Rethinking West Baltimore's Highway to Nowhere

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Ashley Milburn is a 2007 Open Society Institute Community Fellow. His work around the Highway to Nowhere began in 2007 while he was a student in the Masters of Community Arts at the Maryland Institute College of Art. With the assistance of the West Baltimore Coalition (WBC), he helped establish the first West Baltimore Committee on Arts & Culture as an extension of the WBC. Currently, stakeholders and representatives from both sides of the Highway are developing a cultural plan for the area called the Culture Works and West Baltimore Cultural Space Project. Additional support for this project has come from Bon Secours of Maryland, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts and Operation Reach Out South West. The Culture Works and West Baltimore Cultural Space Project is a program of Fusion Partnerships.

Baltimore, Maryland, in the spring of 1956, was as racial divided as it gets. Blacks could not buy from stories in Downtown Baltimore. Blacks could not go past East Baltimore Street for fear of being chased by gangs of youth white boys and the City was about to close the door on many Blacks with its plans for an East West Highway that went from downtown through the West Baltimore community and stopped there. To many this strip of concrete is known as the Rt. 40 Franklin-Mulberry Corridor, but to residents who live with this failed city planning project, it is known as the Highway to Nowhere. This division began a history of disenfranchisement in the late sixties, loss of community power and identity, and a steady increase of social ills and recourses that still plague West Baltimore today.

Residents of West Baltimore are in the process of rethinking this Highway and making it work for them as a place to build communities rather than divide them.

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