'Death Zone' Profiles

All of the sub-districts in Baltimore, delineated as experiencing "excess death," manifest in their particulars of breakdown, disease, and death, the four-decades-long collapse of the entire metropolitan area. The following two community profiles make the point. They are shown in **Figure 1** by number, which displays 55 "Commmunity Statistical Areas," amalgamated from the 200 census tracts, taking into account the 260 local neighborhoods of Baltimore.

Clifton/Berea (10)—'An Epidemic of Homicide'

"An epidemic of homicide" was the phrase used by the *Baltimore Sun* in a front-page feature on Dec. 12, 2005, covering this area and adjacent neighborhoods, referring to the current high murder rate among black males, ages 14 to 25. However, the generalized conditions for the 12,500 residents (as of 2000), in the five census tracts of the core neighborhoods, make the point that the localized homicide rate is not a "separate" vital statistic, but rather is coherent with the whole disease and death syndrome prevailing here.

Relevant descriptions of this "death zone" are provided from the Census 2000 for Clifton/Berea.

The population as of 2000, which was 98% black, had 55% of its households earning less than $25,000 a year. The median household income was $22,516. This is half the national median household income of $44,000; and also below the Baltimore City median income of $30,000.

The official unemployment rate in 2000 was 18%, which has only worsened since then. Moreover, of the population between the ages of 16 and 64, fully 46% is not in the labor force at all. These people are either incapacitated, behind bars, or just "lost" from the rolls of those seeking work, apart from any bare fraction statistically considered homemakers.

Housing is poor, or in outright breakdown. In 2003, the rental eviction rate was 14.4 per 1,000 people. (This refers to where landlords successfully filed through the courts for eviction; not counted are cases where tenants land out on the street summarily.) At the same time, the vacancy rate among residential properties was 21% in 2003; plus there is a high rate of vacant-and-abandoned housing—neither up for rent nor purchase, but simply boarded up and crumbling. This area is also in the larger vicinity of the medical complex of Johns Hopkins Hospital, which has been buying up property, and holding it—frequently in boarded-up condition—for further bio-medical center expansion.

In 2000, forty-three percent of the households that rented, were paying 30% or more of the income for rents. Of those owning homes, 47% were paying out more than 30% of their income for housing.

Sanitation conditions are poor, including trash in the streets, clogged storm drains, debris, and abandoned cars. In 2003, there were 22 incidents per 1,000 population of reported dirty streets and alleys; 44.6 incidents per 1,000, of abandoned vehicles; and 25.4 incidents of rats per 1,000 people. These rates are very high.

Youth are special victims. They are trapped in an environment of crime and violence.

In 2003, the school absentee rate was significant and rising through the grade levels. referring to those who miss classes, 20 or more days out of the school year for elementary and secondary school. The absentee rates in this neighborhood for 2003 were: third grade—8.82%; fifth grade—13.53%; eighth grade—37.04%; and tenth grade—57.14%. The 2003 dropout rate covering all grades was 13.9% in 2003. The number

FIGURE 1

Baltimore City—55 'Community Statistical Areas'
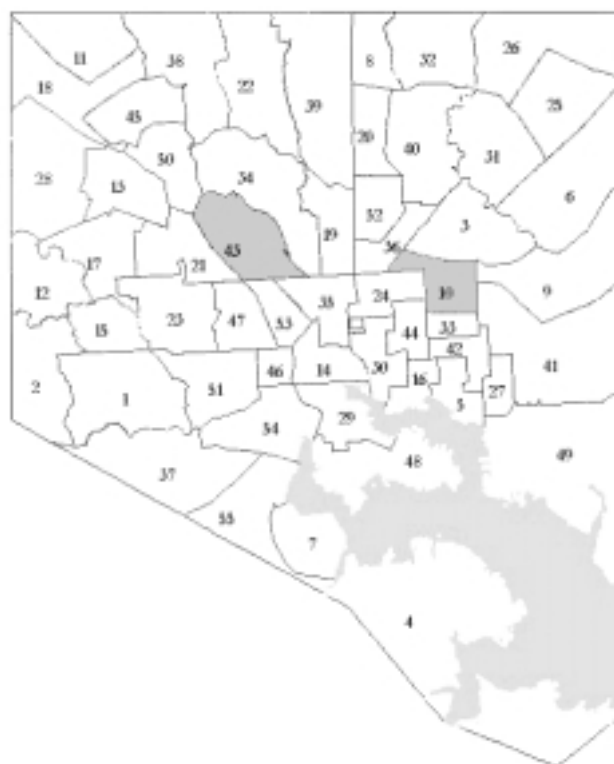
Source: Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. www.bnia.org.

The 55 areas shown here are amalgamations into communities, of the 200 census tracts of Baltimore, into "Community Statistical Areas" to characterize the main features of sub-districts of the City, which span an estimated 260 local neighborhoods. Number 10 shows the neighborhoods of Clifton/Berea; Number 43 shows Southern Park Heights, discussed in the text. The statistics and mapping are done by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance.

Collington Square, in the neighborhood of Clifton/Berea.

of teens who gave birth, per thousand girls between the ages of 15 and 19, was 93.3 in 2003, down from 132.3 in 2000, after concerted interventions through community centers, but still very high.

The juvenile arrest rate is also high, standing at 182.2 per 1,000 youth between ages 10 and 17, in 2003; the year earlier, this rate hit 231.4 per 1,000 youth, with 102.2 for drug-related offenses in 2002. In 2000, overall there was a rate for violent felonies, including murder, of 85 per 1,000 residents (1,063 total crimes) in this community.

Amidst these patterns comes the cycling in and out of prison and jail. Clifton/Berea is one of the six city neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of young men in and out of prison and jail.

In 2001, there were 159 prisoners from the Maryland state system going into this neighborhood, for a ratio of 12.7 returnees per 1,000 residents. They are almost all young black males. Correspondingly, female-headed households account for over 41% of all households here. Over 19% of all households are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients.

Southern Park Heights (43)—Terrible Disease

The extended community of Park Heights is located in northwest Baltimore, and taken at its fullest extent, could be called the single largest neighborhood in the city. Its population is nearly 40,000, living on 1,734 acres. One of its core sub-neighborhoods is Southern Park Heights, discussed below.

As of 2000, what this area is outstanding for, according to expert testimony to Congress that year, is *disease*. Sharon Duncan-Jones, executive director of the Park Reist Corridor Coalition, Inc., gave a graphic description of the situation in testimony on Feb. 14, 2000 to the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Maryland House Committee on Ways and Means. She stressed that this area has the highest rates in all Maryland, for: child maltreatment, crime, infant mortality, substance abuse, juvenile crime, diabetes, and HIV-AIDS.

She also stressed the economic decay as the context from which to understand the disease. "The present economic condition in Park Heights can be linked to past conditions throughout Baltimore," she said. "Beginning in the 1970s, manufacturing jobs had begun to fall. Since 1990, Baltimore has suffered a loss of 63,000 manufacturing jobs. Park Heights has experienced economic decline, with two major companies relocating out of the community and the city: London Fog, a clothing manufacturer, and Park Sausage, a meat manufacturer. Park Heights' unemployment rate is 22%, and it is well above the city's average."

For Southern Park Heights, the situation is extreme. In 2000, its population was 15,761. The description from Community Statistical Area 43, from its four contiguous census tracts, is grim.

The median household income of the population, which is 97.1% black, is $21,218, with 56.3% of households earning less than $25,000. Squeezed to pay even low rents, over 45% of renters pay 30% or more of their income for rent.

The official unemployment rate in 2000 was 15.5%. Of

Baltimore's Southern Park Heights neighborhood, one of the most devastated in the city.

the population between the ages of 16 and 64, fully 43.3% are statistically "not in the labor force."

The condition of housing and sanitation is decrepit in the extreme. The rate of incidents of dirty streets and alleys was 16 per 1,000 people in 2003; of rats, 23 per 1,000 people; and 45 per 1,000, for abandoned vehicles.

The young people are in dire circumstances. The rates in 2003 for those missing 20 or more days of school a year in elementary and secondary school were: third grade—17%; fifth grade—13%; eighth grade—49%; tenth grade—59%. The dropout rate through high school was 12.2%.

In 2003, the juvenile arrest rate—arrests per 1,000 youth ages 10 through 17—stood at 197, with 64 of those drug-related. The number of girls between ages 15 and 19 who gave birth, was 110 in 2003. Domestic and street violence is rampant. In 2000, there were 1,138 reported violent felony crimes, for a rate of 72 per 1,000 residents of this small community.

In 2001, of 4,411 men and women prisoners released to Baltimore City, out of the Maryland state system, 174 of them returned to the small area of Southern Park Heights. This is a ratio of 11 returnees per 1,000 residents. Correspondingly, 40% of the households in this area are headed by females. Over 20% of them are TANF recipients.

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Poverty Kills

by Ned Rosinsky, M.D.

Economic collapse kills people. Poverty destroys societies; and social collapse, at its end stages, involves sudden downward changes in people's health, due to factors such as loss of jobs, loss of health insurance, homelessness, breakup of families, resort to substance abuse, psychological collapse, and descent into crime and incarceration. These various downward changes strongly interact. Loss of job can directly cause loss of health insurance, as well as homelessness due to inability to pay rent or mortgage. Homelessness can contribute to family breakup, and with this loss of family support, can come psychological collapse.

Psychological collapse and family breakup can lead to substance abuse. Substance abuse can in turn lead to job loss, worsen psychological collapse, and induce a resort to crime to pay for the drugs, which in turn can lead to more psychological collapse and more disruption to the family.

These strong interactions set up a spiralling downward process, ultimately leading to the total collapse of individuals, families, and larger social groups and layers of society. These factors also result in poor nutrition, exposure to infectious disease, violence, and lack of medical care for treatable illnesses, all culminating in high death rates.

Health conditions in the City of Baltimore illustrate this collapse process in grisly detail; the death-rate patterns in Baltimore show the disastrous effects of economic collapse.

The study presented here compares death rates to poverty rates, using data from the 1990 and 2000 national censuses, including data on population and household income levels in each of Baltimore's 201 census tracts. (Due to some tracts being sub-divided in two, or missing data, the total number of census tracts used in any part of the study may vary from 199 to 201.)

The median income in Baltimore is currently approximately $34,000 per household; in 2000 it was $30,000. This study uses a measure of poverty as the percent of households with income below $25,000 for the 1991 data, and an inflation-equivalent $30,000 for the 2000 data. (**Figures 1 and 2** show the pattern of census tracts in the various household percentage categories of income.) The figure of $25,000 is not crucial to the study, because as poverty increases and the percent of households below $25,000 increases, so also does the percentage below $20,000, and so on.

This percentage of poverty is then compared to the total number of deaths that occur in each census tract, as reported by the Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.