimore Civil Rights Leader Victorine Q. Adams,* 81-84; Down Memory Lane With the Colored Women’s Democratic Campaign Committee, Ibid; William Adams, interviewed by Charles Wagandt, OH 8210, August 4, 1977, Baltimore, MD, 32-3, Theodore McKeldin –Lillie Jackson Documentation Project, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore [hereinafter TMK-JDP- MHS]. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. “Cole Named Assistant to Atty. General.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Greater Baltimore Commitment: A Study of Urban Minority Economic Development*, (Washington D.C., GPO 1983), Ibid; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighteenth Population Census of the U.S., vol.1, Baltimore, Maryland, Table 7: Population of Counties, By Minor Civil Division:1940 to1960, Number of Inhabitants*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 22-9 to 22-11; Kenneth Durr, *Behind the Backlash*, 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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37. Sherry Olson, Baltimore: The Building of An American City, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Antero Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped A Great American City*, 96-104; Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore*, 84-127; Sherry Olson, *Baltimore and the Making of An American City*, 378-380, David Terry, "Trampling For Justice: The Dismantling of Jim Crow In Baltimore, 1942-1954." (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 2002), 156-217. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Antero Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood*, 144-158; “Messrs. Manning, Shaw run thriving real estate office,” *Baltimore Afro American*, December 14, 1957, Warren S. Shaw, “No Houses,” *Baltimore Morning Sun*, March 26, 1966. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
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41. Odell M. Smith, “Blockbusting Measure Due to Be Revised,” *Baltimore Morning Sun*, December 9, 1958; “Blockbusting Bill,” *Baltimore Morning Sun*, May 18, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood*, 98-101. Before Morris Goldseker, Pietila states that the housing speculators involved in blockbusting black homeowners in Easterwood Park were Ester and Milton Kirsner, and Herbert Kaufman. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Letter from Dr. Carl Murphy Jr. to Mayor Thomas D’Alessandro Jr., February 9, 1948, Mayor Thomas D’Alesandro Jr. Files Folder 352-Proposed Colored Vocational School, Box 311, S23, RG9, BCA; David T. Terry, “Trampling for Justice: The Dismantling of Jim Crow In Baltimore, 1942-1954,” (Ph.D. D diss., Howard University, 2002): 207-14; Pietila, *Not In My Neighborhood:* 98-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Vincent Tubbs, “No Council Opposition to Colored Appointee,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 6, 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
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48. Baltimore’s Inequalities Legislative Districts, *Baltimore Morning Sun*, May 2, 1953 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
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59. “With Tables Turned,” *Baltimore Morning Sun*, October 4, 1958, in Folder-James H. Pollack, 1899-1977, MDVP-EPFL. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. “Mrs. Dixon’s Statement Is Pollack-Inspired-Sen. Cole,” *Baltimore Afro American*, September 30, 1958. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
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