

A WALK  
DOWN  
WEST BALTIMORE  
STREET

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# Intro



**Walk Down West Baltimore Street** features historical research and fieldwork on the 1000 to the 1500 blocks of West Baltimore Street. The final products include a public history zine and video recorded interviews debuting on Saturday, May 18 at the Lion Brothers Building. The project is a collaboration between two UMBC courses during spring 2019.

**American Studies 422: Preserving Places, Making Spaces in Baltimore** is an applied research course that addresses the importance of place to the diverse history and culture of Baltimore by developing innovative preservation and public humanities projects. We worked with Media & Communication Studies 484: Production Fellows, who recorded our interviews as part of the cultural documentation project.

**AMST 422:** (Prof. Nicole King) DeAndre Bright, (teaching assistant) Dawn Baskins (SOWK), Olivia Grimes (INDS), Zack Herd (AMST), Shadia Musa (AMST)

**MCS 484:** (Prof. Bill Shewbridge) Tony Cano, Adam Czarnecki, Daniel Eiskant, Christian Howe, Kenneth M'Balé

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*Baltimore Traces is a project-based interdisciplinary teaching initiative, bringing faculty, students, and community members together to create media and public programming on Baltimore's changing neighborhoods.*

For more see:

<https://baltimoretraces.umbc.edu>

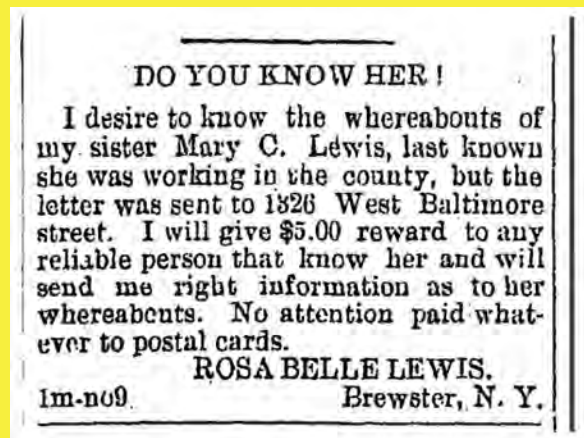
This project was funded by the Hrabowski Innovation Grant, BreakingGround, and the CAHSS Grants for Pedagogy and Teaching



# A Walk Down West Baltimore Street: A Celebration of a Street

You cannot separate the street from the people who built, inhabited, rebuilt, and sometimes abandoned the place. All places change. But the history of a street is really a collection of stories or glimpses and pieces of people's stories as they lived out their lives.

A classified ad in the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper from a woman in New York looking for her sister in Baltimore tells a story:



This ad first appeared in the newspaper on November 9, 1901. On December 28, 1901 the reward increased from \$5 to \$10 and "Mary C. Lewis" was changed to "Mary Ellen Lewis" the wording of the ad remained the same until it disappeared after February of 1902.

We will never know if Rosa Belle Lewis ever found her sister Mary or why she would pay no attention to postal cards in the search for her. But we do have an inkling that Mary Lewis walked down West Baltimore Street.

In this class, I teach my students how to search old newspapers, look at Sanborn maps, find deeds, etc. all in trying to put together a story of a place. But the glimpses of people's lives, especially the lives of everyday, working-class, and poor people, rarely make it into the historical record... unless there's tragedy. Crime, loss, and death are the main ways many ordinary people make it into the newspaper and then, like Mary Lewis, they may disappear from the historical record.

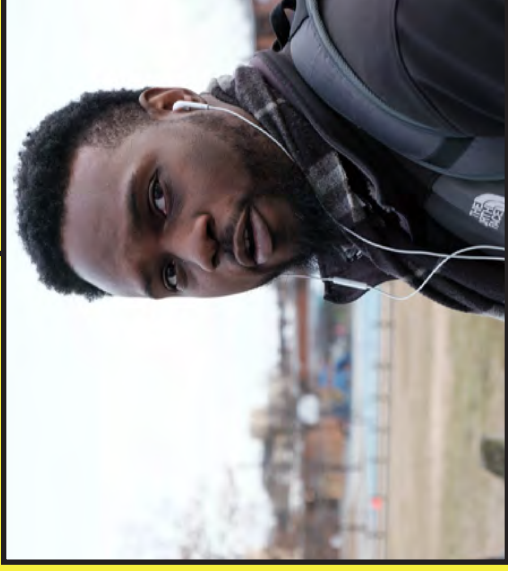
We apologize for what we get wrong. We are not the experts. Those who live and work in Southwest Baltimore are. The following pages have some thoughts on the history of West Baltimore Street as told to us by those we interviewed this semester. We've done our best to honor the stories of a few of the people who walked this street.

Thanks for reading our zine and coming to our event. And a special thanks to everyone who took the time to talk to us and share their stories this semester. It was a pleasure to walk this street with you all. The research is ongoing. If you have a story to share please let me know.

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# STORIES OF A STREET: “We are of great people.”



Being able to appreciate Baltimore history. I think my grandfather being a piece of the history, with the Arabber stable. I learned my grandmother, my mom’s mom, she was actually the first female transportation company owner in Baltimore. So that’s actually like two things to highlight, because she was an African-American and a female business owner, and this was in the 70s... So like, my grandmother being a part of Baltimore history, my grandfather being a part of Baltimore history, it built a sense of pride in myself. Like, “We are of great people.”

**--Curtis Eaddy**

# 1000 BLOCK







# Present

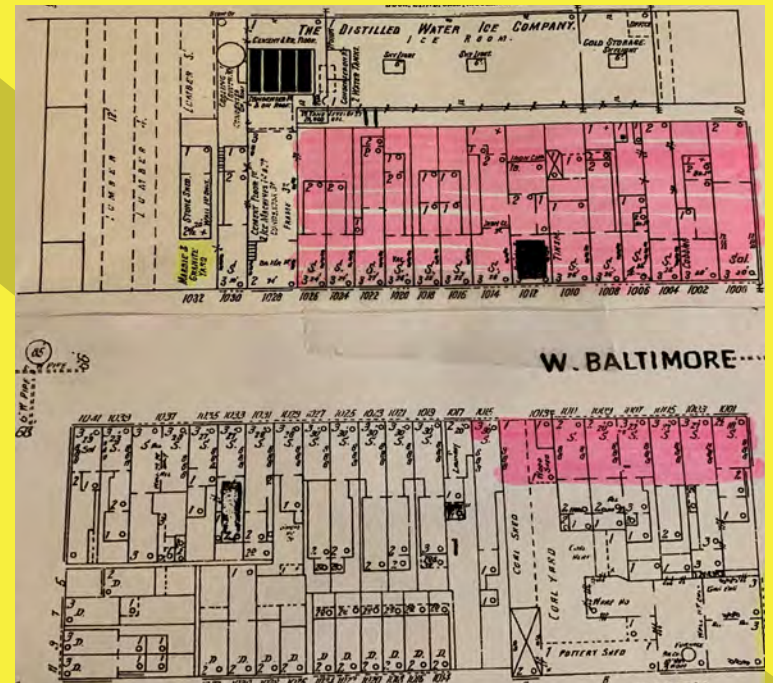


**Hollins House:** How will Privatization of Public Housing Affect Residents of Southwest?

Despite the **1975 Poppleton Study** and its recommendation to save the historic structure along the 1000 block of West Baltimore Street, nearly 70 percent of the block has been torn down. The entire northern part of 1000 that borders the Franklin Square neighborhood was torn down to make way for the Hollins House public housing complex that was completed and opened in 1983. **Hollins House** has 130 one-bedroom units and serves the city's elderly and disabled populations. Neighboring **Poe Homes** (800 W. Lexington St.) is the oldest surviving public housing complex in Baltimore. **Poe Homes** opened on the last day of 1940 after public housing was established in the city in 1937.

Hollins House marks the Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC)'s first project in the City of Baltimore, a partnership with The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to convert the community's 130 apartments from public housing into project-based Section 8 rental units under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. Longtime Baltimore Housing Commissioner Paul T. Graziano led the privatization of almost 40 percent of Baltimore's public housing in 2014. In 2016-2016, there was a \$11 million renovation to Hollins House as part of that process. In 2018, it was reported by the Baltimore Sun that under RAD and privatization tenants were evicted improperly from Baltimore's privatized public housing, including Hollins House.

While the outside of Hollins House received an upgrade, the true test of any housing redevelopment is how it serves local residents.





# The future of the 1000 block of West Baltimore Street..... ?

“We want change. We just want it to be inclusive and we want to be at the table,” Clarke said. “Even though we think it will do some good ... there is still resistance. There is still suspicion as to what [change] is all about.”

--Cecil Clarke, quoted in Natalie Sherman, “Common cause: Southwest Partnership aims to unite diverse neighborhoods to spur improvement, while fighting fatigue of past failed efforts,” Baltimore Sun, April 5, 2015



Cecil Clarke, a Gaithersburg-based real estate investor owns the row of remaining properties on the 1000 block of West Baltimore Street. According to a 2015 Baltimore Sun article on the founding of the Southwest Partnership, Clarke stated that the Commercial Property and Business Owners Association, which represents firms on West Baltimore Street, should have a stake in any plan calling for facade improvements, code enforcement, or targeted demolition. Clarke also supported the Poppleton \$58.6 million tax increment (TIF) bond for the New York-based La Cite housing development, telling a journalist, "The community is desperate for this project to see a new birth." Clarke recently sold the Lord Baltimore Theater (1110 W. Baltimore St.) to the Southwest Partnership, which plans to turn the historic theater into a community cultural arts center as part of the revival of West Baltimore Street.





In 2018, the dozen properties that Clarke owns on the 1000 block of West Baltimore Street received facade improvement grants from the Baltimore Development Corporation. A beauty salon and a pharmacy have already moved into the storefronts and Clarke has renovated apartments above taking the block back to its historic roots where small independent businesses were located in storefronts along the streets and residential space above.

Curtis Eaddy of the Southwest Partnership takes UMBC students on a tour of West Baltimore Street...

*he pauses in front of the  
brightly painted  
properties owned  
by Cecil Clarke on the 1000 block.*

# 1100 BLOCK







**The 1100 block is connected to the city's long history in the medical and performing arts.**

The Maryland Medical College was founded in 1898 at 1114-1120 W. Baltimore Street, which was previously the Newton Academy. The Maryland Medical College and National Temperance Hospital was founded by "dissenting members of the faculty" who left the Baltimore University School of Medicine. The Baltimore Sun reported, "The hospital will be run on strictly temperance principles, and no alcoholic drinks will be given the patients under any circumstances." The College was crowded and planned to move to a space attached to Franklin Square Hospital. However, by 1913 the American Medical Association gave the school a C rating for "colleges requiring a complete reorganization to make them acceptable," which led to its closure.



**The Lord Baltimore Theater opened on November 24, 1913.**

It had an ornamental brick façade, a 45-foot-wide stage with footlights, and a steeply sloped auditorium floor. When it opened, the Lord Baltimore was the largest theater in Baltimore outside the downtown theater district. By the 1930s, its owners added a neon marquee outfitted in the Calvert family arms. While the theater was being remodeled in 1941, the marquee fell and three persons narrowly escaped injury. The theater closed in mid-1970 and by 1973 was converted into a church. The Southwest Partnership purchased the building from Cecil Clarke to develop a community and arts space, much in the style of the successful conversion of the historic Patterson Theater into the Creative Alliance in East Baltimore.

**What would you like to see in the New Lord Baltimore Theater?**



When I bought the Lord Baltimore about 12, 13 years ago... I started to do some research on the history. It started out as vaudeville and then it was converted into a movie house. And at that time, it was all white to begin with, and then it was integrated later. And then it became the Black movie theater because those were the people who were patronizing it. From an important historical point of view, it's one of the oldest movies houses in the city. And from the point of view of the Black experience, it has been a fundamental part of entertainment for the Black community in years gone by. And so, this is why at this point in time an effort has been launched with the help of Southwest Partnership under the leadership of Michael Seipp.

He has had the vision to realize that if we can bring back the Lord Baltimore... as a entertainment, as a training center, as a artist center, then it would help to stimulate, it's one of the largest buildings on West Baltimore Street. The idea is, that if we can do this block, the 10-hundred block, we do the 1100 block, the 1400 block and then the 1500 block, they are actively working on that now.

--Cecil Clarke



# 1200 BLOCK





The Mercantile Bank opened its doors at 1208 West Baltimore Street in 1903. The bank grew and two years later in 1905 opened the new space at the corner of West Baltimore and Carrollton Street. The new building at 1201 West Baltimore Street was made of white brick, granite, and limestone. In 1933 during the years of the Great Depression, the bank was reorganized and renamed the Carrollton Bank of Baltimore. In a 1979 article in the Baltimore Sun, the past and current bank presidents attributed their success to being a part of the community as a local bank. The bank took pride in its connection with its neighbors and communities. The beloved local bank moved and then was bought by a corporate bank. Today the building is used for religious services like many of the historic storefronts on W. Baltimore St.



My dad would go to Oriole's Hardware. That was a place, a hardware store. Been there for forever. It was really convenient for my dad to go down there and get whatever he needed to help renovate the house.

--Brooks Long





In 2017, I hosted my own performance, it was a pop-up performance, for the Ceasefire. The Baltimore Ceasefire event, it was at the corner of Carey and Baltimore Street. They had a big grand open space there, public lot, and it was a very welcoming experience. As a community member, I got some support from neighbors, but I think because I pushed the envelope of this positive content and, “Hey everybody, let’s do something different!” You know, a lot of people don’t like change. So for me to come and gather an audience of over 50 people, a lot of young people, it was a pop-up so it wasn’t promoted. And just to see the response. Business owners came out and they like, “Man, are we doing this? Is this something that we’re gonna be doing frequently?”

**--Curtis Eaddy**

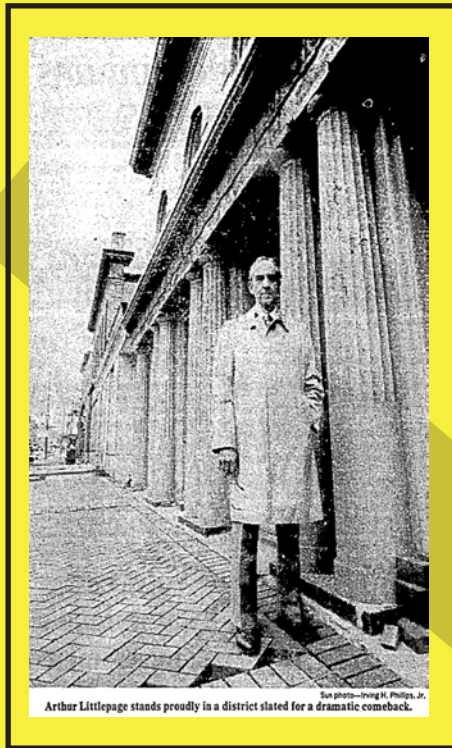


*Littlepages Furniture Store: The last  
100 year business*

*1317 West Baltimore Street*



Well, what I would like you to remember is that a business in Baltimore on West Baltimore Street managed to survive and thrive for 126 years in the same ownership, of the same family. I think that's an important story to tell. We're proud of it. -- **Sarah Littlepage**



Arthur Littlepage stands proudly in a district slated for a dramatic comeback. Sun photo—Irving H. Phillips, Jr.

**The Littlepage family** has been on West Baltimore Street for 126 years. The Littlepage’s furniture company was founded in 1893 on North Gilmore and West Baltimore Street by William T. Littlepage and his son. In the early 1900s, the company moved to Baltimore and Calhoun Street. In 1934, Arthur Littlepage, grandson of William T. Littlepage, joined the family’s furniture business, eventually taking over. Littlepage’s distinguished itself from other furniture stores in the city by selling unique and inexpensive pieces made for narrow Baltimore rowhomes. The store was known for its clothes trees and hall seats. According to The Baltimore Sun, “the hall seats, which became indispensable in Baltimore rowhouses with few closets, offered homeowners a place to store rubber boots and overshoes, and hooks for coats and hats.”

The company moved to 1317 West Baltimore Street in 1971. Arthur Littlepage was known as an active member of his community, preferring to interact with customers instead of sitting behind a desk. He ran the store until his death in 1999. The store is now run by David and Sarah Littlepage, Arthur’s children. Littlepage’s is currently open but plans to close in the next year and the Southwest Partnership has bought the building.







*Sarah Little Page and Shadia Musa*

*1320 West Baltimore Street*

*Gelato & Family Fun*



It was a lot of mixed use up and down West Baltimore Street, even the old gelato factory was made into like a Jeeper's. So going there, playing miniature golf, you don't get that in the city, you know? To have little spaces for community things or for families just to come.

**--Curtis Eaddy**





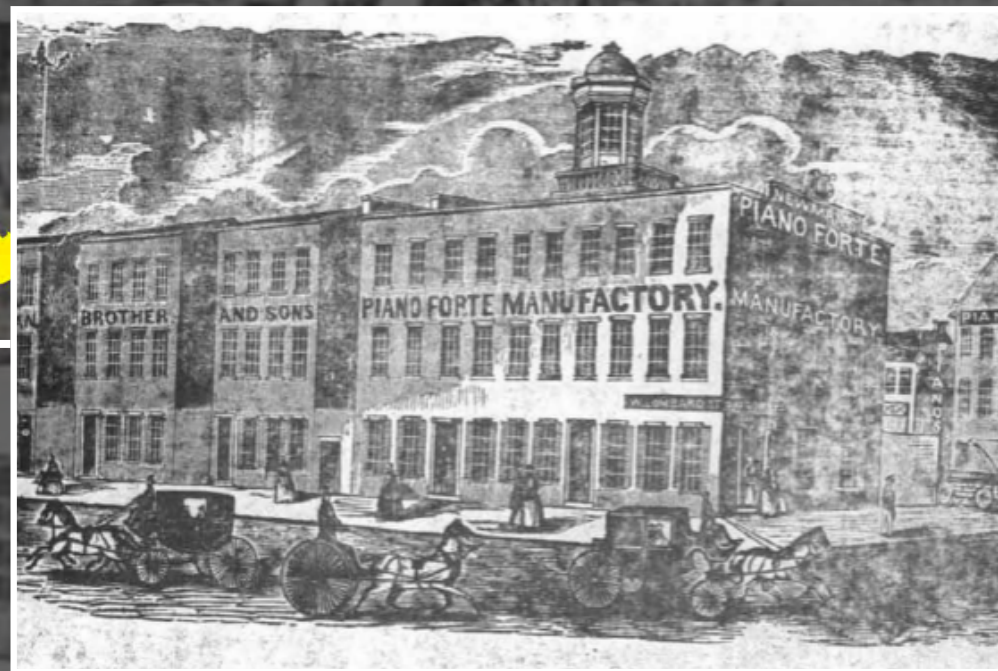
*Aromi d'Italia*



A large warehouse space sits on the corner of West Baltimore Street and Calhoun Street. From the street, you can see big green gates. If you look closely, you can see a faint image the Aromi D'Italia logo next to the green door. The building was constructed in 1953, but in the early 2000s, it would become home to a distribution center for gelato. In 1998, the gelato company Aromi D'Italia was founded by Armenian/Italian immigrant Boris Ghazarian. Ghazarian purchased 1320 West Baltimore Street for his distribution warehouse. After Aromi D'Italia closed its doors, the warehouse on 1320 West Baltimore Street became "The Works Family Fun Center," a Jeepers' like play house for kids. The center had arcade games, birthday party rooms, bumper cars, mini bowling, and much more. The business closed in 2015 and the warehouse has been vacant ever since.

What would you like  
to see for kids on W.  
Baltimore St.?

# 1400 BLOCK





## The 1400 Block...

*“Baltimore was a piano town.”*

In the late 1890s, Albert G. Schumacher, a Baltimore native of German descent, operated an “artistic piano and organ tuner” service. He tuned pianos (which cost \$1), repaired all types of pianos, and did piano inspections for potential buyers. He operated out of several locations on West Baltimore Street. Then in 1911, he opened a storefront at 1421 and 1423 W. Baltimore. He was then able to sell pianos and organs in addition to his other services. In more recent history, Sam Blackwell, a Baltimore native, owned and operated Blackman’s Piano Company on the 1400 block of West Baltimore Street. The store opened in 1967 and stayed in operation for over 33 years. Blackwell was known for offering pianos at affordable prices, making piano purchases accessible to many people. In a 1998 Baltimore Sun interview, Blackwell reminisced that at one time there were five piano stores within a few blocks on West Baltimore Street. Pianos were popular purchases after World War II until the 1980s when electronic keyboards became popular. Today Tony King runs Tony’s Treasure Chest at 1429-31 W. Baltimore St. where he advertises “Not Junk... The BEST Junk” and there’s always something interesting... maybe even a piano or keyboard.

“I think it needs to be like a supermarket around here, fresh fruits, vegetables and juice, things that are healthy.” --Lisa Gee, business owner at 1514 W. Baltimore St.

Several grocery stores were once on the 1400 block of West Baltimore at the turn of the twentieth century. One prominent store was the Knatz and Son Grocery, which operated for over 38 years at 1417 West Baltimore. The founder, Phil Knatz Sr., immigrated as a young man from Germany in 1853. A few years later he opened his grocery store at 1417 and eventually his sons joined him in running the family business. After his death, his sons continued the business, with his son Elmer handling the day to day transactions. The Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, commonly called The A&P, also had a grocery store on the block at 1401 West Baltimore Street in the early 1900s. A&P was the country’s largest commercial grocery chain throughout most of the twentieth century. The Knoop brothers owned a grocery store on the 1500 block.

*Could a grocery store return to West Baltimore Street?*



# 1500 BLOCK





# 1525-1527

## W. Baltimore Street: The Three Germans

The Knoop brothers were three melancholy Germans who kept a grocery-store at the northeast corner of Baltimore and Gilmor streets, opposite Thiernau's. It was a dirty place, and we never patronized it, but my brother Charlie and I often lifted apples, sweet potatoes, turnips, etc., from the baskets which stood outside. The Knoops made money, invested it in the coal business, and died rich. In my boyhood only one of them was married. When he died his widow married one of his brothers. —H.L. Menken, *Happy Days*, 1880-1892





# Past

**John Knoop** built a “handsome store and dwelling” of three stories which was made of pressed brick at the northeast corner of Gilmor and West Baltimore Streets in the late 1800s. The oldest brother, John died in 1902 he left most of his estate to his slightly younger brother George Knoop. The third brother, Allmer Knoop was a “well known grocer” in West Baltimore and “beloved husband” of Frieda Knoop. When Allmer died his brother George married his widow. George and Frieda Knoop moved, along with many other successful German Americans in West Baltimore to Baltimore County, where George died of a heart attack in 1914.

According to deed records in 1949 the U.S. seized the Knoop property on West Baltimore Street as the “owners were residents of Germany and therefore they were the nationals of a designated enemy country.” The post-World War II era began a period of decline along Baltimore Street due to a host of trends, such as the rise of the suburbs, white flight, car ownership, and road development.



Have you ever walked past the tiny house which sits at 1504 West Baltimore Street? The Malachi Mills House was built in 1843 and is one of the last wood frame houses in West Baltimore. Malachi Mills (1802-1886) was an African American carpenter, perhaps building his own home. Mills lived and worked with his family in Southwest Baltimore during the 19th century. The Malachi Mills House is a symbol of the long and important history of African Americans on West Baltimore Street.



## *Tony's* Treasure Chest

Not Junk...The **BEST** Junk

**Open 10am – 6pm**

Gifts	Tony King
Pawn	<b>(443) 413-1778</b>
Consignment	1429-31 W. Baltimore Street
Moving & Hauling	Baltimore, MD 21223



# The future of the 1500 block of West Baltimore Street.....?

The Capitol Theater was built in 1921. The original marquee was replaced in the late 1930s with a neon sign that featured large images of the Capitol dome. In the 1964 the theater became vacant. In November 1968 the Baltimore Sun ran a story about the United Western Front's efforts to buy the theater and turn it into a community center focused on recreation and job training. Neyland Vaughn was the head of the UWF, "a militant black organization" serving several neighborhood groups in the Southwest.

The UWF worked with a group of designers from the University of Maryland School of Architecture to re-envisioned the theater as a possible space for co-operative businesses, recreation, and educational for the neighborhood.

However, there were tensions between the UWF and predominantly white groups coming into the neighborhood. Vaughn explains:

"We don't want planners comin' in here tellin' us what we want. We know what we want. We're planners too. We want City Hall to help us with our plans. We'll buy up the houses and fix 'em ourselves if that's what it takes. We don't want conflict. We just want to be left alone to run our program."





**Lisa Gee and Lonnie Coombs,  
business owners on the 1500  
block discuss what they  
would like to see on the 1500  
block...**

And that's what I think, housing for the homeless, more things for kids, a nice market with some healthy food. Mr. Lonnie was talking about some high-end retail stores. I don't know about that because most of the folks around here are first of the month people. They have money, first of the month, and then around the 10th, everybody's struggling, business owners as well.

**--Lisa Gee**

You could get some good investors to say well look, let's put an apartment place in here, and let's charge them \$1300 a month, and the neighborhood would automatically change. Not saying that you would push the low income people out, but you could mingle these two groups of people could actually mingle together, the low income and the high income people. They can mingle. And that's my thing.

**--Loonie Coombs**



## Lisa Gee and Loonie Coombs

I'll be on Baltimore Street until the end. And my undertake is right up the street, so he'll come right here and pick me up, he don't have far to go. Come here, pick up my body, and just take me on up the street. Because I just love this area. And I just want to be a part of the change. I want to be a part of the change that's going to come in this particular block.

--Loonie Coombs

We're hard workers. We're hard workers and we're here everyday. We're here everyday. We're committed to what we do. And that's another thing a lot of the kids around here have learned by watching us. We're here everyday. So that's the one thing I'd like for you to take with you.

--Lisa Gee



# THOUGHTS ON CHANGE

This area has a history, and it has a future. There are a lot of people here that believe in it and see the long game of it. Which is that this is a place that has been in worse situations and will definitely be in better ones. There are things that happen here that are unfortunate that happen in other places in the city, that happen in other places in the country, and other places in the world. That's unfortunate, but it doesn't take away from the beauty of the place and its people.

**--Brooks Long**

**Many thanks to those we interviewed this semester:**

**Lisa Gee & Lonnie Coombs:** (March 26) business owners,  
1514 W. Baltimore St.

**Curtis Eaddy:** (April 2) grew up in Poppleton and still  
works in the Southwest

**Brooks Long:** (April 9) local musician who grew up in  
Franklin Square

**Cecil Clarke:** (April 16) real estate developer, major  
property owner on W. Baltimore St.

**Sarah Littlepage:** (April 23) runs Littlepage's furniture,  
established 1893, with her brother David



