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# An Interstate Runs Through It: The Construction of Little Rock's Interstate 630 and the Fight to Stop It

Darcy Pumphrey, *Utah State University*



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AN INTERSTATE RUNS THROUGH IT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF LITTLE  
ROCK'S INTERSTATE 630 AND THE FIGHT TO STOP IT

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2013

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**AN INTERSTATE RUNS THROUGH IT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
LITTLE ROCK'S INTERSTATE 630 AND THE FIGHT TO STOP IT  
by Darcy Atwood Baskin Pumphrey, August 2013**

**ABSTRACT**

Completion of the first mile of Interstate 630 (I-630) occurred in 1969. However, demands from organized community groups and litigation delayed completion of the full seven-and-a-half mile route until 1985. While the freeway resistance movement in Little Rock did not stop the construction of I-630 – it did gain influence over many key decisions within the planning and construction process.

Through an examination of the construction of I-630, this thesis advances the basic understanding of the elements of an organized freeway revolt and serves as a guide for other communities as they navigate their own freeway planning efforts. In order to understand how Little Rock changed as a result of I-630 and what the city can do to break down barriers that I-630 represents, it is important to understand the story behind the decisions and processes leading to its creation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a child riding in the car down Interstate 630 I often wondered why the streets on either side of the interstate were designed with such an abrupt end butting up against the chain-link fences separating freeway from city street. As I grew older, I came to understand that the fabric of a city wasn't static. This city's design once included houses and neighborhoods connecting those dead-end streets I saw on either side of the freeway. The interstate I traveled down almost daily between west Little Rock and Dunbar Junior High School and, later on, Central High School was once a fabric of yards and homes, neighbors and families. I wanted to know about this slice of Little Rock that existed before I-630. I am thankful that graduate school has given me the opportunity to explore this part of Little Rock history that has intrigued me since childhood.

Much like the time it took to complete I-630, the journey to finishing this thesis took much longer than I anticipated. During the course of researching and writing this thesis I held five different jobs (and, at one point, three jobs simultaneously), participated in a three-month fellowship at a museum in Germany, met my best friend and married him (and because one wedding wasn't enough, we had a ceremony in both Utah and Arkansas), made a 1,500-mile move from my beloved homestate of Arkansas to northern Utah, and bought my first house. Yes, the opportunities to be distracted from working on my thesis were numerous!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASHO	American Association of State Highway Officials
ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
ACORN	Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now
AHC	Arkansas Highway Commission
AHD	Arkansas Highway Department
AHPP	Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
AHTD	Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department
BPR	Bureau of Public Roads
CZDC	Capitol Zoning District Commission
DOT	Department of Transportation
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
I-30	Interstate 30
I-430	Interstate 430
I-630	Interstate 630
LRSD	Little Rock School District
MAC	Mills Action Coalition
M.A.D.	Movement Against Destruction
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
NCTC	National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act

QQA            Quapaw Quarter Association  
SHPO           State Historic Preservation Office (or Officer)  
UP              (Little Rock) Unlimited Progress

## INTRODUCTION

Urban interstate construction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century immensely affected the patterns of daily life in cities across the United States. City and highway planners as well as government officials saw urban interstates as a way to solve urban issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the redevelopment of the central business district, the removal of slums, and the improvement of access to downtown. However, the effects of urban interstates were often quite different from the original intentions: they altered transportation patterns to rely less on public transportation, they moved economic activity away from a centralized downtown, they disrupted neighborhoods and business districts, they caused prominent divisions in cities along racial and economic lines, and they caused the rapid expansion of cities into suburbs. Each urban interstate construction project changed the face of American cities as massive demolitions occurred within their proposed paths.

The establishment of an urban interstate was often the largest single demolition and construction project most cities ever faced. In 1959, the planning commenced in earnest for a seven and a half-mile stretch of interstate running east to west through Little Rock, Arkansas, with the passage of a \$1.2 million bond issue to purchase property in the proposed right-of-way. Planners routed this interstate, known as the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway or Interstate 630 (I-630), through several of the city's established neighborhoods and business districts while narrowly missing landmarks such as the Arkansas State Capitol, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the Little Rock Zoo, and Ray Winder Field. As in other parts of the country, organized community resistance soon developed to contest the plans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Koon, "Wilbur's Wall: I-630, Little Rock, and 25 Years in a Divided City," *Arkansas Times*, 26 January 2011, p. 12.

Completion of the first mile of I-630 occurred in 1969. However, demands from organized community groups and litigation delayed completion of the full route from the Interstate 30 (I-30) interchange in the east to Interstate 430 (I-430) in the west, until 1985. While the freeway resistance in Little Rock did not achieve the ultimate goal of a “Freeway Revolt” – the abandonment of plans to build an interstate – it did gain influence over many key decisions within the planning and construction process.<sup>2</sup>

The methodology of this study of I-630’s construction is based on historian Raymond Mohl’s five commonalities of “successful freeway revolts.”<sup>3</sup> While Mohl recognizes that each occurrence of a freeway revolt is different – noting factors such as a city’s history, geography, demographics, physical structure, neighborhood patterns and political culture – he suggests some similarities as well. These commonalities include: 1) sustained citizen movements described as “persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class, and interracial alliances”; 2) support from influential city leaders such as local politicians and journalists; 3) a “strong historic planning tradition”; and 4) “legal action over highway routing.”<sup>4</sup> Mohl defines a successful freeway revolt as one that possesses all the commonalities listed above and leads to the fifth commonality: a “final shutdown decision from the courts, from highest levels of the highway bureaucracy, or...from state governors.”<sup>5</sup> Mohl’s approach provides an excellent framework with which to examine the planning and construction of I-630 and explore reasons why Little Rock did not achieve a final shutdown of the interstate plans.

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<sup>2</sup> Koon, David. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30 (July 2004): 676.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Through an examination of the construction of I-630 in Little Rock, this thesis advances the basic understanding of the elements of an organized freeway revolt and serves as a guide for other communities as they navigate their own freeway planning efforts. Chapter one will offer an overview of scholarship relevant to this project as well as a history of interstate development specifically in urban areas. The second chapter will tell the story of I-630, from its conception in the 1930s to its completion in 1985. The third chapter will examine Little Rock's freeway resistance movement and its fight against I-630 in light of Mohl's five commonalities of a successful freeway revolt. Specifically, the chapter will look at the existence of a grassroots movement in Little Rock, the nature of support from local politicians and newspapers, the presence of historic preservation traditions such as the Quapaw Quarter Association (QQA), and the efforts to halt the interstate through legal action by the Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). Chapter three will also discuss why the movement in Little Rock was not successful in achieving Mohl's fifth commonality – a final shutdown of the interstate plans. However, while citizens groups did not succeed in thwarting the construction of I-630, they did achieve some limited successes which this final chapter will also examine.<sup>6</sup>

I-630 was one of the largest construction projects to occur within Little Rock. Stretching seven and half miles across the middle of the city, I-630 significantly changed transportation patterns, neighborhood demographics, and locations of economic centers upon its completion. In order to understand how Little Rock changed as a result of I-630

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<sup>6</sup> ACORN opened branches outside of Arkansas in 1975 and changed its name to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, keeping the original acronym. In 2010, the Arkansas office of ACORN separated from the national organization and changed its name to Arkansas Community Organizations (ACO).

and what the city can do to break down barriers that I-630 represents, it is important to understand the story behind the decisions and processes leading to its creation.

## CHAPTER 1: Urban Interstates and Freeway Revolts: A Historiography of Interstates and Freeway Resistance Movements

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, the Good Roads Movement improved road conditions and automobile ownership increased, leading historian Kenneth T. Jackson to refer to the period as the “New Age of Automobility.”<sup>7</sup> These two factors greatly contributed to the eventual development of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, more commonly known as the Interstate Highway System.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, a key player in the creation of the Interstate Highway System was learning firsthand about the conditions of America’s roads. In 1919, a 28-year-old Lieutenant Colonel named Dwight D. Eisenhower participated in the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy. The heavy military trucks encountered muddy roads and weak bridges, slowing their progress westward across the United States. At times the convoy moved as slowly as four miles a day, though even at its best it only covered around 90 miles a day. During Eisenhower’s command in World War II, he observed the benefits of the German *autobahns* for transporting American soldiers and supplies with ease and speed. This, along with his experience on the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy, led the general to reflect, “The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 157.

<sup>8</sup> Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004), 26; and Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 24. Gutfreund illustrates the significant increase in automobile ownership with the following example: In 1910 there was one car for every 201 Americans. In contrast, by 1930 there was one car for every 5.3 Americans.

the land.”<sup>9</sup> Eisenhower realized the roads in the United States were not nearly as effective as the German *autobahns* and he understood the importance of such a road system to national defense.<sup>10</sup>

While Eisenhower saw the benefit of interstates to national defense, others viewed them as a way to grow cities and increase commerce. General Motors presented the public with one of the earliest previews of urban interstates in the *Futurama* exhibit at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City. Twenty-five million visitors viewed this exhibit which presented a 35,000 square foot panoramic model of an American city in 1960 that included seven-lane superhighways. Historian Raymond Mohl noted the significance of the *Futurama* exhibit in “stimulat[ing] public thinking in favor of massive urban freeway building” to accommodate fast moving vehicles from city to city.<sup>11</sup> The *Futurama* exhibit presented interstates as an integral part of the United States’ progress towards a better, more productive civilization.<sup>12</sup>

Recognizing the potential economic and military advantages of interstates, then-president Eisenhower signed into law the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 on June 29, 1956, which appropriated \$25 billion of federal funding for the construction of 41,000 miles of an interstate highway system. The act established the Highway Trust Fund, which instituted a federal tax on gasoline and diesel fuel and designated federal funding

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<sup>9</sup> Richard F. Weingroff, “Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating the Interstate System,” *Public Roads On-line* 60, no. 1 (Summer 1996),

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/96summer/p96su10.cfm> (accessed June 1, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Gutfreund, 23-4; Dan McNichol, *The Roads that Build America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2006), 92; and Weingroff, “Highway History: The Greatest Decade 1956-1966, Part 1 Essential to the National Interest,” Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation,

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/50interstate.cfm> (accessed June 1, 2011). The convoy of heavy vehicles destroyed or damaged eighty-eight bridges on the way from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30 (July 2004): 677.

<sup>12</sup> Gutfreund, 40.

to reimburse states for 90 percent of the interstate construction costs. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 provided the financial support needed to get the interstate project underway across the nation. With the passage of this act, crews soon undertook the largest construction project in the nation's history, which they planned to complete in less than two decades.<sup>13</sup>

The Bureau of Public Roads' (BPR) 1955 publication, *General Location of National System of Interstate Highways Including All Additional Routes at Urban Areas*, also known as "The Yellow Book," contained maps of proposed urban interstate routes for 122 cities in 43 states and the District of Columbia. As congressmen saw these maps of proposed interstate projects located in their districts, support for the act grew, leading to its eventual passage in 1956. Interestingly, while the Yellow Book contained maps of urban interstates, it was not until Eisenhower was nearing the end of his presidency that he first became aware of the contents of the Yellow Book and the plans for interstate routes through cities. Eisenhower did not intend for the Interstate Highway System to enter into urban areas, but rather to link them; however, the project was already well underway by the time he realized the inclusion. This oversight helped set the stage for the decades-long controversy over urban interstates, which sparked intense public opposition across the nation.<sup>14</sup>

Initially, the interstate construction mandated by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was a sign of progress that appealed to many groups, including motorists, truckers, mayors, highway contractors, automobile manufacturers, gasoline refiners and travel associations. Author Tom Lewis notes that in 1956 "across the country, editorials

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<sup>13</sup> Weingroff, "Highway History"; Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways – Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997), 121-2.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 120-1, 145; and McNichol, 140-1.

complained not that the highways were being built, but that they were not being built fast enough.”<sup>15</sup> At the outset, road builders touted urban interstates as the solution to urban traffic congestion, a way to create jobs and a method to remodel rundown cities. As Public Roads Administration western operations chief Lawrence I. Hewes noted in 1945, “the modern expressway can help preserve the city” by “allowing convenient access” and he spoke of the importance of “coordinat[ing] urban renewal and expressway building.”<sup>16</sup>

While many were excited about the possibilities of the interstates, this massive undertaking was not without some early critics. Historian Mark H. Rose highlights the disapproving opinions of a few urban planners in the late 1940s and early 1950s noting, “Expressways, in this minority view, accelerated decentralization, contributing to the destruction of the central business district and hastening deterioration of outlying areas.”<sup>17</sup> Lewis Mumford, renowned writer and outspoken critic of urban interstates, expressed concern about the Interstate Highway System in his 1958 essay, “The Highway and the City”:

When the American people, through their Congress, voted a little while ago...for a twenty-six-billion-dollar highway program, the most charitable thing to assume about this action is that they hadn't the faintest notion of what they were doing. Within the next fifteen years they will doubtless find out; by that time it will be too late to correct all the damage to our cities and countryside, not least to the efficient organization of industry and transportation, that this ill-conceived and preposterously unbalanced program will have wrought.<sup>18</sup>

While Mumford was quick to perceive potential damages caused by interstates, the public was slower to realize and react.

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis, 122.

<sup>16</sup> McNichol, 106; Lewis, 122; and Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989*, rev. ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 16, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Mumford, “The Highway and the City,” in *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1963), 234.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 estimated 1972 as the completion year for the 41,000 miles of the Interstate Highway System. The first decade of interstate planning and construction went as expected and received limited public opposition. Crews built the first half of the designated interstate mileage during this period. However, the second half of the designated mileage took more than forty years to complete, far surpassing the initial 1972 estimate for completion.<sup>19</sup>

The completion of the first half of the designated 41,000 miles occurred within the first decade of the program partly because early freeway opposition movements faced difficulties in organizing against the proposed interstates. In the late 1950s, those opposed to a freeway plan had little time to react and organize, as much of the public did not yet fully understand the potential negative impact of interstates. When those early groups managed to establish themselves, they faced “an inflexible bureaucratic force of state and federal highway engineers and administrators” in addition to a limited set of legal options to halt or at least delay the interstates.<sup>20</sup> Historians Mark H. Rose and Bruce E. Seely note that, “Throughout the 1960s, highway projects were completed because of the force of law, the momentum of the construction process, and the ability of state road engineers and political leaders to associate highway building with progress.”<sup>21</sup>

Rose and Seely suggest that the growing freeway resistance was similar to other social movements taking hold across the country in the 1960s including the push for civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War protests. As the 1970s approached, the public perception that interstates equaled progress began to change and those opposing the interstates

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis, 121-2; and McNichol, 112. In 1968 the government increased the total mileage by 1,500 miles from the original 41,000 miles designated during the Interstate Highway System’s establishment in 1956.

<sup>20</sup> Mohl, 675.

<sup>21</sup> Mark H. Rose and Bruce E. Seely, “Getting the Interstate Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955 – 1985,” *Journal of Policy History* 2 (1990): 27.

achieved some successes in delaying or halting their construction through new political and legal routes.<sup>22</sup>

Contributing to the slow construction progress of the second half of interstate mileage were citizen movements. As interstates entered urban areas, the public began to experience firsthand the impact of a concrete superhighway running through their city, neighborhood, and sometimes their own home. Mohl notes, “Where expressway construction was delayed into the late 1960s, outcomes differed dramatically” in regards to the completion or cancelation of interstate highway projects, as “neighborhood leaders, institutions, and businesses had time to organize against the highwaymen.”<sup>23</sup> Negative impacts of urban interstates such as neighborhood deterioration or demolition, relocation difficulties, environmental damage, civil rights violations, and the presence of imposing concrete and steel structures all attributed to the growing citizens movements to control urban interstate growth. As a reaction to interstate construction, anti-freeway movements formed all over the country particularly during the late 1960s. Often referred to as “Freeway Revolts,” these groups consisted of frustrated citizens, environmentalists, proponents of public transportation, and residents of threatened neighborhoods.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most prominent freeway resistance organizations was Movement Against Destruction (M.A.D.) founded in 1968 in Baltimore, Maryland. M.A.D. consisted of a coalition of 25 neighborhood groups and community organizations. Their main demands included “a moratorium on all expressway and related activity until full and effective community representation was guaranteed by all public officials and the

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<sup>22</sup> Rose and Seely, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Mohl, 674-5, 699-700.

<sup>24</sup> Mohl, 696-7, 700; and Cliff Ellis, “Interstate Highways, Regional Planning and the Reshaping of Metropolitan America,” *Planning, Practice & Research* 16 (2001): 261.

involved agencies in policy and planning decisions.”<sup>25</sup> M.A.D.’s work and influence spread to other cities fighting similar anti-freeway battles. By the early 1970s, the anti-freeway movement had formed a strong national network through organizations such as the National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis (NCTC).<sup>26</sup>

Several freeway revolts took place across the country. San Francisco halted the construction of the Embarcadero Expressway in 1966 and opposition groups in New York City stopped plans for the Lower Manhattan and Cross-Brooklyn Expressways in 1969. Other interstate projects terminated by citizen movements include the Bay Freeway through Milwaukee, a proposed expressway through Overton Park in Memphis, the R.H. Thomson Freeway in Seattle, the Clark Freeway in Cleveland, and the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway in New Orleans. Not all freeway revolt movements were fully successful in stopping an interstate project – for example, as a compromise with highway planners, sections of Interstate 95 along the riverfront in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were built underground to reduce its impression on the city and the landscape. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, a section of Interstate 35E running through the West Seventh neighborhood was built as a parkway with slower speed-limits and more enhanced landscaping among other features implemented to reduce the road’s impact on the surrounding community. These compromises were small victories in the freeway revolt movement’s primary objective of eliminating freeways.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Introduction,” Movement Against Destruction Collection, Special Collections, Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore, <http://archives.ubalt.edu/mad/table.htm> (accessed May 9, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Mohl, 696-7. According to the October 25, 1972 newsletter of the National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis (NCTC) in the Movement Against Destruction Collection, the NCTC describes itself “as a coalition of groups and individuals who have since 1968 pooled information and experiences to aid communities in halting unwanted and unneeded freeways. It is an unfunded, entirely voluntary citizens organization dedicated to a sane transportation policy for the nation.”

<sup>27</sup> “Highway Fights in Other Cities,” Movement Against Destruction Collection, Special Collections, Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore, <http://archives.ubalt.edu/mad/pdf/7B->

Halting freeway construction was the main goal of freeway revolts and one of the key ways to accomplish this goal was to acquire a voice in the planning process. The first decade of route planning and interstate construction rarely involved public input. The state and federal engineers planned interstate routes based on their training and technical expertise with little or no regard to the roads' visual or social impact on the city. Through interviews with highway engineers of the 1960s, Lewis identifies the lack of training highway engineers received in working with the public and accounting for factors such as the socioeconomic and environmental aspects of road building. One highway engineer noted of his training, "how to hold public hearings; how to deal with the public... That, certainly... was the one point that was... the weakest in anybody's curriculum at the time."<sup>28</sup> To determine urban interstate routes, highway engineers often selected areas with low construction costs, sites with the best service to traffic, and locations with ideal topography.<sup>29</sup>

Because engineers planned routes based primarily on cost savings and traffic service with limited input from the public, interstates often cut through majority African-American neighborhoods and business districts in the inner city. This led to claims that highway planners and city leaders used interstate route planning along with urban renewal projects as a tool for slum clearance. However, Rose points out that in several cases planners had set the routes years before the areas became majority African-American neighborhoods and business districts. Several route plans went back to the late

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1%20Highway%20Fights%20In%20Other%20Cities,%20not%20dated.pdf (accessed May 9, 2011); Ellis, 261; and Christopher W. Wells, "From Freeway to Parkway: Federal Law, Grassroots Environmental Protest, and the Evolving Design of Interstate-35E in Saint Paul, Minnesota," *Journal of Planning History* 11 [1] (2012), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, 134.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 122; and Rose and Seely, 24, 45 - 6.

1930s, he notes, and it was not until after World War II that many American cities experienced population shifts of white households moving to the edges of cities and suburbs and black households and businesses populating the urban center. In many cases however, city leaders and influential businessmen did use urban freeways, as well as urban renewal, to isolate and relocate along racial lines.<sup>30</sup>

Stemming from the Housing Act of 1949, urban renewal efforts took place in cities across the country. Its aim was to revitalize inner cities through the clearance of blighted areas and the construction of private development, public housing, and other forms of urban development including civic centers and urban highways. The areas designated as blighted or as slums were often viable, established African-American communities. Urban renewal in conjunction with freeways, explains historian Carl Abbott, “were intended to both increase the value and accessibility of suburban land and to shore up the downtown core” through increased accessibility between the two areas.<sup>31</sup> The more common result of urban renewal and urban freeway projects, however, was increased suburban sprawl and vacant downtowns.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the potential effects of urban highways on city residents, there was an understanding that technical expertise trumped the ideas and opinions of laypersons. Referring to the use of local input during the interstate planning process, the president of the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) stated during

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38; Lewis, 241; Rose, 107; Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 64, 98-9; Joseph Heathcott, “The City Quietly Remade: National Programs and Local Agendas in the Movement to Clear the Slums, 1942-1952,” *Journal of Urban History* 34 (January 2008), 226; and Ronald H. Bayor, “Roads to Racial Segregation: Atlanta in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Urban History* 15 (November 1988): 3, 5, 9, 14-8.

<sup>31</sup> Abbott, 87-8.

<sup>32</sup> Fullilove, 58-9, 64; Carl Abbott, *Urban America In the Modern Age: 1920 to the Present*, (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1987), 84-5; Mohl, 687; and Rose, 115.

congressional testimony in 1968 that “[t]o allow local people to have a greater voice in the highway location and design for which they are not trained would negate the experience of trained highway professionals.”<sup>33</sup> Rose also points out a social disconnect between highway builders and anti-highway groups: “Highway engineers favored a policy oriented toward solving problems through technical expertise; and they had neither the skills nor the inclination to deal with leaders speaking for neighborhoods, flower gardens, parks, natural beauty, or non growth.”<sup>34</sup> However, through policy changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, politicians gained more control over highway programs and increasingly bridged the gap between the freeway fighters and the freeway planners, thus moving highway-planning discussions to a more public forum.<sup>35</sup>

As citizen displeasure with the Interstate Highway System mounted in the 1960s, new legislation and administrative roles placed more restrictions on highway engineers and the interstate construction process. Politicians passed legislation that gave freeway fighters effective delay tactics and a stronger voice in the planning process, including the Federal Highway Act of 1968 and the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Land Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. These measures both addressed relocation issues and unfair compensation due to federal projects. Stemming from the growing environmental movement, the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 required the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to the use of federal funds on a project. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970 called for the establishment of guidelines to take into account the social, environmental, and economic

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<sup>33</sup> Ben Kelley, *The Pavers and the Paved* (New York: Donald W. Brown Inc., 1971), 128-9.

<sup>34</sup> Rose, 108.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-2. The AASHO changed its name to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in 1973.

effects for federally funded highway projects. In addition, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 allowed states to cancel planned interstate sections altogether and then reallocate those funds from the Highway Trust Fund to other transportation alternatives.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to new legislation, shifts in administrative organization also supported freeway fighters. The creation of the cabinet-level Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1966, which included the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the BPR, placed federal highway engineers within a system of checks and balances under a high-level federal agency. At the state-level, highway departments experienced a shift toward more government control as states formed state-level DOTs and governors gained the ability to designate appointees and influence funding of state DOTs. These changes toward more government oversight forced highway engineers to “be made more responsive to public attitudes” and “end[ed] a period of relative autonomy for road builders.”<sup>37</sup> The first DOT secretary, Alan S. Boyd, recognized the usefulness of public input when he stated in 1968 that expressways needed to be “an integral part of the community, not a cement barrier or concrete river which threatens to inundate an urban area.”<sup>38</sup> Boyd made many changes to the interstate planning and construction process that gave the public a greater opportunity to voice their concerns.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mohl, 681; “Officials Estimate 1,436 Still Eligible For Relocation Aid Due to Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, July 20, 1973, 1B; Lewis, 241; Tianjia Tang, Bob O’Loughlin, Mike Roberts, and Edward Dancausse, “An Overview of Federal Air Quality Legislation as Related to Federally-assisted Highway and Transit Programs,” Federal Highway Administration, United States Department of Transportation, [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/resourcecenter/teams/airquality/teamaq\\_law.pdf](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/resourcecenter/teams/airquality/teamaq_law.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2011); Wells, 10; and Rose, 111. As described in the epilogue of Mark H. Rose’s book, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989*, prior to the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973, if a city canceled an interstate project, they would lose the ninety percent federal funds allocated toward the project. Fear of losing the federal funding discouraged many cities from canceling an interstate project even though the project might not have been the best transportation choice for the area.

<sup>37</sup> Rose and Seely, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Mohl, 681.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 680; and Wells, 10.

Replacing Boyd as DOT secretary in 1969 was John A. Volpe, described as a “hard-line road builder” with a “record of unfettered prohighwayism.”<sup>40</sup> In 1957, as Administrator of the FHWA, Volpe warned state highway engineers not to compromise with local opposition due to the national importance of the interstate system. However, the increased public resistance to urban interstate highways of the late 1960s and early 1970s caused Volpe to reconsider and ultimately cancel two controversial projects, the New Orleans Riverfront Expressway in 1969 and the inner loop highway in Boston in 1971. Volpe came to understand that more highways would exacerbate urban transportation issues rather than ease traffic and that the ultimate success of the Interstate Highway System depended upon the planners’ receptiveness to citizens’ desires.<sup>41</sup>

Through public forums, protests, and increasing organization, freeway revolts gained a direct influence on the location, design or even the very existence of many proposed interstate projects. Mohl points out that freeway fighters, “were successful only to the extent that they used the tools provided by new legislative mandates to challenge, confront, delay, and litigate against the road builders.”<sup>42</sup> These methods of citizen input, gained through the efforts of early freeway revolts to bring a public voice to interstate projects became an integral part of future interstate plans.

The following review of existing scholarship provides a research basis for this thesis. Below are several books and articles that will inform the analysis of freeway resistance to I-630 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

As interstate construction gained speed in the 1960s and 1970s and freeway resistance movements began forming across the United States, scholars started in earnest

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<sup>40</sup> Mohl, 682.

<sup>41</sup> Rose and Seely, 32; Mohl, 682; and Lewis, 231.

<sup>42</sup> Mohl, 700.

writing about these subjects. Early literature criticizing urban interstate construction includes works by Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Helen Leavitt, and Ben Kelly.

Lewis Mumford was one of the earliest critics of the planned Interstate Highway System. In his 1958 essay titled “The Highway and the City,” Mumford foretold with stunning insight the ills and consequences that would befall the United States as the nation became increasingly reliant on the automobile and the interstate while ignoring other transportation modes. Mumford argues that, “The fatal mistake we have been making is to sacrifice every other form of transportation to the private motorcar.”<sup>43</sup> However, he is not entirely against highways, explaining, “there is no one ideal mode or speed... That is why we need a better transportation *system*, not just more highways.”<sup>44</sup> Mumford advocates for the development of a “complex many-sided transportation system” since reliance solely on the development of a system for the automobile, he said, would lead to an overtaxed and inefficient transportation network.<sup>45</sup>

Jane Jacobs describes her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as “an attack... on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding.”<sup>46</sup> Throughout the book Jacobs addresses ways in which cities can accomplish redevelopment while retaining diversity and building upon “organized complexity,” or “intricate relationships and interconnections with other factors.”<sup>47</sup> She describes some of the more recent redevelopment methods of the time, such as expressways, low-income housing projects, and civic centers, as “the sacking of cities.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mumford, 237.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 238, 245.

<sup>46</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 439-440.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

Jacobs' book served as a resource for those opposed to urban freeways and urban renewal with authors like Jane Holtz Kay describing it as a "sacred text" and a "classic."<sup>49</sup> *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was a significant work that greatly influenced the urban redevelopment debates of the 1960s and 1970s.

Literature directly criticizing urban interstates and transportation policy appeared beginning in the early 1970s. One of the first such criticisms was Helen Leavitt's 1970 book *Superhighway—Superhoax* that promoted what historian Mark H. Rose describes as a "polemical account of the politics of the Interstate system."<sup>50</sup> Leavitt notes that her "book is about the men and institutions who promote highways and how they destroy our churches, schools, homes, and parks."<sup>51</sup> Unlike Jacobs' book, in which the focus was on many segments of urban design and redevelopment, Leavitt's work directly denounces urban highways and their failure to remedy the transportation crisis or improve urban life.<sup>52</sup>

Another early criticism of interstate highways, written by a former FHWA employee, was *The Pavers and the Paved* by Ben Kelley. Printed in 1971, Kelley's book makes many of the same criticisms of the interstate highway system as Leavitt's work, both noting problems with policy and failures that had occurred up to that point. In addition, Kelley provides a manual entitled "How to Halt a Highway" which gives freeway fighters advice about what to do and what not to do as they plan their attack against a proposed interstate project.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America, and How We Can Take It Back* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1997), 249.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis, 220; and Rose, 106.

<sup>51</sup> Helen Leavitt, *Superhighway—Superhoax* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 20.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

<sup>53</sup> Kelley, *vii*, 127-150.

Historians have examined specific freeway battles focusing in on a particular city and freeway revolt often by analyzing their methods of fighting the freeway and the outcomes of their efforts to halt or delay construction. One of the most thorough accounts of a freeway battle is the book *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* by Richard O. Baumbach, Jr. and William E. Borah. Several articles also focus on the plights of individual cities against the freeways, including Zachary M. Schrag's "The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations," Ronald H. Bayor's "Roads to Racial Segregation: Atlanta in the Twentieth Century," Christopher W. Wells' "From Freeway to Parkway: Federal Law, Grassroots Environmental Protest, and the Evolving Design of Interstate-35E in Saint Paul, Minnesota," and Joshua Cannon's article, "Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment: The Long Road to Connect Downtown Huntsville, Alabama to the Interstate Highway System." Each of these sources focuses on a specific freeway fight in the United States.<sup>54</sup>

In his article "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," Raymond Mohl examines the freeway revolt movement as a whole by comparing two cities' experiences with freeway construction – Baltimore and Miami – and analyzing the differing outcomes. As a framework for his study, Mohl outlines five commonalities of successful freeway revolts. While Mohl recognizes that each occurrence of a freeway

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<sup>54</sup> See Richard O. Baumbach, Jr. and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront-Expressway Controversy*, (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981); Zachary M. Schrag, "The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations," *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004): 648-673; Ronald H. Bayor, "Roads to Racial Segregation: Atlanta in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 15 (November 1988): 3-21; Christopher W. Wells, "From Freeway to Parkway: Federal Law, Grassroots Environmental Protest, and the Evolving Design of Interstate-35E in Saint Paul, Minnesota," *Journal of Planning History* 11 [1] (2012), 8-26; and Joshua Cannon, "Huntsville, the Highway, and Urban Redevelopment: The Long Road to Connect Downtown Huntsville, Alabama to the Interstate Highway System," *Journal of Planning History* 11 [1] (2012), 27-46.

revolt is different – noting factors such as a city’s history, geography, demographics, physical structure, neighborhood patterns, and political culture – he suggests some similarities among these movements to “stop the road.”<sup>55</sup> Mohl’s commonalities include: 1) sustained citizen movements described as “persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class, and interracial alliances”; 2) support from influential city leaders such as local politicians and journalists; 3) a “strong historic planning tradition”; and ,4) “legal action over highway routing.”<sup>56</sup> Mohl defines a successful freeway revolt as one that possesses all the commonalities listed above and leads to the fifth and final commonality: a “termination of the interstate project” via a “final shutdown decision from the courts, from highest levels of the highway bureaucracy, or...from state governors.”<sup>57</sup> Mohl concludes by addressing the presence of government involvement in highway planning. He notes, “Despite all the talk among road engineers about simply serving traffic needs, in the highway field, politics was always in the driver’s seat.”<sup>58</sup> While highway engineers claimed to locate routes based on service to traffic and cost-efficiency, politics, Mohl contends, always had the greatest influence on the projects.

By the 1980s, when many of the interstate projects outlined in the 1955 Yellow Book had been completed or abandoned, literature emerged which covered the history of the Interstate Highway System and the role of key players in its development. Bruce E. Seely, in his book *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers*, examines the progress of federal highway policy from the Good Roads Movement (1890-

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<sup>55</sup> Mohl, 674

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 676.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 676, 700.

1921) to the formation of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Throughout the book, Seely addresses the role engineers played in road development. He notes that, “engineers...relied on the image of apolitical expertise to influence a democratic society.”<sup>59</sup> While they maintained a reputation as working separate from politics, engineers played key roles in highway politics and significantly influenced the “biggest and most expensive public works project in history.”<sup>60</sup>

Picking up where his book left off, Seely coauthored an article with Mark H. Rose titled, “Getting the Interstate Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955-1985.” Rose and Seely continue the discussion about highway engineers’ seemingly apolitical approach to road construction even though the politics often influenced engineers’ decisions. Rose and Seely describe the shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s to more political involvement in the planning of highways by noting, “The politics of economic development and environmental sensibilities replaced the politics of apolitical expertise.”<sup>61</sup> Road politics and road engineering could not be separated, the authors argue, due to multiple parties with differing stakes in the Interstate Highway System. As a result, “in every state... political leaders recaptured their highway departments and insisted on road-building programs that took account of a host of nontraffic variables.”<sup>62</sup>

To help the reader understand the perspective of a highway engineer in the 1950s and 1960s, Rose and Seely’s article also provides insight into the profession’s training

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<sup>59</sup> Seely, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-3; and Richard O. Davies, *The Age of Asphalt: The Automobile, the Freeway, and the Condition of Metropolitan America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1975), 4; quoted in Seely, 223.

<sup>61</sup> Rose and Seely, 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

and approach to road location and construction. They explained that the road engineers' education "produced a commitment to production [of roads] rather than to the social, aesthetic, political, and land-use goals."<sup>63</sup> Highway engineers tackled problems with technical solutions, but as freeway opposition grew, they did not possess the background to adequately consider the aesthetic, environmental, and social aspects of their work and were slow to adapt. Overall, Rose and Seely's article builds upon the discussion of the "apolitical" approach to interstate planning found in Seely's book and provides a profile of the road engineer of the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to understand their difficulties dealing with social impacts of interstates during the freeway revolts of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>64</sup>

Mark H. Rose's 1990 revised edition of *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939 – 1989* expands upon his abovementioned article with Seely and the book's previous edition – printed in 1979 – which covered the period from 1941 to 1956. In the preface, Rose acknowledges that the article he coauthored with Seely, "Getting the Interstate Built: Road Engineers and the Implementation of Public Policy, 1955-1985," assisted him in "shap[ing] the framework for the epilogue in [the 1990] edition."<sup>65</sup> In *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939 – 1989*, Rose describes freeway politics by breaking down the interstate political timeline into three phases occurring between 1956 and the late 1980s. Rose depicts the first period of interstate politics, between 1956 and the mid-1960s, as largely influenced by the expertise of highway engineers. The second period occurred after 1965 with Rose observing growth in the influence of "advocates of environmentalism and elimination of Interstate routings in cities" over interstate-related

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 40-1, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Rose, *xi – xii*.

legislation.<sup>66</sup> Rose characterized the third phase of interstate politics, in the mid-1970s, as possessing “a passion for localism” which “overwhelmed the national highway program” and left those who promoted road construction struggling to “articulate a national road construction program that appeared adequate, affordable, and acceptable.”<sup>67</sup>

Dan McNichol’s *The Roads that Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System* gives an overview of the development of the system providing details about notable events and offering several quotes and photographs. McNichol’s voice seems decidedly pro-highway, using descriptive words such as “incredible,” “amazing,” and “fascinating” when describing the interstate. While his tone is generally positive, McNichol does address some of the system’s early failures and lasting consequences. Nevertheless, his perspective is much different from the next body of literature – criticisms of the Interstate Highway System written during the late 1990s and 2000s.<sup>68</sup>

By the 1990s, the negative impacts of America’s automobile-centric society were familiar and frequently studied. Jane Holtz Kay’s 1997 anti-automobile book *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America, and How We Can Take It Back* criticizes a nation dependent on cars and the systems supporting this dependency, including interstates and oil. Kay discusses the origins of the United States’ reliance on the automobile and concludes with solutions to lessen the country’s dependence on the motor vehicle.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> See Dan McNichol, *The Roads that Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System*, (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2006).

<sup>69</sup> See Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America, and How We Can Take It Back*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1997).

With the automobile and the interstate came suburban sprawl. Adam Rome examines the environmental impact of the spreading city in *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, while Owen D. Gutfreund's book, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape*, addresses the growth of suburban sprawl as supported by policies and government subsidies. The increase in suburbs occurred as downtowns declined and interstates provided a fast, convenient way out of the city. Rome and Gutfreund both criticize this sprawl and the role the Interstate Highway System played in creating it. Rome focuses on the rise of suburban housing and the destruction of the environment to support this growth while Gutfreund uses case studies to illustrate the negative effects of interstates and sprawl on cities such as Denver, Colorado; Middlebury, Vermont; and Smyrna, Tennessee.<sup>70</sup>

This thesis focuses on the construction of and the fight against an urban interstate through the middle of Little Rock, Arkansas. Early planning for what eventually became I-630 occurred around the time that Little Rock was experiencing a crisis of racial tensions, most notably the events surrounding the attempts to integrate Little Rock Central High School in 1957. This conflict was accompanied by massive redevelopment through the urban renewal program, which Little Rock embraced with enthusiasm in the early 1950s. For a general overview of the urban renewal project that promoted blight eradication initiatives in Little Rock during the 1950s and 1960s, see Martha Walters article "Little Rock Urban Renewal" in the *Pulaski County Historical Review*. Walters

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<sup>70</sup> See Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004); and Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

examines the legislation and organizations that enabled and promoted urban renewal programs in the city. For specifics about some of the African-American communities in and around Little Rock that the urban renewal program targeted and eliminated, the *Arkansas Times* offers a report by Margaret Arnold titled, “LR’s Vanishing Black Communities: The Value is in the Money, But the Price is in Roots.” Arnold examines the virtual wiping off the map of several historically African-American communities in Little Rock due to urban renewal. She explores the motivations behind the areas selected for demolition, which were often targeted for their newfound commercial value in a westward advancing Little Rock or for their proximity to prominently white neighborhoods in an increasingly segregated city. Arnold also discusses the negative impacts on the individuals uprooted from their communities under the auspices of urban renewal and progress.<sup>71</sup>

Many African-American families forced to relocate because of urban renewal programs often found that their only option was to move into public housing units located on the periphery of the city. John Kirk’s article “City Planning and the Civil Rights Struggle” explores how the city used urban redevelopment and slum clearance to create a residentially segregated city prior to the events of the integration crisis at Little Rock Central High School in 1957. By reorganizing the city along racial lines through tactics such as urban renewal, segregated neighborhoods thus “paved the way for the *de facto* segregation of numerous other associated facilities” such as public schools and parks.<sup>72</sup>

As a result of this system, the Little Rock School District (LRSD) could simply use

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<sup>71</sup> Martha Walters, “Little Rock Urban Renewal,” *Pulaski County Historical Review* 24 (March 1976) 14; and Margaret Arnold, “LR’s Vanishing Black Communities: The Value is in the Money, But the Price is in Roots,” *Arkansas Times*, June 1978, 36-43.

<sup>72</sup> John Kirk, “City Planning and the Civil Rights Struggle,” in *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* (University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 152.

neighborhood zoning to avoid integrating the schools. Kirk argues that the government-supported housing segregation of Little Rock was “the city’s most decisive response to *Brown v. Board of Education*” in attempts to resist integration.<sup>73</sup> Ben Johnson’s article “After 1957: Resisting Integration in Little Rock” examines some of the public and private efforts in the city to avoid integrating the schools in the years following the 1957 crisis. He also discusses the actions of some of the advocates for integration and racial equality in the 1960s and 1970s who felt that simply “re-opening...the Little Rock high schools in 1959 had not resolved the crisis nor set in motion the extinction of a dual education system.”<sup>74</sup>

Jay Jennings’ book *Carry the Rock: Race, Football, and the Soul of an American City* addresses the aftermath of the Little Rock Central High School integration crisis through the lens of the high school’s 2007 football team. In Chapter 6, “Road to Ruin,” Jennings identifies the crisis at Little Rock Central High School as a catalyst for the start of work on a main east-west thoroughfare across the city. Jennings also addresses the urban renewal program and the city’s growing neighborhood segregation noting, “Before the building of I-630, urban renewal programs had started the trend toward racially homogenous neighborhoods.”<sup>75</sup> The presence of I-630 further encouraged the segregation of an already segregated city, a situation created by urban renewal programs and city planning.

The story of I-630, one of the largest construction projects in Little Rock, is an important part of the city’s history and its development as a metropolitan area. Financial

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<sup>73</sup> Kirk, 155-6.

<sup>74</sup> Ben F. Johnson, “After 1957: Resisting Integration in Little Rock,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Summer 2007), 259.

<sup>75</sup> Jay Jennings, *Carry the Rock: Race, Football, and the Soul of an American City* (New York: Rodale Books, 2010), 129.

issues and legal action were among the delays that often plagued the construction of the freeway. The latter delay was a result of an active group of citizens that worked to slow the freeway's encroachment on and division of Little Rock. This thesis will document Little Rock's freeway resistance movement, a topic that has hitherto been largely unexplored.

## **CHAPTER 2: Twenty-Seven Years to Construct Seven and a Half Miles: The Fight over the Construction of Interstate 630**

Plans to construct an east-west thoroughfare across Little Rock date back as far as the 1930s with serious efforts to build the route commencing in the late 1950s. Interstate 630 (I-630), as it was ultimately known, underwent multiple name changes, endured various adjustments in funding, and experienced several starts and stops in construction before it became the expressway that now stretches around seven and a half miles across Little Rock, Arkansas, and links Interstate 430 (I-430) in the west to Interstate 30 (I-30) in the east.

A 1962 description of the Little Rock East-West Expressway, an early name for what would become I-630, envisioned “a smooth-riding ribbon of concrete-and-steel that cut through the heart of Little Rock, consuming large chunks of property and changing the face of the city so that vehicles can get to their destinations faster and safer.”<sup>76</sup> The Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, Little Rock Unlimited Progress (UP), and other city leaders and businessmen viewed the route as “vital to the continued growth of downtown Little Rock” while also easing east-west traffic congestion during rush hour.<sup>77</sup>

Once construction was underway, the highway department intended for the route to take less than a decade to complete. A 1965 newspaper article noted the estimated time of completion for the expressway as fall 1972. While the effort to construct what eventually became I-630 gained momentum in the late 1950s starting with right-of-way purchases by the city, the last section of the interstate did not open until 1985. Why did it

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<sup>76</sup> “Engineers’ Report Details Planning for Expressway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 April 1962, 6A.

<sup>77</sup> Brenda Spillman, “200 Attend Discussion on Freeway Completion,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 9 May 1978, 4A; and Jimmy Jones, “Little Rock Expressway is Included in Interstate,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 November 1970, 1A.

take more than a quarter of a century to complete this route through a relatively small capital city in the southern United States?<sup>78</sup>

In the 1930s, Little Rock had a population of 81,679 that was largely concentrated around the central downtown area. The main transportation modes were trolleys, buses, and walking, with trains that carried passengers longer distances outside of the city. It was during this decade that the Little Rock Planning Commission enlisted the advice of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based city planner John Nolen to develop the city's first comprehensive plan to consider Little Rock's future development and growth patterns. Within the plans Nolen included an east-west route he referred to as an "express thoroughfare" that largely followed the path of today's I-630.<sup>79</sup> Over the next 20 years, officials included variations of the route concept in city road and transportation plans but did little to make this route a reality.<sup>80</sup>

After World War II, the City of Little Rock began to examine the city's traffic needs. It commissioned H.W. Lockner and Associates of Chicago to complete a traffic study of the city, which like the Nolan plan, emphasized the need for a main east-west route through the city. The 1948 Highway and Transportation Plan for Greater Little Rock first proposed that the route have controlled access, and from then on almost all transportation plans for the city included some form of an east-west freeway-type route in the general area of I-630. In 1956 Little Rock's Metropolitan Area Planning Commission

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<sup>78</sup> "First Clearing for Expressway Starts This Week," *Arkansas Gazette*, 31 October 1965, 21A.

<sup>79</sup> Doug Smith, "Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion," *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 September 1985, 1A.

<sup>80</sup> David Koon, "Wilbur's Wall: I-630, Little Rock and 25 Years in a Divided City," *Arkansas Times*, 26 January 2011, 10; and James W. Bell, "Little Rock, (Pulaski County)," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=970#> (accessed 15 April 2012). For a comparison, the 2010 population of Little Rock, according to the U.S. census, was 193,524.

initiated a study of Pulaski County roads that emphasized the need for an east-west route.<sup>81</sup>

Real efforts to establish such a thoroughfare in Little Rock began to materialize in the late 1950s as racial tensions and urban renewal efforts grew in the city. Little Rock city leaders enthusiastically embraced the urban renewal programs resulting largely from the Housing Act of 1949, which provided federal funding to construct low-rent public housing and demolish areas identified as blighted or slums. Such efforts began in 1951 when the Little Rock Housing Authority cleared a large section of the Dunbar neighborhood, the first of many historically African-American communities demolished in the name of urban renewal. Many of the impacted individuals relocated to newly constructed high-rise public housing facilities. The city's efforts to clear and repurpose large sections of private homes were not a novel concept when the right-of-way acquisitions for the future Interstate 630 got underway.<sup>82</sup>

After the 1957 integration crisis at Little Rock Central High School drew international attention, many outside of the state recognized Little Rock for an educational system rife with racial tensions. As a result, new businesses were reluctant to locate in the city. Prominent businessmen and city leaders felt they needed to have a large, modern development project to show companies and industries Little Rock's progressive side. A modern thoroughfare through Little Rock, a route that city planning

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<sup>81</sup> Site Visit Report, Little Rock, Arkansas, Economic Development Management Project, April 1972, p. 95, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 24, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; Transcript of Public Hearing on Job 6872 Interstate 630 (Wilbur Mills Freeway), Ricks Armory, Little Rock, Arkansas, 14 March 1972, p. 43, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 23, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; and Smith, "Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion," 29 September 1985, 1A.

<sup>82</sup> Martha Walters, "Little Rock Urban Renewal," *Pulaski County Historical Review*, 24 (March 1976) 14; Gene Foreman, "Urban Renewal: A Decade of Progress has brought Impressive Changes to Little Rock," *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 May 1960, 2E; and Margaret Arnold, "LR's Vanishing Black Communities: The Value is in the Money, But the Price is in Roots," *Arkansas Times*, June 1978, 36-43.

maps since the 1930s had featured prominently, was a chance to make Little Rock attractive to businesses and erase some of the negative perceptions caused by the integration crisis. The project gained initial funding when in 1958 Little Rock voters approved a \$5 million capital improvement bond issue. The city dedicated \$1.2 million of the bond to purchase the right-of-way for the proposed east-west expressway. Though neither the city nor its residents could have known at the time, this action initiated the eventual construction of I-630.<sup>83</sup>

While city leaders committed to purchasing the right-of-way with funds from the bond issue, they recognized that the construction of the expressway was too large and expensive of a project for the city to handle alone. Therefore, the city persuaded the Arkansas Highway Department (AHD) to include the Eighth Street Expressway in the Arkansas Highway System in October 1958. The Eighth Street Expressway then became a joint project between the city, which was responsible for acquiring the right-of-way, and the AHD, which constructed the expressway as funds became available. In 1959 the city further committed itself to the idea of a main east-west route when they officially adopted the expressway running “from the proposed Fourth Bridge Freeway [I-430] west of Little Rock to the freeway under construction on the east side [I-30]” into a master street plan.<sup>84</sup> That same year, the AHD hired the engineering firm Garver & Garver, Inc.

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<sup>83</sup> Jay Jennings, *Carry the Rock: Race, Football, and the Soul of an American City* (New York: Rodale Books, 2010), 127-8; and “Interstate 630 Environmental Impact Statement: Administrative Action Draft,” Arkansas State Highway Department, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 3, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed (the collection is now processed and can be found in MSS 06-15), Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas. The “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree” elaborates on the city’s expenses prior to the route’s incorporation into the Interstate Highway System noting that the \$1.2 million bond and general city revenues produced a combined sum of roughly \$3.17 million. Of this sum, the city spent about \$2.69 million toward right-of-way acquisitions; \$17,670 on the Fair Park Boulevard underpass construction; \$204,574 on retaining walls, paving grades, etc.; and \$240,000 on relocation expenses.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, “Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion,” 29 September 1985, 1A.

to create an initial report on the engineering for the route. With committed leaders onboard and a plan in place the route was on its way to becoming a reality.<sup>85</sup>

In April 1961, the AHD and the federal Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) designated the route's official name as the Little Rock East-West Expressway. An April 28, 1961, newspaper article noted the availability of city funding to purchase the right-of-way for the first stage of construction from University Avenue to Park Street, and explained that the state and federal governments would each pay half of the construction costs. One year later, in April 1962, Garver & Garver, Inc. submitted a preliminary report on the design of the expressway to the AHD for review. The report estimated the construction costs of the route (not including right-of way expenses) at \$13,819,186, established more precise right-of-way boundaries, and projected that the proposed design would handle the expected traffic volumes through 1980.<sup>86</sup>

The report also divided the construction of the route into three sections. Each section, once complete, would immediately serve as an independently functioning roadway until crews finalized the project and linked all the segments. The first section planned for construction, as previously mentioned, ran from University Avenue east to Park Street. From there, the second section stretched two miles from Park Street to what was to become I-30. The third and final section slated for construction ran three and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.; Transcript of Public Hearing on Job 6872 Interstate 630, 14 March 1972, p. 43, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 23, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; Arkansas State Highway Department, Minute Order No. 2977, 7 October 1958, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder "I-630 AHPP Misc," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, Appendix II "Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree," Exhibit A, p. 3, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Site Visit Report, April 1972, pp. 95-96, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 24, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>86</sup> "Expressway Gets East-West Name," *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 April 1961, 16B; "Land Purchases Expected Soon for Expressway," *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 April 1961, 16B; "Engineers' Report," 29 April 1962, 6A; and Transcript of Public Hearing on Job 6872 Interstate 630, 14 March 1972, p. 43, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 23, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

three-eighths miles from University Avenue west to the future I-430. The report described the area around this third section as consisting of “a moderate amount of suburban development to rural” with a potential for “expanding residential development along the route.”<sup>87</sup> The right-of-way for this segment disrupted fewer citizens compared to those across the more populated areas to the east. Notably intrusive was the proposed second section, from Park Street east to I-30, which cut through downtown Little Rock, well-established neighborhoods, like the Quapaw Quarter, and business districts, like the Ninth Street African-American business district. It also narrowly missed or slightly skimmed such landmarks and institutions as Mount Holly Cemetery, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the Arkansas State Capitol, Philander Smith College, and MacArthur Park. This downtown section, from Park Street east to I-30, would prove to be the most controversial and time-consuming segment of the proposed project.<sup>88</sup>

While the original plans called for a four-lane expressway, the BPR requested that the right-of-way accommodate six lanes from University Avenue east to I-30, because, as City Manager Ancil M. Douthit explained, “the Bureau had adopted a policy of requiring all such facilities to be at least six-lanes.”<sup>89</sup> Purchasing the right-of-way for a six-lane expressway was not within Little Rock’s original plans or budget for the project. As a result, in June 1962 the city requested and received \$800,000 in federal aid funneled through the Arkansas Highway Commission (AHC) to assist in the unanticipated acquisition of additional right-of-way properties.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “Engineers’ Report,” 29 April 1962, 6A.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*; and Bill Dawson, “I-630 Route, Design Defended,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 3 November 1978.

<sup>89</sup> “Right of Way Plea From Little Rock Approved by AHC,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 August 1962, B1.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Constructing I-630 through the heart of Little Rock was a massive undertaking that affected many people's lives. Property owners discovered their position within the proposed right-of-way during a public hearing on the route's location hosted by the AHD in February 1961 and by the presence of stakes placed along the planned route by Garver & Garver, Inc. in 1962. By November 1963, the right-of-way acquisition was "beginning to make its physical mark through 38 blocks of West Little Rock" as many structures began to disappear.<sup>91</sup> Those 38 blocks were in the path of the first section, from University Avenue to Park Street, and included 168 parcels acquired by the city for the right-of-way.<sup>92</sup>

Official AHD work on the East-West Expressway began with the first section from University Avenue to Park Street in early November 1965 when the AHD awarded contracts for the clearance of the right-of-way and route and overpass construction. However, the source of long-term funding for the project was uncertain throughout the late 1960s. In 1967, concerned about the slow pace of the project, Fifty for the Future (a group comprised of influential business and civic leaders in Little Rock) hired consultants Garver & Garver, Inc. of Little Rock and Knoerle, Bender, Stone & Associates out of Baltimore and Chicago to conduct a pre-feasibility study on the possibility of making the route a toll road. The consultants determined that setting up the expressway as a toll road was a feasible method for funding the road; however, there was no law in the state allowing toll roads. To remedy this problem, the Arkansas House of Representatives

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<sup>91</sup> Jerry Dhonau, "Expressway Route Starting to be Forged in Little Rock," *Arkansas Gazette*, 10 November 1963, 16A.

<sup>92</sup> "East-West Name," 28 April 1961, 16B; "Land Purchases," 28 April 1961, 16B; "Engineers' Report," 29 April 1962, 6A; and Transcript of Public Hearing on Job 6872 Interstate 630, 14 March 1972, p. 43, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 23, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

voted to approve bill SB 7 in 1968 which allowed toll financing as a method for funding road construction in the state. The Little Rock city government then hired the consultants Howard, Needles, Tammen and Bergendorf of Kansas City and New York in 1969 to complete a feasibility study on toll financing for the expressway. They determined that toll financing was impractical due to the short distance of the expressway and the current poor status of the highway bond market. As a result of the report, the city abandoned plans to finance the expressway with tolls. With only a one-mile stretch of the expressway, from Pine Street to Rice Street, completed by April 1969, Little Rock and the AHD were again without a solid financial plan to complete the route. The East-West Expressway project came to a standstill.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the financial issues they faced, by early 1970 the AHC had not set any firm timeframe to complete the first section of the project. This worried city officials, as the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce designated the completion of the first section of the expressway as “the prime program” for the city in 1970.<sup>94</sup> The city worked to convince the AHC to include the completion of the first section of the expressway on their work schedule for that year. Little Rock Mayor Haco Boyd pleaded with the AHC insisting that the city had “tried every real and imagined device to insure the completion of this roadway” and that his administration “can go no further than to simply state to [the AHC] that the city of Little Rock has met all requirements and acted in good faith and [the city] believe[s] that the [Arkansas Highway] Commission is obligated to complete

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<sup>93</sup> “First Clearing,” 31 October 1965, 21A; “Senate Passes Toll Road Bill for Little Rock,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 February 1968, 5A; “House Votes Toll Roads Bill, Private Sales,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 16 February 1968, 7A; Smith, “Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion,” 29 September 1985, 1A; and Site Visit Report, April 1972, pp. 98-99, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 24, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>94</sup> “City Fails to Get AHC Commitment About Expressway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 January 1970, 1B.

Stage One.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, former Little Rock Mayor Werner C. Knoop explained that he “never would have undertaken the project as mayor in 1958 if [he] had not thought the [Arkansas Highway] Commission would want to see it through.... The obligation seemed to be pretty well set. If it hadn’t been, [the city] never would have spent \$2.5 million on it.”<sup>96</sup> The AHC, however, continued to deny the city’s requests to complete the first phase of the East-West Expressway citing its unpopularity in other parts of the state, which had many road needs of their own. AHC Chairman Truman Baker reminded city officials that, “we’ve still got some people out in the state in the mud and the dust.”<sup>97</sup> Despite refusing to designate a timeline for the project, the AHC promised to eventually “live up” to their commitment to complete the East-West Expressway, but for the time being, the project was not on the AHC’s priority list for allocating funds.<sup>98</sup>

The city and state explored other sources of funding for the project, including the possible addition of the route to the Interstate Highway System. This arrangement would require the federal government to cover 90 percent of the construction costs while the state government would be responsible for only ten percent. The AHC chairman Truman Baker indicated that the state would be able to fund ten percent of the project, so on March 31, 1970, AHD Director Ward Goodman wrote to Frank C. Turner, administrator for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), formally requesting the inclusion of the East-West Expressway in the Interstate Highway System. Goodman noted in his letter that the federal government allotted Arkansas 521.8 miles of interstate highway but the state had only constructed 518.8 miles. This left three miles available for the expressway

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.; “LR Expressway ‘Not Popular,’ Baker Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 26 March 1970, 1B.

project so they would only need 4.4 more interstate highway miles from the federal government to complete the route. Goodman suggested pulling miles from other states that did not have plans to use their allotted interstate highway mileage. United States Representative Wilbur D. Mills of Kensett, Arkansas, took special interest in this project and discussed it with Turner. Representative Mills' spokesman noted that the representative was "hopeful" about an approval of the request.<sup>99</sup>

The BPR initially denied the inclusion of the route in the Interstate Highway System with Rex C. Leathers, Little Rock division engineer for the BPR, citing that, "All mileage had been allocated and none is available for the addition or extension of routes."<sup>100</sup> However, Leathers left reason to remain optimistic when he noted that the request "is being held for future consideration if and when mileage becomes available."<sup>101</sup> Despite being denied the additional mileage, AHC Chairman Truman Baker was hopeful, noting that the rejection of this request only meant "there is no mileage available today."<sup>102</sup> The AHC, along with Representative Mills, remained confident they

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<sup>99</sup> Site Visit Report, April 1972, p. 99, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 24, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; "Make Expressway Part of Interstate, Government Asked," *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 April 1970, 1B; "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, p. I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Russell Wright, "The MacArthur Park National Register Historic District," October 1977, p. 1, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder "AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas. According to the web version of the *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States*, the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) was transferred to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) effective April 1, 1967. The BPR was later abolished and the FHWA absorbed its functions effective August 10, 1970.

<sup>100</sup> "Roads Bureau Turns Down Expressway: Interstate Mileage Already Allocated, Commission Told," *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 May 1970, 1A.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

would eventually get the East-West Expressway included in the Interstate Highway System.<sup>103</sup>

It took less than a year from the initial March 31, 1970 request to get the East-West Expressway designated as part of the Interstate Highway System. The federal government informed Representative Mills in June 1970 of the plans to add the route to the Interstate Highway System; however, they did not allow the congressman to make an official announcement until after the November general elections. Therefore, about five months later on November 12, 1970, Representative Mills excitedly announced at a meeting of the Little Rock Rotary Club that the federal government had agreed to include the stalled East-West Expressway project in the Interstate Highway System.

Representative Mills added that the federal government would fund construction of the route at 90 percent. The state would pay the remaining 10 percent, while the city was relieved of further financial obligations. With its designation as part of the Interstate Highway System the East-West Expressway also received a new name: Interstate 630.<sup>104</sup>

City leaders largely attributed the inclusion of the expressway in the Interstate Highway System to the work of Representative Mills. During the announcement of the inclusion, the influential Representative Mills, head of the powerful Ways & Means Committee, recounted that he told the Department of Transportation (DOT) “to take the proposition as submitted by the [Arkansas] Highway Commission...and just approve

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Congressional limits set the Interstate Highway System at 42,500 total miles. The government increased the total mileage by 1,500 miles in 1968 from the original 41,000 miles designated during the Interstate Highway System’s establishment in 1956.

<sup>104</sup> Jones, “Little Rock Expressway,” 13 November 1970, 1A; “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, pp. I-10 – I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Wright, “MacArthur Park,” October 1977, pp. 1-2, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas.

it.”<sup>105</sup> Representative Mills and many city leaders saw I-630 as a way to improve downtown and halt its decline. The Chamber of Commerce noted that I-630 “is probably the single most important project pending to assure the continued rebuilding of the downtown area.”<sup>106</sup> Shortly after Representative Mills’ announcement, the Little Rock City Board adopted a resolution on December 21 designating the expressway as the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway in recognition of the congressman’s efforts to get the route included in the Interstate Highway System. The AHC officially renamed the route the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway on January 5, 1971 choosing to designate the route as a freeway versus an expressway as it contained no at-grade crossings or intersections along the route. While the city and state agreed to name the route after Representative Mills, on a federal level the route remained I-630.<sup>107</sup>

The construction of I-630 moved forward quickly once the route was included in the Interstate Highway System. Less than a month after Representative Mills’ announcement, the AHC opened bids on the second segment of the first section of the project – from University Avenue to Pine Street – on January 27, 1971. However, with federal funding came federal rules and regulations with which the AHC had to adhere. Most notably, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 required the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) detailing the environmental consequences of any project receiving federal funding. Although the city and state had

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<sup>105</sup> Jones, “Little Rock Expressway,” 13 November 1970, 1A.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> “Expressway Renamed Mills Freeway; Bid Opening is Set for January 27,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 January 1971, 1A; and Smith, “Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion,” 29 September 1985, 1A. According to a December 12, 1976 article in the *Arkansas Gazette* entitled, “LR Can Call it Anything, but Mills Freeway is I-630,” the AHC determined that the Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices prohibits the renaming of numbered highways after persons. While the city could unofficially refer to the route as the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway, it was officially known as Interstate 630.

already purchased, cleared, and constructed some of the route prior to federal funding, the I-630 project was not exempt from these federal requirements.<sup>108</sup>

The FHWA disseminated interim EIS guidelines to the state highway departments on November 24, 1970, shortly after the federal designation of I-630. Nine months later, on August 24, 1971, the agency distributed the first policy and procedure guidelines for the creation of an EIS, which the AHD used to draft the EIS for the I-630 project. The AHD also created the Environmental Development Section to handle the new environmental planning and EIS requirements for I-630 and other projects under NEPA's jurisdiction.<sup>109</sup>

The AHD's Right of Way Division released its original draft EIS for I-630 in February 1972. The agency's chief, Gip I. Robertson Jr., explained that the development of an EIS had only been a requirement for federally-funded projects for about a year. Even though the I-630 project had been in progress for more than ten years at this point, since the project now received federal funding, the AHD had to comply with the EIS requirement. Its main purpose was to examine the environmental impact of the federally funded project and recommend ways to mitigate potential negative impacts on the affected area. For example, the AHD explained in the EIS its effort to avoid "the taking of any parks, recreations areas or historical sites" when determining the route.<sup>110</sup> The statement also addressed other aesthetic issues, noting the incorporation of native landscaping and inclusion of playgrounds and sitting parks as well as the possibility of

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<sup>108</sup> "Expressway Renamed," 6 January 1971, 1A; and "Mills Freeway Design Needs a Close Look," *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 March 1972, 4A. The first stretch of the expressway, a 1-mile segment from Pine Street east to Dennison Street, opened April 22, 1969. Citizens often referred to it in jest as the World's Shortest Freeway. The completed first section from University Avenue east to Dennison Street opened May 1973, lengthening I-630 to two and a half miles.

<sup>109</sup> "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, p. I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>110</sup> "I-630 Won't Affect Historical Sites, Parks, Report Says," *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 February 1972, 3C.

building parts of the freeway below grade or elevated on “single, widely spaced piers to a height which will minimize harmful effects and permit attractive development under the roadways.”<sup>111</sup> It also addressed social ramifications of the project, asserting, “the Freeway would not cause or add to the isolation of neighborhoods, particularly those of minority groups.”<sup>112</sup>

As they continued construction on the freeway, the AHD submitted the draft EIS for review by local, state, and federal agencies in addition to a public review accomplished through three public hearings. Many of the governmental agencies spoke positively of the EIS and the project, though a few suggested minor alterations or considerations to mitigate any potential damages. For example, the Arkansas Department of Pollution Control and Ecology reviewed the statement and found it to be “adequate to protect environmental qualities” but approved the EIS with the understanding that the AHD would implement all proposed environmental mitigation measures such as using native trees in landscaping plans and reworking their methods for acquiring the dirt fill for earthen berms along the route.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “Memorandum of Agreement: Job 6872,” circa April 1978, pp. 3 – 4, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP Interstate 630 Ratified Agreement,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, p. I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Wright, “MacArthur Park,” October 1977, p. 2, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>113</sup> “Historical Sites, Parks,” 13 February 1972, 3C; Jerry Dean, “I-630 Seen With Eye of Beholder: Freeway Signals Either Beginning or End,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 22 July 1973, 1; “MOA: Job 6872,” circa April 1978, pp. 3 – 4, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP Interstate 630 Ratified Agreement,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, p. I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Wright, “MacArthur Park,” October 1977, p. 2, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas. The agencies reviewing the EIS included the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department’s Fort Worth office; U.S. Commerce Department’s office on Environmental Affairs, Pulaski County judge’s office; Arkansas Soil and Water Resources Division; U.S. Health,

The AHD held a public hearing on the design, as required for the EIS review, on March 14, 1972. An *Arkansas Gazette* editorial printed before the hearing discussed the EIS and the proposed design of the freeway, noting, “It is axiomatic... that any urban Freeway will have great impact on the urban environment simply by being there. One test is whether the impact is acceptable and whether its over-all effect will be positive in nature.”<sup>114</sup> The editorial also urged residents to consider “the effects construction will have on the community while there is still time, presumably, to make the project as responsive as possible to a high quality of urban life.”<sup>115</sup> Heeding this warning, residents along the route’s right-of-way, friends of the historic MacArthur Park, and environmentalists brought up concerns about the effects on racial patterns, the increased pollution and damaged aesthetics in nearby city parks, and adequate compensation for houses during the March 14, 1972 public hearing. Around 350 to 400 people attended the four-hour hearing at Rick’s Armory, however, there were only four African-Americans present at the hearing despite the fact that the planned route ran through several predominately African-American areas.<sup>116</sup>

Views among the hearing participants varied from full support, to apprehensive acceptance, to complete disapproval of the project. Local business leaders and city government officials attended the hearing in support of I-630 and spoke to the importance

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Education and Welfare Department’s Dallas regional office; Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism; Arkansas Agriculture Department’s Soil Conservation Service; Arkansas Game and Fish Commission; Pulaski County Metroplan; Little Rock Chamber of Commerce; Central Arkansas Transit; U.S. Geological Survey of the Interior Department; Environmental Protection Agency’s Dallas office; Little Rock District of the Army Engineers; Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Department; Little Rock Unlimited Progress, Inc.; U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity; Arkansas Forestry Commission; Arkansas Historic Preservation Program; and the Interior Department’s Albuquerque regional office.

<sup>114</sup> “Mills Freeway Design,” 6 March 1972, 4A.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.; “Plans for Wilbur Mills Freeway are Discussed,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 15 March 1972; and Jones, “Letter From Mills Probably Settles Main Street Issue,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 March 1972, 14B.

of the freeway's potential. Don R. Venhaus, director of Little Rock's Department of Community Development said that I-630 would "become the most significant traffic transportation artery in this community the day it is opened for traffic from I-430 to I-30."<sup>117</sup> The president-elect of the Arkansas Arts Center Board expressed apprehension about the proximity of the I-630 and I-30 interchange to MacArthur Park and suggested eliminating a frontage road bordering the park in order to reduce noise and air pollution in the area. Homeowners on Marguerite Drive, residents of a new subdivision west of Sears near University Avenue, mostly supported the freeway since the subdivision plans always included the nearby freeway route. Still the residents voiced their concern about adequate compensation for the 40-plus homes taken as part of the expanded six-lane right-of-way. Little Rock citizen Fred Cowan spoke about the issue of increased racial segregation as a result of the interstate. Cowan questioned the placement of an interstate through "the heart" of Little Rock, expressing concern that the route "leading out to the suburbs" would "encourage even more segregation of housing as it has in other cities."<sup>118</sup> While not in attendance at any of the three public hearings held by the AHD, the group that would eventually be the most outspoken in opposition to the I-630 project, Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), issued one of its first statements opposing I-630 the same day as the March 14 public hearing. The statement reflected ACORN's stance that the AHD should not construct I-630 and their concern that the freeway would not benefit "poor or working people."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Transcript of Public Hearing on Job 6872 Interstate 630, 14 March 1972, p. 66, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 23, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68 – 69.

<sup>119</sup> Jones, "Letter From Mills," 15 March 1972, 14B; "Plans for Wilbur Mills Freeway," 15 March 1972; "The Public Hearing on Freeway Design," *Arkansas Gazette*, 20 March 1972, 4A; and "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, Appendix II "Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree," Exhibit A, p. 7, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas. In an April

After completing the necessary public and governmental reviews, the AHD submitted a final EIS to the FHWA which approved and adopted the document on December 8, 1972. ACORN released a response to the FHWA's proposal for I-630 that same month noting its opposition to:

the continuation of the Interstate 630 project since the AHD has never sincerely considered the justified aspirations of residents living in those neighborhoods which are tentatively planned to be partially extinguished. Until such inconsiderations and inconsistencies within the EIS are changed from rhetoric to guaranteed action, ACORN asks that all construction be discontinued immediately.<sup>120</sup>

This response was one of the first of many critiques of the interstate project ACORN produced over the next few years. On May 14, 1973, ACORN continued their attack on the EIS by submitting to the AHD and the FHWA a 24-page critique of the statement titled "A Response to the Environmental Impact Statements Concerning the Completion of Interstate 630." ACORN noted on the cover page that they "believe[d] a more comprehensive and objective document should be prepared by the Arkansas Highway Department that adequately considers the completion of Interstate 630 and answers serious questions of its impact on residential areas and their environs."<sup>121</sup>

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1973 document, ACORN described themselves as "a democratic entity composed of approximately 30 neighborhood organizations and involved individual members trying to solve community problems. Generally, the rationale for ACORN's existence is to centralize efforts of these neighborhood groups which function to improve the daily lives of their members. A majority of ACORN's 4,000 members live in Little Rock; these residents have personal evidence why it will not be in the public's best interest to implement plans for the construction of 'Interstate 630.'" Some of these neighborhood groups included the Mills Action Coalition, MacArthur Park Neighborhood Association, the East End Drive, the Garden Homes Community Organization, and the 9-17 Community Organization.

<sup>120</sup> "An ACORN Response to the Proposal of Interstate 630," Arkansas Institute for Social Justice, Inc., December 1972, cover page, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 26, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>121</sup> "MOA: Job 6872," circa April 1978, p. 4, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder "AHPP Interstate 630 Ratified Agreement," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, p. I-11, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Wright, "MacArthur Park," October 1977, p. 2, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder "AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; and "A Response to the Environmental Impact

ACORN felt that the AHD's EIS simply justified the I-630 project and failed to impartially consider environmental and societal implications of the interstate on the surrounding areas. ACORN director Wade Rathke stated, "The whole Mills Expressway project was irresponsible, unjustified, and dealt a smashing blow to the hopes of neighborhoods in central Little Rock."<sup>122</sup> Some of the organization's specific concerns included the EIS's use of language assuming the inevitability of the project's completion, and the diversion of funds from projects to improve sometimes dangerous and inadequate state routes to construct I-630 which would allow commuters "to arrive at their destination three minutes faster."<sup>123</sup> The group also argued that I-630 would not serve "interstate travelers" but would more closely resemble an "urban commuterway" and therefore should not be part of the Interstate Highway System, and that the AHD failed to seriously consider mass transit alternatives, route alternatives, or possible environmental impacts.<sup>124</sup> Finally, ACORN expressed concern that "the 'Interstate' will...constitute a physical barrier between black and white neighborhoods," and that relocation efforts offered a limited number of housing options for displaced citizens.<sup>125</sup> If the AHD did not guarantee adequate mitigation efforts for these public concerns then ACORN insisted that the "project be suspended and funds withdrawn."<sup>126</sup>

Over a month passed and the AHD had not sent ACORN a reply, though the FHWA administrator J.W. White responded noting "the spirit and intent of the National

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Statements Concerning the Completion of Interstate 630," ACORN, April 1973, cover page, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 26, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>122</sup> "Environmental Statement Self-serving, ACORN Says," *Arkansas Gazette*, 17 June 1973, 6A.

<sup>123</sup> "A Response to the EIS," ACORN, April 1973, p. 4, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 26, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4 – 12; "EPA Didn't Get Impact Statement, ACORN Charges," *Arkansas Gazette*, 24 June 1973, 10A; "Environmental Statement Self-serving," 17 June 1973, 6A; and Dean "I-630 Seen With Eye of Beholder," 22 July 1973, 1.

Environmental Policy Act has been fully met.”<sup>127</sup> Frustrated with the minimal acknowledgement of their concerns, ACORN held a press conference on June 16, 1973, to outline their critique of the EIS. The members also sent letters to the AHD director Henry Gray asking “that [their] questions and demands be answered, documented and justified immediately,” and requested a meeting with AHD officials to discuss their concerns about the EIS.<sup>128</sup> ACORN also demanded a halt to construction on I-630 until the EIS fully addressed “the issues of unforeseen environmental disasters, neighborhood isolation and deterioration, congestion, mounting pollution, discrepancies among the policy-making agencies, and viable alternatives” to the freeway project.<sup>129</sup>

Despite demands to the contrary, construction proceeded as planned and ACORN continued to attack the AHD for its EIS by pointing out procedural errors and inadequacies in the report. For example, even though the AHD noted that the EIS “had already been approved by the necessary authorities at the Washington level,” on June 23, 1973, ACORN discovered that the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Fort Worth office had not received a copy of the EIS for proper review of the freeway project as required.<sup>130</sup> ACORN expressed concern that “this negligence further demonstrates the inadequacies and illegalities” of the EIS and used an “aggressive media strategy” in attempts to “embarrass” federal highway officials.<sup>131</sup> ACORN also surmised that they had “discovered only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the disastrous affects of the Mills [I-

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<sup>127</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 6; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>128</sup> “Environmental Statement Self-serving,” 17 June 1973, 6A.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; Dean “I-630 Seen With Eye of Beholder,” 22 July 1973, 1; and “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, pp. 6 – 7; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>130</sup> “EPA Didn’t Get Impact Statement,” 24 June 1973, 10A.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.; and “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 7, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

630]. Again our concern is that we become fully aware of the destruction that is planned for our neighborhoods.”<sup>132</sup> With this oversight exposed, the AHD agreed to meet with ACORN about the EIS; however, during the July 1973 meeting, AHD officials refused to answer any of ACORN’s questions, stating that either the EIS already addressed those questions or the questions were “inappropriate.”<sup>133</sup> In a statement to reporters after the meeting, AHD assistant to the director Gip L. Robertson, Jr. spoke to the inevitability of the project noting that the route location “cannot at this stage be altered.”<sup>134</sup> ACORN, frustrated with the lack of response from the AHD, began to consider legal action to stop the project.

ACORN felt that they had a strong case against the AHD and their EIS. While researching their prospects, ACORN communicated with several national organizations familiar with protesting interstate construction. Many of these groups, such as the Highway Action Coalition, the Center for Community Change, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Legal Defense Fund of the NAACP, provided ACORN with advice for challenging the AHD and agreed that ACORN had a strong case against the EIS. In response to what it felt was a “grossly inadequate” EIS, ACORN set up the ACORN Neighborhood Legal Defense Fund in August 1973 to raise money for legal action against the AHD as part of the community organization’s “continuing effort to insure minimal disruption to Little Rock neighborhoods.”<sup>135</sup> Carolyn Carr, organizer for the ACORN Mills Action Coalition noted that her group could not wait long to file a

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<sup>132</sup> “EPA Didn’t Get Impact Statement,” 24 June 1973, 10A.

<sup>133</sup> Tish Talbot, “ACORN Group Fails to Get Answers to Questions on Mills Freeway Issue,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 July 1973, 5A.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> “ACORN Seeks Suit to Prevent Work on Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 August 1973, 1B; and “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, pp. 9 – 10, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

lawsuit citing the AHD's upcoming plans on August 29 to open bids for a \$3.6 million drainage pipe for I-630.<sup>136</sup>

ACORN reached out to its members, the QQA, the Arkansas Ecology Center, historical societies, congregations of downtown churches in the path of the freeway, leaders in the African-American community, and small business owners located downtown in order to raise funds for a legal defense. By November 9, 1973, ACORN raised enough funds to file a lawsuit against federal and state highway officials in an effort to place a temporary injunction on I-630 construction. Little Rock attorney Jack Lavey provided his services to the plaintiffs *pro bono*.<sup>137</sup>

In the suit the plaintiffs made three claims against the defendants. The first claim against the defendants charged that the AHD had not filed a satisfactory EIS under the requirements of NEPA. The suit stated that the AHD's draft and final EIS, which were approved by the FHWA, were "not sufficiently detailed to meet the standard of the National Environmental Policy Act, because each impact statement was ambiguous, too vague, too general, and too conclusionary."<sup>138</sup> The plaintiffs' main contentions with the EIS involved the statement's failure "to sufficiently study alternatives to the proposed Mills Freeway and the alternatives of no Mills Freeway at all" along with a lack of data

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 9 – 10; and "ACORN Seeks Suit," 7 August 1973, 1B. According ACORN's essay "ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway" the ACORN Mills Action Coalition was "a group of Little Rock residents who [were] interested in the preservation of central city neighborhoods."

<sup>137</sup> "ACORN Files Suit to Halt Construction on Freeway," *Arkansas Gazette*, 10 November 1973, 13A; "ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway," ACORN, circa 1977, p. 10, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; "ACORN Seeks Suit," 7 August 1973, 1B; and "LR Enters Suit, Supports Mills Freeway," *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 July 1974, 1B. Plaintiffs in the suit included ACORN, Mr. and Mrs. Henry White, Mrs. John A. Vogler, Mrs. V. B. Baty, Herman Conrad and Marguerite Conrad, and Mrs. Hulda Sanders (the majority of the plaintiffs were residents or landowners living or owning property near or within the proposed route of I-630). Defendants in the suit included Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar; Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Regional Administrator J. W. White; Department of Transportation (DOT) Division Engineer for Arkansas Charles F. McMillen; Commissioners of the AHC: Maurice Smith, Lawrence Blackwell, J. C. Patterson, George Kell, and James A. Branyan; and AHD Director Henry Gray.

<sup>138</sup> "ACORN Files Suit," 10 November 1973, 13A.

on the cost and benefits of alternative routes.<sup>139</sup> The plaintiffs' second claim in the suit dealt with the issue of nearby public park lands. A special provision of the DOT Act of 1966 states that "FHWA and other DOT agencies cannot approve the use of land from publicly owned parks [and] recreational areas...unless" the Secretary of Transportation ruled that "there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of land" and everything had been done to minimize damage to the park.<sup>140</sup> The plaintiffs felt that the proximity of the proposed route of I-630 to two public parks, MacArthur Park and Kanis Park, required the Secretary of Transportation to review and rule on the proposed route. The third claim by the plaintiffs addressed their view that the AHD was inadequately handling relocation efforts under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisitions Act of 1970, a law that provides certain protections for individuals and entities impacted by federally funded projects.<sup>141</sup>

With the lawsuit in place, divisions among community members and organizations became clearer as those against the interstate aligned behind ACORN and those in support of the project intervened in the lawsuit on behalf of the state and federal governments. In July 1974 the City of Little Rock joined the lawsuit in support of the defendants. The city had already spent over \$3 million on the completed section of the interstate from Rice Street to University Avenue and did not want to see this section

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, Appendix II "Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree," Exhibit A, pp. 2, 9, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and U.S. Department of Transportation (UDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Environmental Review Toolkit, Section 4(f), Program Overview, <http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/4f/index.asp> (accessed 26 August 2012).

<sup>141</sup> "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, Appendix II "Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree," Exhibit A, p. 2, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and UDOT, FHWA, Realty, The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (Uniform Act), <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/ua/index.htm> (accessed 22 September 2012).

“rendered virtually useless” through an early termination of the project.<sup>142</sup> The city expressed concern about high traffic volumes and congestion that they felt would result without the presence of a complete interstate and noted the presence of extensive development and rezoning along the route completed in anticipation of the interstate. The Little Rock School District (LRSD) and the Baptist Medical Center also intervened in the lawsuit on the state and federal governments’ behalf. The AHD agreed to build a new elementary school for the LRSD to replace the aging Parham Elementary School located in the right-of-way of the interchange between I-630 and I-30. The LRSD did not have the funds to replace or renovate the original building so they looked forward to AHD-financing of a new elementary school for the district. The Baptist Medical Center intervened in the lawsuit because they selected the location for their newly constructed medical facility along the western end of the planned I-630 route with the idea that the complete I-630 would provide easy access to their medical facilities. With the court battle looming, the I-630 project appeared to have many supporters.<sup>143</sup>

The case went to trial September 16, 1974, under federal Judge J. Smith Henley. Attorney John Lavey represented ACORN while Assistant U.S. Attorney O. H. “Bud” Storey III defended the government in the lawsuit. ACORN brought in a number of witnesses to testify on the inadequacy of the EIS including Dr. James B. Sullivan, an air-

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<sup>142</sup> “LR Enters Suit, Supports Mills Freeway,” 2 July 1974, 1B.

<sup>143</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, pp. 10 – 12, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; “LR Enters Suit, Supports Mills Freeway,” 2 July 1974, 1B; Mike Trimble and Leslie Mitchell, “No Viable Alternative to Freeway, Highway Department Official Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 24 September 1974, 4A; Mitchell, “Effect of Freeway On Air Pollution Seen as Minimal,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 21 September 1974, 3A; and “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, pp. 1, 6, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas. The Little Rock School District website notes that Parham Elementary School, built in 1908, was closed and demolished after the 1978-79 school year. Rockefeller Elementary School, built just southwest of the right-of-way for the I-630 and I-30 interchange, replaced Parham Elementary School. The AHD funded a majority of the construction for Rockefeller Elementary School. The school opened for the 1979-80 school year.

quality expert from Washington, D.C. who testified that the AHD's EIS was "technically...terrible" and included claims about air pollution that were "unsubstantiated by air quality tests."<sup>144</sup> Dr. Malcolm Getz, a Vanderbilt University economics professor, also testified on behalf of ACORN noting the lack of cost-benefit analyses and alternatives within the EIS. Dr. Getz explained, "It is impossible to evaluate the environmental impact without understanding the costs and benefits to be derived from the investment."<sup>145</sup> The EIS, he argued, needed to examine whether or not a quicker commute downtown was worth depressing the land values within one-quarter mile along the route. A consultant on transportation planning and policy based in Berkeley, California, Robert A. Burco, testified that the AHD did not consider alternatives and did not take into account any public objections within the EIS. During Burco's testimony he emphasized that "there are alternatives. They simply have not been addressed" or "seriously considered."<sup>146</sup>

Testifying on behalf of the defense, Jason Rouby, the director of Metroplan, stressed that downtown Little Rock would "deteriorate further" without the construction of I-630 as businesses would move toward the suburbs and western Little Rock.<sup>147</sup> Rouby viewed I-630 as a way to provide easier access to downtown businesses and did not see the interstate as a "substantial barrier" to neighborhoods.<sup>148</sup> Brian H. Davis, AHD chief of the environmental division also testified in support of the existing plans for I-630 noting

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<sup>144</sup> "Impact Statement on Expressway Called 'Terrible,'" *Arkansas Gazette*, 17 September 1974.

<sup>145</sup> "Economist Says Mills Freeway Study Doesn't Tell Environmental Impact," *Arkansas Gazette*, 18 September 1974, 12A.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*; "Freeway Land Figures in Suit," *Arkansas Democrat*, 18 September 1974, 23A; and "AHD Accused of Discounting Road Options," *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 September 1974, 16A.

<sup>147</sup> "Overload Seen on the Freeway From First Day," *Arkansas Gazette*, 20 September 1974. Metroplan, as defined in an April 1972 site visit report submitted to the Economic Development Administration, is "the official authority legally constituted to provide planning services for urban renewal projects."

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

that the environmental impact would be minimal, as many features of the plan such as earthen berms to minimize noise and landscaping would lessen any environmental damage. Two AHD ecologists, Steve Wilson and Robert E. Tyler, claimed that I-630 would not seriously increase air pollution in the area. Tyler stated that the interstate would actually reduce vehicle emissions because there would be less starting and stopping on the interstate versus regular city driving. The defense called Carl C. McChesney, head of the advanced planning section in the AHD planning and research division, to rebut the testimony of ACORN's witness Robert A. Burco who testified earlier in the trial that the EIS should examine other alternatives to the planned route for I-630. McChesney argued that there were no other practical alternatives for the route. The City of Little Rock, the LRSD, and the Baptist Medical Center all testified in support of the defense with each citing anticipated benefits from the project's completion.<sup>149</sup>

The AHD continued construction on the freeway throughout the September 1974 trial and during the intervening time between the trial's conclusion and when Judge Henley issued his ruling on the case. Ten months after the court proceedings, on July 28, 1975, Judge Henley ruled that the EIS was "inadequate" and did not sufficiently consider design alternatives.<sup>150</sup> It was then that the AHD finally had to suspend some of their construction on I-630. While Judge Henley ordered that all construction in the eastern section, from Dennison Street east to I-30, cease, he permitted the AHD to continue to acquire right-of-way properties in this section with the caveat that they could only purchase properties through voluntary sales and not through condemnation. Judge Henley

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.; Mitchell, "Effect of Freeway on Air Pollution Seen as Minimal," 21 September 1974, 3A; and Trimble and Mitchell, "No Viable Alternative to Freeway," 24 September 1974, 4A.

<sup>150</sup> "I-630 EIS," AHD, 1977, Appendix II "Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree," Exhibit A, p. 19, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

allowed construction to continue along the route from University Avenue west to I-430 citing “the need for rapid access to the new [Baptist] Medical Center” and the minimal impact to properties along the western half of the freeway since most real estate development and zoning occurred after the AHD determined the route.<sup>151</sup> Judge Henley noted that construction in the section west of University Avenue would “have substantially less immediate adverse impacts on individuals, neighborhoods, and business establishments than may be anticipated with respect to the eastern half of the project.”<sup>152</sup>

In addition to his rulings about where to halt and allow construction, Judge Henley provided an explanation for the AHD’s creation of an inadequate EIS. He noted the newness of the EIS requirement, the constantly changing guidelines for EIS content, and the lack of experience AHD officials possessed in completing statements. The judge also pointed out the fact that the AHD was not preparing the statement “on a clean slate,” meaning the project was already in the works when the federal government agreed to fund the project thereby making the whole endeavor subject to the requirements of an EIS.<sup>153</sup> Judge Henley expressed hope that the AHD officials had had time to learn more about completing a thorough EIS and could apply that knowledge to another attempt. Robert E. Tyler, an AHD ecologist, seconded Judge Henley’s reasons for the inadequate EIS noting that this was the first large highway project for which the AHD created an EIS. Tyler also noted that the AHD discussed and rejected several route alternatives during the preparations of the first EIS; however, they did not incorporate these

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<sup>151</sup> Leslie Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 July 1975, 1A; and “Interstate 630 Environmental Impact Statement: Administrative Action Draft,” Arkansas State Highway Department, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 26, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>152</sup> Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 July 1975, 1A; and “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 7, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>153</sup> “Ibid., p. 20.

alternatives into the original statement. Judge Henley gave advice to both parties as they moved forward with the creation and review of a new EIS. To the defendants he suggested that they be prepared “to listen sympathetically to reasonable suggestions and criticisms from citizens and citizen and business groups.”<sup>154</sup> And to the plaintiffs, he recommended that they “would do well to attend the hearings and express their views and make their suggestions, and not sit idly by and wait until a new final impact statement is prepared and then attack it in court.”<sup>155</sup> Concerning the other two claims made by the plaintiffs regarding residential and commercial relocation efforts and route proximity to public park land, Judge Henley ruled that the AHD satisfied the requirements of the laws and did not need to take any further action in response to these complaints.<sup>156</sup>

ACORN viewed Judge Henley’s decision as a success because it required the AHD to hold new public hearings to review a newly-created EIS. The director of ACORN, Wade Rathke, explained that these public hearings offered the opportunity to “open up very serious consideration at every step of the process where there may be fights engaged... to make this thing right.”<sup>157</sup> ACORN also viewed the outcome of the trial “as a lesson to the Arkansas Highway Department that people will no longer stand by and let the AHD ramrod highways through their neighborhoods.”<sup>158</sup> However, Henry Gray, director of the AHD, did not view the ruling as a hindrance to the overall project because Judge Henley allowed the AHD to continue construction on the western section

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<sup>154</sup> Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” 29 July 1975, 1A; and “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 23, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>155</sup> “Year’s Delay is Predicted on Mills Project,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 September 1975, 4A; Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” 29 July 1975, 1A; and “I-630 EIS,” AHD, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 23, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, Exhibit B, pp. 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” 29 July 1975, 1A.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

and purchase right-of-way properties on the eastern section while they prepared a new EIS for review.<sup>159</sup>

Despite the fact that both sides viewed Judge Henley's decision in a positive light, both ACORN and the AHD appealed the ruling. ACORN submitted an appeal to the United States Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals to have all work on the project halted. The AHD also appealed the ruling in an attempt to overturn the injunction on the interstate project. In February 1976 the Eighth Circuit Court judges unanimously supported Judge Henley's decision based on a "well-reasoned opinion...amply supported by the record."<sup>160</sup> With Judge Henley's decision upheld, the AHD moved forward with construction on the western section, acquiring right-of-way on the eastern section through voluntary means only, and redoing the EIS for the entire route.<sup>161</sup>

Almost two years after Judge Henley's ruling, the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) issued their first draft of the second EIS in April 1977. In the new EIS, the AHTD greatly expanded the section on possible alternatives to the planned I-630 construction, from ten paragraphs to 29 pages. These proposals fell into three categories: alternative travel modes, alternative street projects, and alternative designs for the existing freeway project. Among the alternatives considered, the AHTD examined the possibility of moving the eastern section of the route north or south of the existing design, however, they determined that "because of the partially completed status of the project...the route already selected would result in the fewest adverse effects."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> United Press International (UPI), "Ruling Allowing Section of Mills Freeway Upheld," *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 February 1976; and Al May, "Restraint on Freeway is Upheld," *Arkansas Democrat*, 14 February 1976.

<sup>161</sup> UPI, "Ruling Allowing Section of Mills Freeway Upheld," 14 February 1976; and May, "Restraint on Freeway is Upheld," 14 February 1976.

<sup>162</sup> "State Issues New Statement on Freeway," *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 April 1977.

The AHTD also considered placing the section of the route running alongside MacArthur Park in a tunnel due to the historical significance of the area and surrounding buildings; however, they determined this option to be “economically unfeasible.”<sup>163</sup> The revised EIS came to the same conclusion as the first EIS – that the route chosen was the best option for an east-west freeway in Little Rock.<sup>164</sup>

Over the next year, the EIS went through several public hearings and a significant amount of scrutiny. The state historic preservation officer (SHPO) Anne Bartley (and step-daughter of former Arkansas governor Winthrop Rockefeller) conducted a public hearing on August 29, 1977, for residents of the MacArthur Park area in order to solicit their ideas about how to mitigate the impact of I-630. The hearing included consultant Russell Wright, an architectural historian from Annapolis, Maryland, and an expert in dealing with historic preservation efforts during highway construction. During the hearing Wright spoke to the inevitability of the interstate running through their neighborhood and told the audience they should “recognize that [I-630] is a 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction in a neighborhood that has been changing for 150 years and deal with it that way.”<sup>165</sup> He recommended working with the AHTD to modify design elements in order to make I-630 “more palatable.”<sup>166</sup> Some of his suggestions for the historic area included constructing 10-foot high earthen berms along both sides of the route to minimize noise and sight barriers and reducing the number of exits in the area. Bartley also hired Wright

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<sup>163</sup> James Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 30 August 1977.

<sup>164</sup> “State Issues New Statement on Freeway,” 27 April 1977; and Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” 30 August 1977. The Arkansas Highway Department (AHD) changed its name to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) in 1977.

<sup>165</sup> “Hearing on Freeway Set Monday,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 26 August 1977; and Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” 30 August 1977.

<sup>166</sup> Carol Matlack, “Make Highway ‘More Palatable’ Consultant Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 August 1977, 2A.

to suggest what mitigation measures she should request the AHTD to include in the project design.<sup>167</sup>

The recent designation of the MacArthur Park neighborhood as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places had important implications for the construction of I-630. The designation meant that the federal government would withhold funds for the project until the SHPO, Anne Bartley, signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the AHTD to authorize construction, and subsequently submitted it to the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) for approval. MacArthur Park Historic District residents asked if Bartley could stop the construction by refusing to sign the agreement with the AHTD, but Bartley indicated that not signing the MOA would only serve as a method to postpone the construction until, eventually, the federal government would override her refusal to sign the MOA and construction would proceed. Bartley suggested the best course of action was to work with the AHTD to create a MOA that provided the best mitigation measures to reduce the impact of I-630 through the historic district.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> “Hearing on Freeway Set Monday,” 26 August 1977; and Matlack, “Make Highway ‘More Palatable,’” 30 August 1977, 2A.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.; Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” 30 August 1977; and Letter from Henry Gray to Kay C. Powers, 26 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas. According to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) website the group “promotes the preservation, enhancement, and sustainable use of our nation’s diverse historic resources, and advises the President and the Congress on national historic preservation policy.” The MacArthur Park Historic District was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 8, 1976. According to the National Register nomination “the MacArthur Park Historic District is the oldest and most historic, intact, residential neighborhood in Arkansas. Composed of picturesque and often flamboyant antebellum and Victorian homes set along tree-shaded streets, the district generates an atmospheric feeling for historic time and place. Furthermore, much of Little Rock’s development between 1838 and 1900 can actually be seen in the old structures which continue to stand in the neighborhood. The aesthetic ideals and social patterns of 19<sup>th</sup> century Little Rock came vividly to life in the MacArthur Park Historic District where modern intrusions, incompatible in scale and design with the older buildings have not yet marred the visual continuity of the built and natural landscape.” The 1976 boundaries of the district stretched from Capitol Street in the north to 15<sup>th</sup> Street in the south. The eastern boundary ran along the side of MacArthur Park bordering with I-30 and the western edge of the boundary generally stretched

Bartley signed the MOA with the AHTD in late January 1978 in what many opposition groups and apprehensive individuals thought was a premature move. The board of the Quapaw Quarter Association (QQA), a non-profit historic preservation organization, expressed to Bartley their disappointment that they “were not informed as to the proposed content of the agreement and consulted before it was signed.”<sup>169</sup> The QQA felt there had been an “understanding...that [they] would have the opportunity to comment on any proposed agreements before they were finalized.”<sup>170</sup> Because they were unable to comment on the mitigation measures for the MOA, the QQA Board sent a letter in early March 1978 to the AHTD expressing their “disappoint[ment] that the oral assurances made to the [QQA] were not embodied in the written Memorandum of Agreement.”<sup>171</sup> The QQA also made suggestions for mitigation measures that they felt the AHTD should incorporate into a revised MOA including a guarantee that the AHTD construct visual and noise barriers between the interstate and Mount Holly Cemetery as well as MacArthur Park. Robert Tyler and Bernie McClerkin of the Environmental Division at the AHTD called Joan Baldrige, Executive Director of the QQA, on March 17 regarding the QQA’s letter. Baldrige later recounted that during the phone call Tyler and McClerkin explained that the AHTD had “assumed that Bartley represented all preservation concerns” and “they in no way intended to back down on any verbal

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between Main Street and Scott Street. I-630 cut through the middle of the southern third of the historic district between 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> streets as well as the southern end of MacArthur Park.

<sup>169</sup> Letter from the QQA Board to Anne Bartley, 2 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>170</sup> “Hearing to Get More Ideas About Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 May 1978; and Letter from the QQA Board to Anne Bartley, 2 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas. In an official document, the QQA defined themselves as “a non-profit civic and educational organization with more than 1,100 members involved in historic preservation and urban conservation within the Quapaw Quarter Area of Little Rock. This area surrounds and includes the central business district. The boundaries are the state capitol, the airport, Fourche Creek and the Arkansas River.”

<sup>171</sup> Letter from the QQA Board to Henry Gray, 3 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

commitments made to QQA even though the Memorandum of Agreement did not reflect them.”<sup>172</sup> Bryan H. Davis, the chief of the AHTD Environmental Division followed up with a letter addressing some of the QQA’s concerns with the MOA and emphasized the AHTD’s desire to uphold a strong relationship and maintain open communication with the association.<sup>173</sup>

Due to complaints about the first MOA, the ACHP did not sign the agreement and instead decided to hold a public hearing on May 8, 1978, to discuss mitigation measures for I-630 within the MacArthur Park Historic District. In preparation for this meeting, the QQA board held a hearing for its organization’s members on May 3 to address their concerns about the MOA and to ask questions about the QQA’s formal stance on the I-630 project. During the QQA hearing, members Jim Rule and John Matthews pushed the QQA board to consider a resolution to oppose the construction of I-630 “in every legal manner” through “the Quapaw Quarter in general and the McArthur [*sic*] Park Historic District in particular.”<sup>174</sup> The following evening, the QQA board held their regular monthly meeting in which they discussed the resolution presented by Rule and Matthews, the board’s concerns with the current MOA, and what mitigation measures they would like to have included in the MOA. The board unanimously voted to oppose the current MOA but they did not vote on Rule and Matthews’ resolution. Instead, after much deliberation, they went “on record continuing to support the completion of I-630 only if a

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<sup>172</sup> Memo from Joan Baldrige to QQA Board, 7 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>173</sup> Memo from Joan Baldrige to Interstate 630 File, 17 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Letter from the QQA Board to Henry Gray, 3 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Letter from Bryan H. Davis to Joan Baldrige, 20 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>174</sup> Proposed Resolution, 3 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

new Memorandum of Agreement is executed with as definite, complete and enforceable a mitigation package as possible clearly outlining the responsibilities of the various agencies.”<sup>175</sup> In response to the QQA board’s decision to support the I-630 project, Rule and Matthews threatened to resign from the QQA, and Matthews stated that they would take their efforts to ACORN. The QQA board determined that it was in their best interest to work with the AHTD to create a MOA that provided the best mitigation measures to minimize I-630’s impact.<sup>176</sup>

Michael H. Bureman of the ACHP conducted the council’s meeting on May 8. Despite State Historic Preservation Officer Bartley’s previous claim that she could not halt the interstate project by refusing to sign the MOA, the director of the AHC Henry Gray expressed concern in a letter to QQA President Kay C. Powers that “an adverse decision by the [ACHP regarding the MOA] could result in a Federal determination not to construct I-630.”<sup>177</sup> Gray emphasized to Powers the importance of moving the project forward without more costly delays and therefore urged her to express her views about a revised MOA to the ACHP during the hearing. Bureman explained that the ACHP’s “ultimate power” regarding federal approval of the project rested in the hands of its executive director, who could recommend that the DOT withdraw the project from the

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<sup>175</sup> “Statement to Advisory Council on Historic Preservation About the Memorandum of Agreement Concerning the Completion of I-630,” 8 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>176</sup> QQA Notice, 26 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Handwritten QQA Board Meeting Notes, 4 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; “Quapaw Board Votes to Back Freeway,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 5 May 1978; Spillman, “Agreement on Freeway Opposed,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 5 May 1978; and “Hearing Set to Discuss Wilbur Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 8 May 1978, 6A.

<sup>177</sup> Letter from Henry Gray to Kay C. Powers, 26 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

Interstate Highway System.<sup>178</sup> However, the DOT could simply disregard the ACHP's recommendation and move forward with the project.<sup>179</sup>

The hearing drew about 200 participants on all sides of the issue. Mayor Don Mehlburger, along with representatives of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Little Rock UP, the Metrocentre Improvement District, and the Little Rock Housing Authority attended in support of completing the interstate. Those that attended in support of the project but with a new MOA included Little Rock's state Representative Robert Johnston, the QQA president Kay C. Powers, and Little Rock School Board member Herb Rule. Some residents of the MacArthur Park Historic District spoke out against the project entirely. Those in favor of the project spoke in terms of "revitalization of the inner city" and viewed the interstate as "a necessary and desirable element of transportation," while those opposed to the project foresaw a "gradual decay of the neighborhood south of the completed freeway" and expressed concerns about racial divisions along the route.<sup>180</sup> Jim Rule presented a petition signed by several MacArthur Park residents that requested that the ACHP "refrain from approving the project" because "the construction of the Freeway will split the neighborhood in two and leave it vulnerable to speculation, strip development, and re-segregation."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Spillman, "200 Attend Discussion on Freeway Completion," 9 May 1978, 4A.

<sup>179</sup> Letter from C. F. McMillen to Kay C. Powers, 19 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Spillman, "200 Attend Discussion on Freeway Completion," 9 May 1978, 4A.; Letter from Henry Gray to Kay C. Powers, 26 April 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Garry Hoffmann, "Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway," *Arkansas Democrat*, 9 May 1978, 10A.

<sup>180</sup> Spillman, "200 Attend Discussion on Freeway Completion," 9 May 1978, 4A; and Hoffmann, "Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway," 9 May 1978, 10A.

<sup>181</sup> Petition signed by MacArthur Park residents opposing the construction of I-630, 4 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; Spillman, "200 Attend Discussion on Freeway Completion," 9 May 1978, 4A; and Hoffmann, "Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway," 9 May 1978, 10A. Little Rock Unlimited Progress (UP) was a group of civic organizers tasked with promoting downtown, which, in 1985, reformed as the Little Rock Downtown

The result of the hearing was a new MOA which provided detailed mitigation measures. It addressed the depth of the below-grade roadway; the width of the buffer zones; the construction methods and work schedule; specific landscaping details; the types of lighting, signs, fences, and other architectural details in the interstate and right-of-way area; mitigation measures for specific historic sites; restrictions on in-fill structures; the elimination of frontage roads in certain areas; and the expectations for the maintenance and supervision of the area and project. The ACHP approved the new MOA and in June 1978 Bartley signed it and the federal government released the federal funds necessary to complete the freeway. However, construction still could not move forward until the AHTD submitted a new EIS for approval.<sup>182</sup>

The AHTD submitted a new EIS on July 14, 1978, and requested to have the injunction on construction removed. ACORN asserted that the new EIS was also inadequate calling parts of it “absurd,” “ridiculous,” and “a sham” with “grossly inflated” data.<sup>183</sup> Some of ACORN’s main issues with the second EIS included concerns that the report did not consider a “no-build alternative,” did not examine the alternatives of building four lanes as opposed to six lanes, did not “reasonably and objectively analyze and evaluate the mass transit alternative,” and did not consider the freeway’s socio-economic impact on minorities.<sup>184</sup>

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Partnership. The Metrocentre Improvement District is a state legislated special improvement district in downtown Little Rock. The Little Rock Housing Authority, as defined in an April 1972 site visit report submitted to the Economic Development Administration, is “the legally constituted authority to process and administer urban renewal projects.” The author is unaware of any familial relationship between Jim Rule and the previously mentioned Herb Rule.

<sup>182</sup> “Culture Office Agrees to I-630,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 27 June 1978; and “Moving on the Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 June 1978.

<sup>183</sup> “Hearing Scheduled in Freeway Case,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 September 1978.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

Judge G. Thomas Eisele presided over the hearing on the new EIS which took place the week of October 30, 1978. ACORN presented two witnesses during the hearing. The first witness was Dr. Fred Johnson, an associate professor of economics at the University of Alabama, who felt that the new EIS did not “analyze whether the cost justif[ied] the benefits of the proposed route or alternatives” as required by the federal highway planning manuals.<sup>185</sup> The second witness for ACORN, Jack Smyth, a consulting engineer and urban planner from Aston, Pennsylvania, criticized the new EIS on several points. He accused the AHTD of using “grossly overblown” projected traffic volumes on which to base the need for completion of the project, creating a road design with too many hazards such as the placement of numerous ramps within a short distance, and not adequately exploring the costs of “meaningful alternatives.”<sup>186</sup> Witnesses for the defendants argued in support of the new EIS and the proposed design by refuting many of Smyth’s arguments against the freeway route and EIS data. Brooks Nichols, an AHTD engineer, challenged Smyth’s suggestion to reduce the number of interchanges explaining that they were necessary due to the high volume of traffic downtown. Another defense witness, Garver & Garver, Inc. president Sanford M. Wilbourn, spoke to the inevitability of the planned freeway design noting, “You’ve already cut a swath through Little Rock and relocated 90 per cent [of the occupants in the right-of-way].”<sup>187</sup> Starting a completely new route for the remaining section of the freeway instead of using the area already

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<sup>185</sup> Brenda Tirey, “Cost-Benefit Analyses for Freeway Lacking, Acorn Witness Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 31 October 1978.

<sup>186</sup> Tirey, “Engineer Criticizes Traffic Estimates in Freeway Report,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 November 1978; and idem, “Too Many Red Flags in Plan for Freeway, Engineer Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 2 November 1978.

<sup>187</sup> Tirey, “‘Ridiculous’ to Change Freeway Location, Right of Way Already Acquired, Consultant States,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 November 1978, 10A.

cleared, he argued, was “ridiculous” and would cause even more environmental damage.<sup>188</sup>

The five-day hearing ended on October 3, 1978, and Judge Eisele stated that he would make a decision on the new EIS “as soon as possible.”<sup>189</sup> About six months later, on April 27, 1979, Judge Eisele announced the dismissal of the lawsuit ruling that the new EIS “[met] all of the requirements” of federal laws and regulations.<sup>190</sup> His 30-page opinion, released on May 7, 1979, called the data used by the AHTD “sufficiently accurate” and insisted, “no such error [had] been shown to undermine the methodology used or the essential reliability of the data.”<sup>191</sup> Judge Eisele also criticized ACORN for refusing to participate in the creation of a new EIS and bestowed little credibility upon ACORN’s expert witness, Jack Smyth, whose analysis provided the main support for ACORN’s central arguments in the case. Judge Eisele noted, “The court simply does not credit Mr. Smyth’s analysis... It was apparent that Mr. Smyth had been called in very late to examine the statements... Understandably, he made many factual mistakes and assumptions.”<sup>192</sup> The I-630 project moved forward after Judge Eisele’s ruling removed the last major hindrance to the construction of I-630. The AHTD prepared to quickly

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<sup>188</sup> “Hearing Scheduled in Freeway Case,” 6 September 1978; “Second Court Fight Over Mills Freeway to Begin Monday,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 29 October 1978, 12A; Dawson, “I-630 Route, Design Defended,” 3 November 1978; Tirey, “Decision Promised ‘Soon’ in Hearing on Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 4 November 1978, 10A; and idem, “‘Ridiculous’ to Change Freeway Location,” 3 November 1978, 10A.

<sup>189</sup> Tirey, “Decision Promised ‘Soon,’” 4 November 1978, 10A.

<sup>190</sup> John McAnulty, “Freeway Lawsuit Will be Dismissed,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 28 April 1979; and Carol Griffie, “Freeway Work Through LR to be Resumed,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 April 1979, 1A.

<sup>191</sup> Griffie, “Facts, Figures on Mills Freeway Completion are Ruled ‘Sufficiently Accurate,’” *Arkansas Gazette*, 8 May 1979, 4A.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

open bids on the eastern section of the project, and a completed I-630 opened on September 30, 1985, more than 25 years after the project began.<sup>193</sup>

Like many freeway opposition groups across the country in the 1970s, ACORN fought the construction of an urban freeway by using legal action and grassroots organization. Although they were not successful in their efforts to fully terminate the project, ACORN did have an impact on how the AHTD interacted with the public when designing and building interstates and how the AHTD ultimately constructed I-630. The following chapter will explore in what ways the effort to stop the freeway in Little Rock failed and in what ways it succeeded.

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<sup>193</sup> McAnulty, "Freeway Lawsuit Will be Dismissed," 28 April 1979; Griffie, "Freeway Work Through LR to be Resumed," 28 April 1979, 1A; Smith, "Freeway Takes a Winding Road to Completion," 29 September 1985, 1A; and John Brummett, "Final Dedication Held as all of I-630 Opens; Occasion Brings Smiles," *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 October 1985.

### **CHAPTER 3: Too Little Too Late: Why Little Rock's Freeway Resistance Movement did not Stop Interstate 630**

The construction of Interstate 630 (I-630), which began with right-of-way acquisition starting in 1958 and concluded with the completion of the interstate in 1985, spanned two distinct periods of freeway resistance. During the 1950s and early 1960s, freeway planners built roads with limited opposition and many citizens welcomed the routes through their cities as a sign of progress. As a result of this mindset, highway departments completed many freeway projects that began during this time with minimal resistance from the community. This was true in Little Rock, where the main difficulty during those early years of freeway route planning and construction involved funding to carry out the project.

As the 1970s approached, many citizens began to feel the impact of these imposing roads and questioned the need for such destruction to the fabric of their cities and neighborhoods. At the same time, the federal government enacted laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which gave freeway opposition groups legal ground to fight urban interstate projects. In the early 1970s, the freeway resistance movement in Little Rock began to coalesce and gain legitimacy and the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) realized for the first time that funding issues were not the only obstacle for the I-630 project. The significant influence of this movement is evidenced by the fact that an interstate less than eight miles in length took more than 25 years to complete.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30 (July 2004): 696-7, 700; Cliff Ellis, "Interstate Highways, Regional Planning and the Reshaping of Metropolitan America," *Planning, Practice & Research* 16 (2001): 261; and Tom Lewis, *Divided*

As outlined by Raymond Mohl in the article “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” successful freeway resistance movements often shared five commonalities: 1) sustained citizen movements characterized by “persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class, and interracial alliances”; 2) support from powerful and influential city leaders such as local politicians and journalists; 3) “strong and historic planning traditions”; and 4) “legal action over highway routing.”<sup>195</sup> Mohl defined a successful freeway revolt as one that possessed all the commonalities listed above and resulted in the fifth commonality: a “final shutdown decision from the courts, high-ranking highway officials, or the state governor.”<sup>196</sup> This chapter will use Mohl’s commonalities as an outline to discuss why the Little Rock freeway resistance movement failed in stopping the road.

Clearly, the opponents of I-630’s construction did not succeed in stopping the project or even diverting the project around some of the historically significant areas. This result was apparent in Representative Wilbur D. Mills remarks at the final I-630 dedication ceremony: “Little Rock benefits from an almost-unique situation...Most urban freeway projects have been bypasses, or loops that encircle a downtown area” with Mills stating “Crosstown interstates have not been prevalent.”<sup>197</sup> An examination of the Little Rock movement within the context of Mohl’s five commonalities demonstrates where the resistance effort was lacking and examines the movement’s shortcomings when working to prevent I-630 from becoming a reality. In addition to the failures of the anti-freeway

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*Highways – Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997), 241. Recognizing that the Arkansas Highway Department (AHD) changed its name to the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) in 1977, for the purposes of this chapter all references to the AHD and AHTD will be referred to as the AHTD.

<sup>195</sup> Mohl, 676.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> John Brummett, “Final Dedication Held as all of I-630 Opens,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 October 1985.

movement, this analysis highlights their successes, including efforts to mitigate the final impact of the project. These efforts are important because they would shape the future of freeway planning and construction in the state.

Mohl's first commonality of a successful freeway resistance movement is evidence of sustained citizen movements characterized by "persistent neighborhood activism, committed local leaders, and extensive cross-city, cross-class, and interracial alliances."<sup>198</sup> The most prominent and outspoken organization fighting the I-630 project was Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a community organization founded by Wade Rathke and Gary Delgado in 1970. ACORN served as the catalyst for the Little Rock movement's grassroots organization and neighborhood activism and largely led the fight to stop I-630. Their involvement contributed to the delays in construction experienced during the 1970s.<sup>199</sup>

ACORN worked to publicize the adverse impacts they felt the interstate construction would cause, stating that the main goal of their movement "was to clearly establish to public officials what citizens really thought about the project."<sup>200</sup> Tactics included creating a position paper on the project, reaching out to the media and the AHTD, organizing neighborhood groups, and attacking the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) through legal avenues. ACORN's self-described "tenacity" proved beneficial as the organization's attempts to explain their position and question the project were not always met by a receptive audience.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Mohl, 676.

<sup>199</sup> Richard Drake, "Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=4797> (accessed 14 March 2013).

<sup>200</sup> "ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway," ACORN, circa 1977, p. 3; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

ACORN's diligence was exemplified by a July 1973 meeting with the AHTD in which they thought they would receive answers to their issues with the project. The highway department refused to answer any of ACORN's questions about the EIS or acknowledge the group's concerns by calling them "inappropriate."<sup>202</sup> ACORN described the AHTD's attitude during the meeting as "preposterous" and decided to take their own "preposterous action" in efforts to keep the AHTD's behavior in the public spotlight.<sup>203</sup> Two weeks after the meeting with ACORN, the AHTD opened bids for a drainage pipe and ACORN submitted "a proposal of \$00000.00 for constructing a 10-foot inside diameter pipe."<sup>204</sup> In their bid ACORN explained, "This proposal includes the guarantee of not isolating neighborhoods... not increas[ing] traffic congestion and environmental pollution... preserv[ing] the pleasant residential character of our neighborhoods... and will be the vital force behind keeping the heart of Little Rock alive."<sup>205</sup> Needless to say, the AHTD did not accept their bid.

Continuing their efforts to highlight issues with the interstate project, ACORN followed the AHTD into the affected neighborhoods. In 1974 the AHTD set up a mobile office in the neighborhoods in the route's vicinity in order to gather citizens' opinions on the project and listen to their concerns. ACORN saw the AHTD's mobile office as an effort to "minimize future citizen opposition" against the department and the I-630 project noting that while there were AHTD employees present to listen to the residents "their concerns [went] no further than the van."<sup>206</sup> The organization countered the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 8; Tish Talbot, "ACORN Group Fails to Get Answers to Questions on Mills Freeway Issue," *Arkansas Gazette*, 14 July 1973, 5A.

<sup>203</sup> "ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway," ACORN, circa 1977, p. 8, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

AHTD's mobile office by placing an "ACORN Counter Van" nearby in order to share with residents "how to organize to protect their lives from overly ambitious highway planners."<sup>207</sup>

Many smaller organizations emerged from ACORN's membership to fight aspects of the proposed freeway while maintaining an affiliation with the parent organization. The Mills Freeway Neighborhood Committee challenged the Little Rock Planning Commission's zoning and land-use near the route. A representative of the committee, Paul Kelly, brought to the attention of city leaders and planners the issuance of city permits to the Little Rock Sign and Emblem Company to erect two billboards 65-feet in height along the route between Jones and Thayer streets. Concerned about the "placement of these unsightly structures," Kelly urged the city to reconsider zoning along the route to prevent more billboards and noted that the Mills Freeway Neighborhood Committee was "extremely disturbed about this proposal to erect objects that will clearly disrupt the residential character of the area."<sup>208</sup>

Another group associated with ACORN, the Mills Action Coalition (MAC), was instrumental in raising funds to pursue legal action against the AHTD. MAC established the ACORN Neighborhood Legal Defense Fund to raise \$7,500 in legal fees needed to file a lawsuit in MAC's "continuing effort to insure minimal disruption to Little Rock

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 16; and "Mobile Office Utilized by ACORN to Oppose Possible Freeway Route," *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 June 1974, 1B.

<sup>208</sup> "Billboards Set Near Freeway; Protest Voiced," *Arkansas Gazette*, 16 March 1973, 1B. The city planning staff conducted a land-use study along the route in January 1973; however, a shortened study time resulted in omission of the area east of Woodrow Street. The study gave rezoning recommendations for the section of the route surveyed. Don Venhaus, Little Rock Community Development Department director, explained that had the study included the area of the proposed billboards, the recommendation would have included rezoning that area to prevent such "extreme" billboard heights. Venhaus noted in reference to the issuance of the billboard permits that "unfortunately [the city] just got beat to the punch" by the signage company's request. The city had no choice but to issue the permits for the two billboards between Johnson and Thayer streets.

neighborhoods.”<sup>209</sup> Another ACORN affiliate, the MacArthur Park Neighborhood Association, continued its opposition to the freeway throughout the late 1970s. Concerned about maintaining the historic aesthetic of their district and preventing a re-segregation of the community, the group held an opposition march in late-July 1978 and planned to work through ACORN to challenge the AHTD’s new EIS in court. The group also complained about the AHTD’s failure to maintain the cleared right-of-way and keep it free of weeds and trash. These affiliate groups, many of which sprouted from the affected neighborhoods, helped create a larger reach for ACORN’s campaign.<sup>210</sup>

Mohl also describes the first commonality as possessing “cross-class, and interracial alliances.”<sup>211</sup> ACORN prided itself on class cooperation, describing their resistance movement as “somewhat unique because the fight was exclusively orchestrated by low and moderate income residents of Little Rock’s central city.”<sup>212</sup> ACORN noted that other freeway fights often involved “upper or middle-upper income environmental devotees” but “the Mills controversy was clearly a gut issue for ACORN working families who did not wish their neighborhoods destroyed.”<sup>213</sup> While ACORN boasted class diversity, it is unclear to what extent the group achieved racial diversity. Those opposed to I-630 often expressed concern about the potential racial barrier that the freeway might create but few sources discussed the racial makeup of those working to stop the project. One of these references is a journalist’s description of the audience

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<sup>209</sup> “ACORN Seeks Suit to Prevent Work on Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 August 1973, 1B.

<sup>210</sup> “Billboard Uglification Along Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 18 March 1973, 2E; Letter from Carolyn Carr to Mrs. George Rose Smith, 30 July 1973, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and “Complete the Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 27 July 1978.

<sup>211</sup> Mohl, 676.

<sup>212</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 1, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

makeup at the March 14, 1972 hearing on the interstate project that noted of 350 to 400 people attending the hearing there were only four African-Americans present.<sup>214</sup>

Though ACORN's work against the freeway certainly demonstrated persistent neighborhood activism with a strong message and network of citizens, the group's downfall was in their timing. Because the AHTD had already acquired properties and cleared much of the right-of-way by the time ACORN established an opposition movement, there was little they could do to stop the interstate. Since the project's inception, many development plans included the future route as part of the reasoning for a particular zoning designation or construction of a building or road. Furthermore, many influential business leaders and politicians had already aligned their support behind the project's completion citing such perceived benefits as a revitalized downtown. As an editorial in the *Arkansas Gazette* suggested, "[t]he time for real protest or objection was in the 1950s."<sup>215</sup>

Mohl's second commonality of a successful freeway revolt involved the backing of politicians and journalists in the community. Unfortunately for the Little Rock freeway resistance movement, the city's politicians were largely pro-freeway, including influential U.S. Representative Wilbur D. Mills. One of the project's biggest supporters, Mills, was instrumental in obtaining the necessary interstate mileage to include the route in the Interstate Highway System. As a result, his name served as the unofficial moniker for I-630 as christened by city leaders in 1971. Representative Mills and other influential local politicians viewed the interstate as a way to revitalize downtown, arguing, "Frankly,

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<sup>214</sup> Jimmy Jones, "Letter From Mills Probably Settles Main Street Issue," *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 March 1972, 14B.

<sup>215</sup> "Complete the Freeway," 27 July 1978.

I think it will do more to restore values downtown...than anything any of us could do.”<sup>216</sup>

The project also had the support from both sitting and former mayors of Little Rock such as Werner C. Knoop (1958-1962), Byron R. Morse (1963-1964), Haco Boyd (1969-1970), and Donald L. Mehlburger (1977-1978) who felt it would move the city forward and minimize traffic congestion.<sup>217</sup>

Much of the business community was also supportive of the route. Fifty for the Future, a group comprised of influential business and civic leaders, first commissioned a study to explore toll financing as a way to get the stalled expressway project moving again in 1967. Other businessmen touted the project’s potential to invigorate the city’s central business district. Little Rock Chamber of Commerce president Werner C. Knoop emphasized that the completion of the route was “probably the single most important project pending to assure the continued rebuilding of the downtown area.”<sup>218</sup> Beverly S. Lambert, Little Rock Unlimited Progress (UP) president-elect, spoke out in support of the freeway at the May 8, 1978 public meeting stating that the finalized route would provide “revitalization of the inner city.”<sup>219</sup> Perhaps most telling were the millions of dollars invested in downtown with the anticipation of I-630’s completion. First National Bank board chairman and the Advertising and Promotion Commission chairman B. Finley

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<sup>216</sup> Jones, “LR Expressway is Included in Interstate,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 13 November 1970, 1A.

<sup>217</sup> “Expressway Renamed Mills Freeway; Bid Opening is Set for January 27,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 January 1971, 1A; Garry Hoffmann, “Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 9 May 1978, 10A; and “City Fails to Get AHC Commitment About Expressway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 January 1970, 1B.

<sup>218</sup> Jones, “LR Expressway is Included in Interstate,” 13 November 1970, 1A.

<sup>219</sup> Hoffmann, “Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway,” 9 May 1978, 10A.

Vinson reminded the audience at the May 8, 1978 hearing of the investments from his firm and several others.<sup>220</sup>

Because the I-630 project had such strong support among the business community and politicians, opposition groups like ACORN struggled to find any influential backers. In a recollection of the freeway fight, ACORN discussed the lack of support from prominent community leaders noting that after ACORN filed a lawsuit regarding I-630 in 1973, “the Little Rock law firms, banks, insurance and real estate institutions which have traditionally provided the community with ‘community leaders’ now recognized that the previous months of newspaper articles [regarding ACORN’s opposition to I-630] were not to be taken lightly.”<sup>221</sup> In addition, ACORN felt that “Little Rock’s upper crust and traditional centers of political power began to apply pressure to siphon away the marginal supports ACORN had recruited.”<sup>222</sup>

While I-630’s detractors failed to gain the full endorsement of most city leaders, some expressed a desire to minimize the project’s impacts. Demonstrating hesitancy in throwing their support fully behind the interstate project, state Representative Robert Johnston and Little Rock School Board member Herb Rule spoke up about the need for stronger mitigation measures. Though both men supported the completion of the freeway, they voiced their concerns and ideas about on-off ramps and pedestrian overpasses during the May 8, 1978 public hearing. Representative Johnston also sent a letter to Highway Commissioner Patsy Thomasson explaining, “with some hesitation and reservation as to

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<sup>220</sup> Site Visit Report, Little Rock, Arkansas, Economic Development Management Project, April 1972, pp. 98-99, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 24, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; and Hoffmann, “Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway,” 9 May 1978, 10A.

<sup>221</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, pp. 10-11, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

conditions, I support the completion of I-630.”<sup>223</sup> He was concerned “that I-630 will be a major physical and psychological schism splitting the community” and suggested covering sections of the route through downtown and creating parks on top of these two to three block long portions.<sup>224</sup> While Representative Johnston and Rule questioned the project and requested better mitigation measures, this was not the kind of full backing ACORN needed to advance their fight.<sup>225</sup>

Another element of Mohl’s second commonality involved support from prominent journalists and newspapers. ACORN felt they came up short here as well, noting that they “were unable to swing to [their] position the city’s major newspaper [the *Arkansas Gazette*] which had previously supported similar citizens campaigns in other cities, i.e. saving Overton Park in Memphis from the path of an expressway.”<sup>226</sup> ACORN described the *Arkansas Gazette* as “selectively debat[ing] [ACORN’s] arguments on their editorial page.”<sup>227</sup>

A review of editorials in the local newspapers did not turn up any articles calling for the elimination of the freeway project. Rather, some of the editorials in the early 1970s discussed or criticized design features and emphasized the proposed project’s importance for the future of downtown. One editorial in the *Arkansas Gazette* stressed that “completion of the downtown phase of the Mills Freeway clearly is going to have a profound influence on development of the entire metropolitan community and the design

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<sup>223</sup> Letter from state Representative Robert Johnston to Patsy Thomasson, 3 June 1977, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Hoffmann, “Supporters, Foes Debate Mills Freeway,” 9 May 1978, 10A.

<sup>226</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 18, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

will be a major element in that influence.”<sup>228</sup> In advance of the March 14, 1972 public hearing, another *Arkansas Gazette* editorial urged residents to consider “the effects construction will have on the community while there is still time, presumably, to make the project as responsive as possible to a high quality of urban life.”<sup>229</sup>

The focus of later editorials, dating from the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s, appeared to shift from concerns about design to expressions of frustration with delays on the project. While acknowledging that the first EIS was “not well-formulated” a 1975 *Arkansas Gazette* editorial went on to state that “it remains a fairly obvious conclusion in our own view that the Freeway should be completed for its entire distance.”<sup>230</sup> Another *Arkansas Gazette* editorial brought into question the benefits of the Interstate Highway System noting, “Whether the original decision to build the freeways was correct raises another important, but separate question.”<sup>231</sup> However, the editorial still supported the completion of I-630 explaining, “If the reliance on freeways should be judged a fundamental error in American society, it certainly would make no sense to place the error of abandonment alongside it.”<sup>232</sup> As the draft of the second EIS was under public review in 1977, *Arkansas Democrat* editorialist Robert McCord complained about the money wasted due to all of the legal delays wrought by ACORN. McCord claimed that these setbacks cost taxpayers over \$21 million. When the project finally appeared to be nearing completion in the 1980s, McCord, now an editorialist for the *Arkansas Gazette*,

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<sup>228</sup> “New Look at Expressway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 12 August 1971, 6A.

<sup>229</sup> “Mills Freeway Design Needs a Close Look,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 March 1972, 4A.

<sup>230</sup> “Delay on Mills Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 4 August 1975, 4A.

<sup>231</sup> “Another Mills Freeway Delay,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 3 October 1975, 6A.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

claimed ACORN wasted over \$80 million and went on to harshly criticize ACORN's involvement stating: "Its interest was only in showing muscle."<sup>233</sup>

Because ACORN failed to garner support among politicians, businessmen, and journalists, their campaign suffered. Unfortunately, it was these influential citizens who were perhaps in the best position to bring the I-630 construction to a halt. Their steadfast support for the project forced ACORN to look to local leaders for help, namely the historic preservation community.

Mohl's third commonality of a successful interstate resistance movement included the involvement of "strong and historic planning traditions."<sup>234</sup> When planning for I-630 began, Little Rock's organized historic preservation efforts were in their nascent stages. The passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 on October 15, 1966, established the National Register of Historic Places and the criteria for which properties and districts were nominated to the Register. In response to this federal legislation, the Arkansas General Assembly created the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) in 1969, a state agency tasked with the fulfillment of "the objectives of the National Historic Preservation Act through the identification, preservation, and protection of the

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<sup>233</sup> Robert McCord, "Latest Delay on Mills Freeway Costs \$21 Million," *Arkansas Democrat*, 25 May 1977; and idem, "How a Few People Wasted \$80 Million," *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 January 1983, 13B.

<sup>234</sup> Mohl, 676.

cultural resources of the State of Arkansas.”<sup>235</sup> The governor-appointed State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) serves as head of the agency.<sup>236</sup>

One of the earliest nonprofit historic preservation organizations in Little Rock, the Quapaw Quarter Association (QQA), grew out of a reaction to the urban renewal projects taking place within the city. The organization initially formed in 1961 as the Significant Structures Technical Advisory Committee of the Little Rock Housing Authority, but the members of this committee, recognizing the decline of the MacArthur Park neighborhood of central Little Rock, chose the name Quapaw Quarter Association to provide a more positive, cohesive image of the area. The group ultimately focused its work on historic preservation efforts in central Little Rock.<sup>237</sup>

On May 8, 1978, the QQA board, much to the consternation of some of its more outspoken members, officially went on record in support of the freeway’s completion as long as the AHTD worked with them to create an acceptable mitigation agreement. This compromise was a result of the good relationship the QQA had developed with the AHTD throughout the 1970s. In a 1974 letter from Porter Briggs, the president of Briggs Associates, Inc., to Governor Dale Bumpers, Briggs explained that the QQA was working

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<sup>235</sup> The State of Arkansas – Bureau of Legislative Research; Fiscal Publications, “H. 2007 Regular Session - FY2008 and FY2009 (2007-09 Biennium); A. 2007 to 2009 Budget Manuals; Volume 05 DAH, St Police and Various Agencies; Historic Preservation,” [http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/bureau/fiscal/Publications/H.%20%202007%20Regular%20Session%20-%20FY2008%20and%20FY2009%20\(2007-09%20Biennium\)/A.%20%202007%20to%202009%20Budget%20Manuals/Volume%2005%20DAH,%20St%20Police%20and%20Various%20Agencies/HistoricPreservation.pdf](http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/bureau/fiscal/Publications/H.%20%202007%20Regular%20Session%20-%20FY2008%20and%20FY2009%20(2007-09%20Biennium)/A.%20%202007%20to%202009%20Budget%20Manuals/Volume%2005%20DAH,%20St%20Police%20and%20Various%20Agencies/HistoricPreservation.pdf) (accessed 11 December 2012).

<sup>236</sup> “National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended through 2006,” <http://www.achp.gov/docs/nhpa%202008-final.pdf> (accessed 7 October 2012); Arkansas Archeological Survey, “Act 480 of 1977,” <http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/archinfo/act480.html> (accessed 11 December 2012).

<sup>237</sup> Roger Williams, “Quapaw Quarter Association,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2329> (accessed 7 October 2012); “About the QQA,” <http://www.quapaw.com/index.htm> (accessed 7 October 2012).

“very closely” with the highway department in regards to right-of-way acquisition.<sup>238</sup>

After Judge Henley’s ruling in 1975 that the highway department would need to create a new EIS, QQA president Sam Strauss wrote to Bernie McClurkan, the head of the highway department’s environmental division, pointing out specific mitigation measures that the QQA would like to see included in the design including a depressed roadbed lined with “attractive” landscaping to “shelter the eye and ear from the sights and sounds of traffic.”<sup>239</sup> Strauss closed the letter stating that the QQA “is ready to work with you as the plans progress.”<sup>240</sup> The QQA formed an I-630 Committee to examine the potential effects of the interstate and how to best mitigate impact. Frances Ross, a member of the I-630 Committee wrote to Bob Tyler of the highway department’s environmental division noting that the QQA Board of Directors was “favorably impressed with the Highway Department’s plans to create as aesthetic an environment as possible along the highway.”<sup>241</sup>

However, not all of the QQA’s membership was pleased with the organization’s cooperation with the highway department. Member Jim Rule had strong words about the group’s actions in regards to I-630, writing to the QQA president that “[a]ny self-respecting historic preservation organization should have gone on record long ago strongly opposing such an intrusion through the middle of the most historic residential

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<sup>238</sup> Letter from Porter Briggs to Governor Dale Bumpers, 17 June 1974, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>239</sup> Letter from Sam Strauss to Bernie McClurkan, 25 March 1977, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Letter from Frances Ross to Bob Tyler, 3 August 1977, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; “Statement to Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) About the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) Concerning the Completion of I-630,” 8 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Proposed Resolution, 3 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

area in the State of Arkansas.”<sup>242</sup> During a May 3, 1978 meeting of the QQA membership to determine their official stance on the interstate project, John Matthews joined Rule in urging the organization to pass a resolution opposing I-630 “in every legal manner” through “the Quapaw Quarter in general and the McArthur [*sic*] Park Historic District in particular.”<sup>243</sup> However, the QQA Board appeared to view the freeway as inevitable and decided it was best to work with the highway department to ensure they would receive what they wanted from mitigation negotiations. As a result of these efforts, Bryan Davis, chief of the environmental division at the AHTD, described the QQA as “one of the most helpful and informative groups that [the AHTD had] the pleasure to work with.”<sup>244</sup>

As part of their responsibilities assigned by the National Historic Preservation Act, AHPP documented structures within the MacArthur Park neighborhood, which straddled the proposed I-630 right-of-way. The agency nominated it to the National Register of Historic Places and the National Park Service officially listed it as the MacArthur Park Historic District on July 25, 1977. The nomination’s authors mentioned several threats to the “continuous harmonious historic residential atmosphere” of the district citing the addition of four high-rise apartment buildings in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the construction of Interstate 30 to the east which cut off access to the “historic sister neighborhood” of Hanger Hill.<sup>245</sup> The nomination also mentioned the

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<sup>242</sup> Letter from James Rule to Kay Powers, 10 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>243</sup> Proposed Resolution, 3 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>244</sup> “Statement to ACHP About the MOA Concerning the Completion of I-630,” 8 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Letter from Bryan Davis to Joan Baldrige, 20 March 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>245</sup> Mike Shinn and Sandra Taylor, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: MacArthur Park Historic District,” 25 July 1977, Item Number 8, p. 5, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas.

“impending freeway” to the south as a “major threat to the present integrity of the district.”<sup>246</sup> Conversely, the nomination presented evidence of a burgeoning revitalization within the district noting that in the two years prior “individual citizens [were] actively conducting a large number of private restoration projects” and “fully a dozen major adaptive restorations...house[d] the offices of Little Rock professionals.”<sup>247</sup>

In addition to the completion of the National Register nomination, AHPP was involved in public meetings and mitigation with the AHTD. The SHPO Anne Bartley held hearings to discuss ways to reduce the freeway project’s impact and hired consultant Russell Wright to provide recommendations to protect the historic integrity of the MacArthur Park Historic District. I-630 opponents asked Bartley to refuse to sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the AHTD in hopes that the federal government would block funding for the project without her cooperation. Bartley felt that this “would only be a delaying tactic” that would eventually be overruled by the federal government.<sup>248</sup> The agency never opposed the project and, like the QQA, they chose to work with the AHTD to negotiate terms of the MOA.<sup>249</sup>

Another outgrowth of the local historic preservation movement was the creation of two government commissions in the mid-1970s, charged with monitoring changes and developments within three downtown historic areas. The establishment of these commissions demonstrated the state and local governments’ concern for historic preservation and commitment to maintaining the integrity of historic areas in central

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., Item Number 8, p. 6.

<sup>248</sup> James Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 30 August 1977.

<sup>249</sup> Russell Wright, “The MacArthur Park National Register Historic District,” October 1977, p. 2, Section 106 Files in the office of George McCluskey, Senior Archeologist/106 Review Coordinator, Folder “AHPP I-630 MOA and Preliminary Documents,” Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; Carol Matlack, “Make Highway ‘More Palatable’ Consultant Says,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 30 August 1977, 2A; and Scudder, “Residents Protest Freeway at Hearing,” 30 August 1977.

Little Rock. The Arkansas General Assembly created the Capitol Zoning District Commission (CZDC) in 1975 in an effort to protect the “special character of these neighborhoods by acting as a special planning and historic preservation commission.”<sup>250</sup> The legislature mandated that the CZDC oversee development in the areas surrounding the state capitol and the governor’s mansion. Similarly, in 1976 the Little Rock City Board of Directors voted to establish the Little Rock Historic District Commission to review requests for alterations made to the exterior of any structure located within the MacArthur Park Historic District. While the establishment of these commissions suggested that the city and state governments placed importance on historic preservation these commissions held little influence with the I-630 project.<sup>251</sup>

The freeway resistance movement, led by ACORN, was not able to sway the historic preservation and planning organizations of Little Rock to support total opposition to the freeway project. Instead, many of these groups focused their efforts on working with the AHTD to produce a mitigation agreement that included, among other aspects, the removal of frontage roads around MacArthur Park, depression of the freeway 20 feet below grade between Dennison and I-30, a pedestrian overpass near MacArthur Park, and an outline for various design elements such as lighting styles, fencing, and paint colors.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> “Capitol Zoning District Commission: About Us,” <http://czdc.arkansas.gov/aboutUs/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 16 December 2012).

<sup>251</sup> Shinn and Taylor, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: MacArthur Park Historic District,” 25 July 1977, Item Number 8, p. 6, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas; and City of Little Rock Planning and Development Department, “Little Rock Citywide Historic Preservation Plan,” 2009, p. 2, [http://www.littlerock.org/%21userfiles/editor/docs/planning/hdc/pres\\_plan\\_part\\_1\\_rev.pdf](http://www.littlerock.org/%21userfiles/editor/docs/planning/hdc/pres_plan_part_1_rev.pdf) (accessed 15 December 2012).

<sup>252</sup> Letter from C.F. McMillen to Michael Bureman, Re: I-630 Memorandum of Agreement, 15 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Brenda Spillman, “200 Attend Discussion On Freeway Completion,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 9 May 1978, 4A.

Where the freeway resistance movement lacked in support from politicians, businessmen, journalists, and historic preservationists, they attempted to make up for in litigation. In pursuing legal action against the project – the fourth of Mohl’s commonalities – ACORN focused in on the project’s EIS that the AHTD created in response to a requirement of the NEPA. As the EIS was a relatively new requirement, the AHTD had limited experience to draw upon to create a thorough EIS. Adding to the lack of familiarity with compiling the report, the federal procedures on what should be contained in an EIS were new and often changing. Calling the report “ambiguous” and “vague,” ACORN capitalized on this weakness and used the law to make a strong case against the AHTD’s first EIS.<sup>253</sup> In February 1976 Judge J. Smith Henley agreed that the EIS was inadequate and ruled that the AHTD create a new statement. This tactic delayed the completion of the interstate and, since the AHTD was required to hold more public hearings on the project, it allowed for additional public debate and discussion on I-630’s design and its possible effects on the surrounding areas. ACORN hoped that the continued delay would give them the opportunity to build a larger public resistance to the project.<sup>254</sup>

Over the next few years, the AHTD worked on a new EIS that included more route alternatives and research on potential impacts. They held public hearings to solicit the public’s opinions and wrote a much more thorough report. They submitted the EIS in July 1978 and requested that the court remove the injunction so they could continue construction on the downtown portion of the route. ACORN again took legal action

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<sup>253</sup> “ACORN Files Suit to Halt Construction on Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 10 November 1973, 13A.

<sup>254</sup> “Interstate 630 Environmental Impact Statement: Administrative Action Draft,” Arkansas State Highway Department, 1977, Appendix II “Court Memorandum Opinion and Decree,” Exhibit A, p. 20, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas; and Leslie Mitchell, “Halt to Mills Freeway Ordered,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 July 1975, 1A.

calling the second EIS “absurd.”<sup>255</sup> After a five-day hearing in October 1978, Judge G. Thomas Eisele dismissed the lawsuit in April 1979 when he ruled that the AHTD had “[met] all of the requirements” of federal laws and regulations guiding the new EIS.<sup>256</sup> At this point, having exhausted their legal avenues, ACORN’s legal battle was essentially over.

The downfall of ACORN’s legal fight against the AHTD essentially came down to timing. Their efforts came too late to stop the freeway as the city and state had already purchased and cleared a large portion of the right-of-way by the time ACORN first organized as a group in the early 1970s. Though ACORN took action against the first EIS and made a strong case, the wide swath of cleared land bisecting the city suggested the inevitability of the project. Even as Judge Henley ruled that the first EIS was inadequate he spoke to the certainty of the route noting “the court thinks it fair to say that in all probability an adequate statement will eventually be submitted and approved, and that the project east of Dennison will be built substantially along the route that has been delineated for years.”<sup>257</sup>

Elements of Mohl’s first four commonalities – including neighborhood activism and citywide alliances, support from local politicians and newspapers, a passionate emphasis on historic preservation, and decisive legal action – were present in the Little Rock freeway resistance movement, but not to an extent that resulted in Mohl’s fifth and final commonality: a complete shutdown of the interstate project. Because the movement was strong in some areas but not in others, it was doomed to fall short of its ultimate goal.

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<sup>255</sup> “Hearing Scheduled in Freeway Case,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 6 September 1978.

<sup>256</sup> John McAnulty, “Freeway Lawsuit Will be Dismissed,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 28 April 1979; and Carol Griffie, “Freeway Work Through LR to be Resumed,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 April 1979, 1A.

<sup>257</sup> “Relocation of Utilities to Begin on Freeway,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 21 August 1976; “Some Encouraging Words,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 28 August 1976, 4A.

As Mohl explained when highlighting the first commonality, “Grassroots, populist struggle against the urban interstates was crucial, of course, but without these other ingredients, there was a very good chance that the freeway would get built anyway.”<sup>258</sup>

An examination of the weaknesses in the Little Rock freeway resistance movement through the lens of Mohl’s commonalities illustrates fundamental shortcomings in the “ingredients” necessary to stop the construction of I-630.<sup>259</sup>

A small but active group, the grassroots movement originated in the affected areas of the central city however it lacked ideal class diversity and citywide influence, which limited their effectiveness and support. Reflecting on their opposition to I-630, ACORN made a distinction between their experience and “other legendary freeway contests” that consisted more of “upper or middle-upper income environmental devotees.”<sup>260</sup> They explained that the Little Rock battle was a “partial, but real victory of ordinary people...exclusively orchestrated by low and moderate income residents of Little Rock’s central city.”<sup>261</sup>

While ACORN highlighted the participation of low-to-moderate income groups in the fight against I-630, they were less specific about the racial makeup of their anti-freeway opposition. A newspaper account of the March 14, 1972 public hearing suggests that few minority residents participated in the process prior to ACORN’s involvement. The journalist reported that of the 350 to 400 people that attended the four-hour hearing at Rick’s Armory only four were African-Americans despite the fact that the planned route ran through several predominately African-American neighborhoods. The lack of

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<sup>258</sup> Mohl, 676.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 1; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

African-Americans in attendance at the public hearing may be a result of the government's involvement in urban renewal programs, which cleared blocks of many historically African-American neighborhoods through "coercive authority" and with minimal, if any, citizen input.<sup>262</sup> Given this history of "heavy-handed intimidation and threats of eviction" many of the city's African-Americans may have been hesitant to attend such a hearing since their presence had made little to no difference in the outcome of past projects.<sup>263</sup> As ACORN became more involved in the I-630 fight in the months following the March 1972 hearing, it is likely that more African-Americans became involved in the effort, though the evidence is inadequate to be certain. However, like many aspects of the Little Rock anti-freeway movement, involvement did not begin early enough for the process to be effective. In hindsight, it is apparent that the opposition's efforts would have benefitted from a more diverse, citywide coalition, beginning in its initial stages.<sup>264</sup>

The movement failed to garner support from powerful politicians and influential media outlets as well. To the contrary, these groups actually worked against those protesting the freeway, with influential politicians like Representative Mills enthusiastically supporting the I-630 project. Neither did the state newspapers join with the freeway fighters; ACORN was particularly frustrated with the lack of support from the *Arkansas Gazette* noting that they had supported the Overton Park freeway fight in Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Ben F. Johnson, "After 1957: Resisting Integration in Little Rock," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66 (Summer 2007), 263.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Jones, "Letter From Mills Probably Settles Main Street Issue," *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 March 1972, 14B.

<sup>265</sup> "ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway," ACORN, circa 1977, p. 18; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

The historic preservation and planning community focused their efforts on mitigation, and not elimination, of the interstate project. The QQA went on record stating that the organization “continu[ed] to support the completion of I-630 only if a new Memorandum of Agreement [was] executed with as definite, complete and enforceable a mitigation package as possible clearly outlining the responsibilities of the various agencies.”<sup>266</sup> The state historic preservation office was eager to document the neighborhood in the path of I-630 but perhaps felt limited in their authority in the face of the more powerful and influential highway department.

The commonality in which the resistance movement had the most success was with litigation, which focused on the EIS. ACORN and its allies managed to use the law to their advantage to force the highway department to reconsider their plans. While ACORN made a strong case against the interstate they failed to completely shut down the I-630 project. By the time they started their fight the project was already well underway, a point ACORN recognized when they advised other freeway challengers to “get started real early if you want to successfully fight an urban expressway.”<sup>267</sup>

Even though the Little Rock freeway resistance movement did not manage to stop the project, they did score some small victories. An editorial by I-630 critic Robert S. McCord, written while the AHTD reworked the second EIS, described what ACORN founder and leader Wade Rathke saw as positive outcomes of the opposition’s work to that point: “The highway dept has been much more amenable to compromise in selecting locations for other urban highways since the suit was filed. Little things improved, too,

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<sup>266</sup> “Statement to ACHP About the MOA Concerning the Completion of I-630,” 8 May 1978, Quapaw Quarter Association Records, unprocessed, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>267</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 1; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

such as keeping the right-of-way cleared, which [Rathke] said [the AHTD] did not do before the suit. And Rathke is certain that the relocation settlements for families were better following the suit.”<sup>268</sup> Rathke also stated that “Before this lawsuit, the Highway Department was pretty stout in this town... Now if you look at what’s happening, it’s pretty common for people to rap on the highway department.”<sup>269</sup>

The battle over I-630 reflected the changes in how citizens responded to highway departments’ plans across the nation. Interstate projects started in the 1950s and early 1960s often faced little opposition and, as a result, highway departments often completed these routes in a timely manner. Planners viewed interstates as a boon to declining central cities and a way to revitalize and encourage people to come downtown. As the road in Little Rock was not included in the Interstate Highways System at this time, its early difficulties involved a lack of funding via city and state governments. After delays from budgetary holdups in the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government added the route to the Interstate Highway System and provided 90 percent of the funds for construction. Though the project’s money was secured, the route soon faced a different kind of battle. With the passage of NEPA, governmental agencies found their decisions more often challenged by anti-freeway groups with new legal tools to fight interstate plans. Such resistance in Little Rock, which initially caught the AHTD by surprise, eventually became the norm.

Unfortunately for Little Rock freeway opponents, this nationwide shift came too late to stop I-630, which was an active project even before it became part of the Interstate Highway System in 1970. The movement in Little Rock did not have the advantage of

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<sup>268</sup> Robert S. McCord, “Latest Delay on Mills Freeway Costs \$21 Million,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 25 May 1977.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

fighting only proposed drawings and plans; they were fighting a route that was already making a visible mark across town. Further complicating their goal was the fact that many businesses anticipated its construction and several citizens had already sold their houses to the highway department and relocated. Such factors made I-630 seem inevitable, an issue that ACORN recognized as a shortcoming in their fight: “The Mills Freeway was almost a reality when ACORN kicked its organizing machine into motion.”<sup>270</sup>

While ACORN did not “stop the road,” as Mohl described it, their efforts slowed construction and allowed citizens to question the design and ultimately minimize the road’s impact.<sup>271</sup> Their efforts, for example, resulted in the construction of the downtown portion below grade among other mitigation measures agreed to upon review of the second EIS. ACORN and the freeway resistance movement also helped change the highway department’s approach to planning and construction of such imposing structures that significantly alter a city’s fabric. ACORN reflected in 1977 that “A real victory had been won, in that ordinary citizens have learned that you can fight institutions like the Highway Department. The AHTD was noticeably shaken up by our challenge and will not be so quick to assume that they can force their highway plans through in the future.”<sup>272</sup>

Such successes of the freeway resistance movement, however, are obscured by what many see as the results of its failure, foreshadowed by ACORN’s 1973 response to

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<sup>270</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 20; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>271</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30 (July 2004).

<sup>272</sup> “ACORN vs. The Wilbur Mills Freeway,” ACORN, circa 1977, p. 20; ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 25, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

the first EIS: “If constructed, this ‘Interstate’ will be a substantial racial divider, with blacks realistically allotted housing mobility only south of the project from downtown westward to University [Avenue]. More businesses will continue to move westward... To contend that the ‘Interstate’ will save the city by destroying its physical structure needs logical documentation.”<sup>273</sup> Some scholars and journalists have suggested that ACORN might have been right about these predictions, made twelve years before the completion of I-630 in 1985. The aim of this thesis is not to prove or disprove such assertions, but certainly Little Rock would be a different city had the freeway resistance movement succeeded in their efforts to halt the freeway. Maybe the neighborhoods to the north and south of the route would be more integrated than they are today. Maybe West Little Rock would still be rolling hills and quiet forests. Maybe downtown would be the vibrant center of commerce it was in the first half of the twentieth century. Regardless of how I-630 changed Little Rock, the movement against its construction can offer important lessons for future groups looking to alter the course of a city’s development.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> “A Response to the Environmental Impact Statements Concerning the Completion of Interstate 630,” ACORN, April 1973, p. 10, ACORN Arkansas Records, Box 17, Folder 26, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>274</sup> For examples of such arguments see: Jay Barth, “LR in Black and White,” *Arkansas Times*, 20 September 2007; idem, “Interstate 630,” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=6587> (accessed 14 March 2013); David Koon, “Wilbur’s Wall: I-630, Little Rock and 25 Years in a Divided City,” *Arkansas Times*, 26 January 2011; Chad Day, “10 Census Data Indicate a City Still Estranged: I-630 Seen As Racial Dividing Line,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 20 March 2011; Jay Jennings, *Carry the Rock: Race, Football, and the Soul of an American City* (New York: Rodale Books, 2010).

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