

The landscapes, peoples and industries of Akron have a diverse history, from the native peoples who used the portage between the Cuyahoga and the Tuscarawas Rivers to the scar cut through a predominantly African American neighborhood in the name of urban renewal.

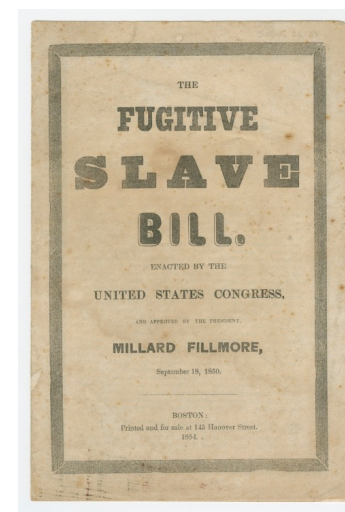


# 1850s-1860s

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The 1850 Census revealed that Akron's black population had grown to 73 people, but the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act caused that number to decline until after the Civil War.

According to the 1860 Census, only 24 black people were living in Akron.



# 1870s-1920s

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Akron saw a boom in the rubber industry thanks to key individuals like Dr. Benjamin Franklin “BF” Goodrich, Harvey Firestone, Jr., and brothers F.A & C.W. Seiberling. This industrial boom made Akron the “Rubber Capital of the World,” requiring thousands of workers. Akron soon became the largest growing city in the United States. Rooms were rented by the shift and tire was king.

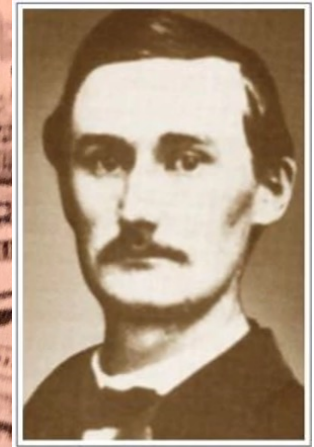


Photo courtesy of Summit County Historical Society of Akron, OH

# 1920s-1940s

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1920, George Matthews became the first African American hotel and barber shop owner in Akron. His hotel, located on North Howard Street, welcomed entertainers to the area with a safe place to stay, including performers and travellers, adding to Akron's growing jazz scene.



Photo courtesy of Summit County Historical Society of Akron, OH

# 1950s

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After WWII, Akron witnessed a second Great Migration. The community's African American resident numbers grew rapidly with plentiful jobs. Unfortunately, most skilled laborers were kept from higher-paying jobs reserved for their white counterparts.



Dr. Morgan at center with his bride, jazz singer Dolores Parker Morgan, and their friends, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Loray White



Photos courtesy of Morgan family and Akron Beacon Journal

# 1962 - 1965

In 1962, the idea of the Innerbelt was created mimicking urban renewal plans across the nation. Sadly, most projects targeted African American neighborhoods for new expressways.

When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, Akron unveiled its new renewal maps near the University of Akron campus.



Photo courtesy of the Akron Beacon Journal

# 1965

In 1965, the Innerbelt project is listed to cost \$47.4 million with work to begin within 2 years. The State Highway Department scheduled to pay 75% of the project.

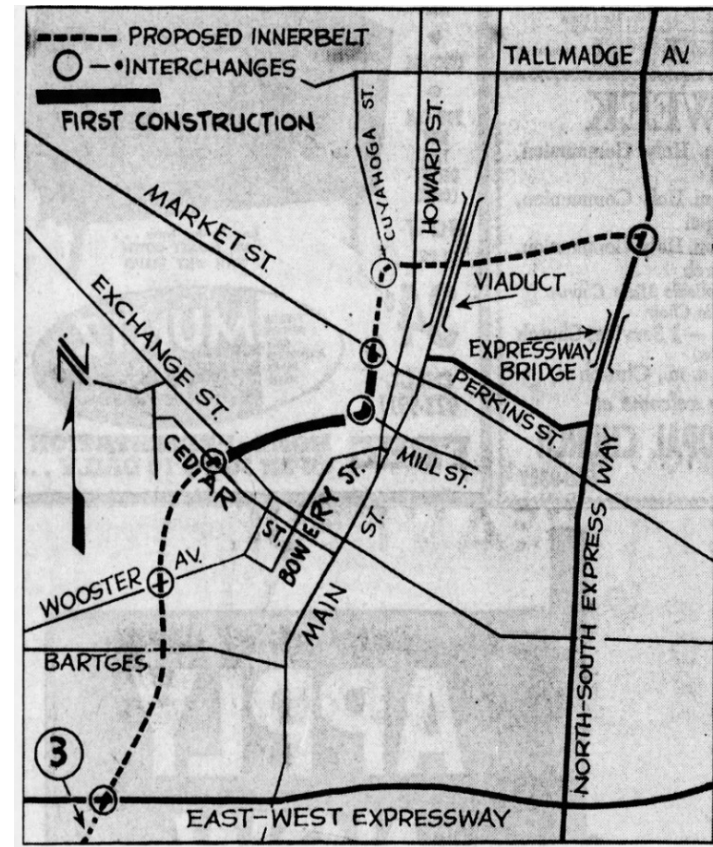


Photo courtesy of the Akron Beacon Journal

# 1966

James “Jim” Williams brings together his Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brothers and applied the federal government to establish housing to assist African Americans looking for homes in Akron.

Alpha Phi Alpha Homes built the James R. Williams Towers the year Mayor Ballard chose to extend the Innerbelt southerly.





# 1967

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Newspaper accounts share that the Innerbelt will assist with heavy traffic flow downtown, but what about the residents displaced?

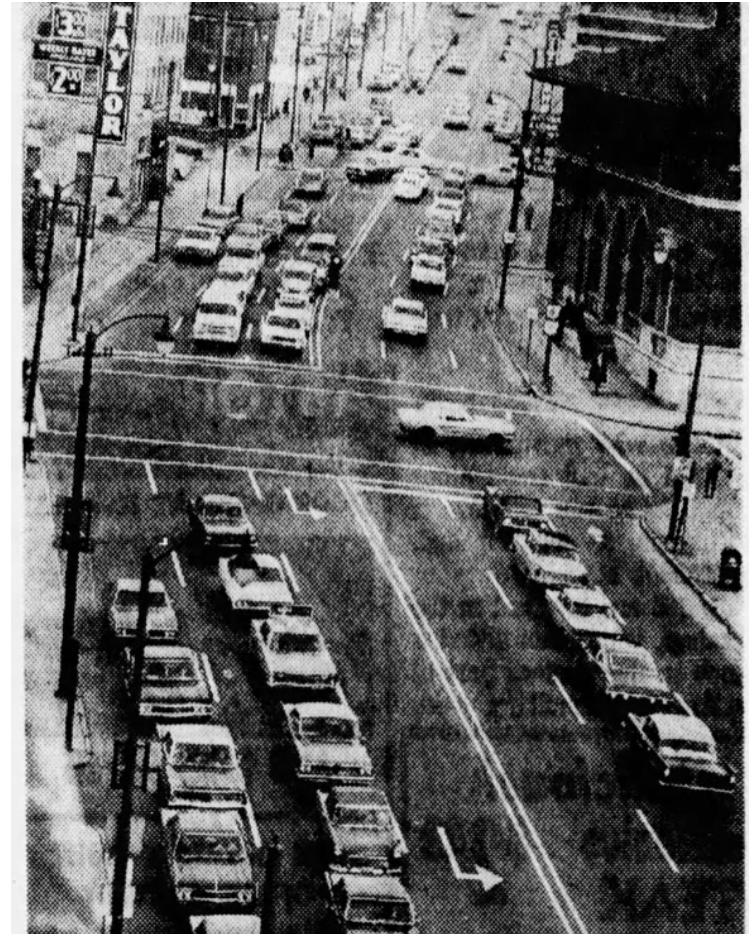
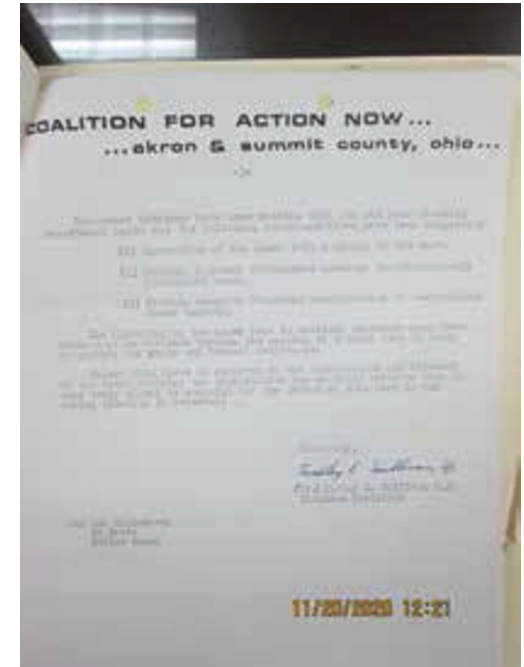
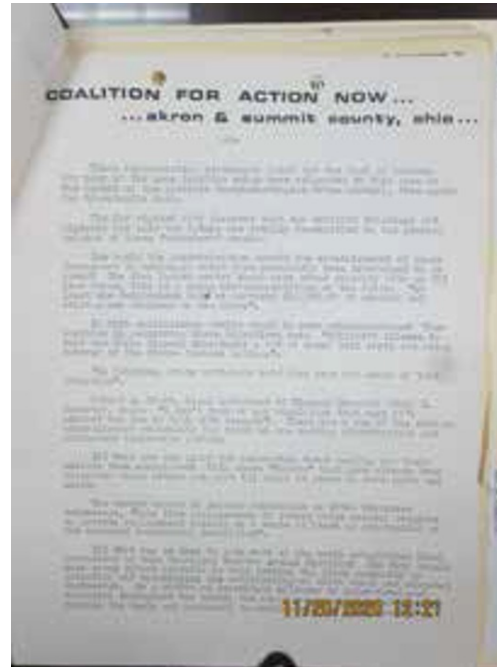


Photo courtesy of the Akron Beacon Journal

# 1969

The Coalition for Action Now steps in to assist Akron residents.



Photos courtesy of the City of Akron

# 1971

Acquisition for the Innerbelt began.

Entire communities and notable locations like the Wooster Avenue Church, Howe School on W. Bowery, Whelton Drug Store on Wooster Ave, and the Salvation Army's Locust St. Headquarters were wiped off the map.



Photos courtesy of The University of Akron Archival Services



Photos courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal



Photos courtesy of The University of Akron Archival Services



Photos courtesy of The University of Akron Archival Services

# 1975

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The State of Ohio agreed to begin construction on the Innerbelt.

Many African American families had rented their homes so they had no payment for being forced from their neighborhoods and limited housing options in their price range.

While many residents are displaced by the new expressway, it becomes a location for promotional and fundraising events including the City's 150th anniversary and continuing through today.

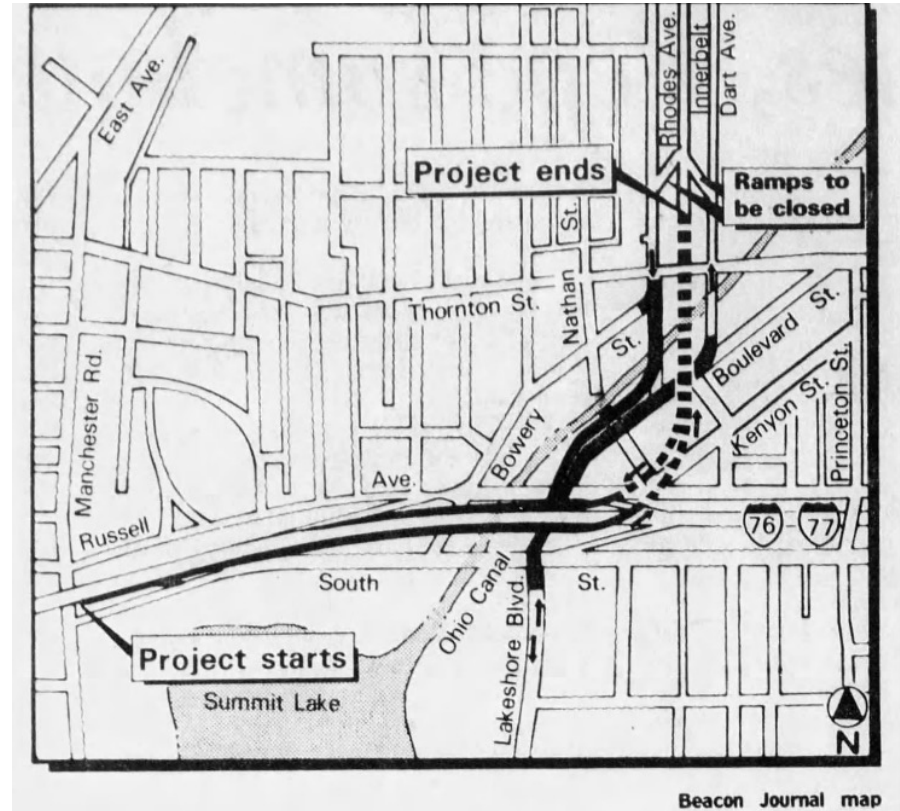


Photos courtesy of the City of Akron

# 1983

Akron and the Ohio Department of Transportation continued their work to connect the Innerbelt over two decades after the concept was first presented to the public. Residents continue to lose land to eminent domain.

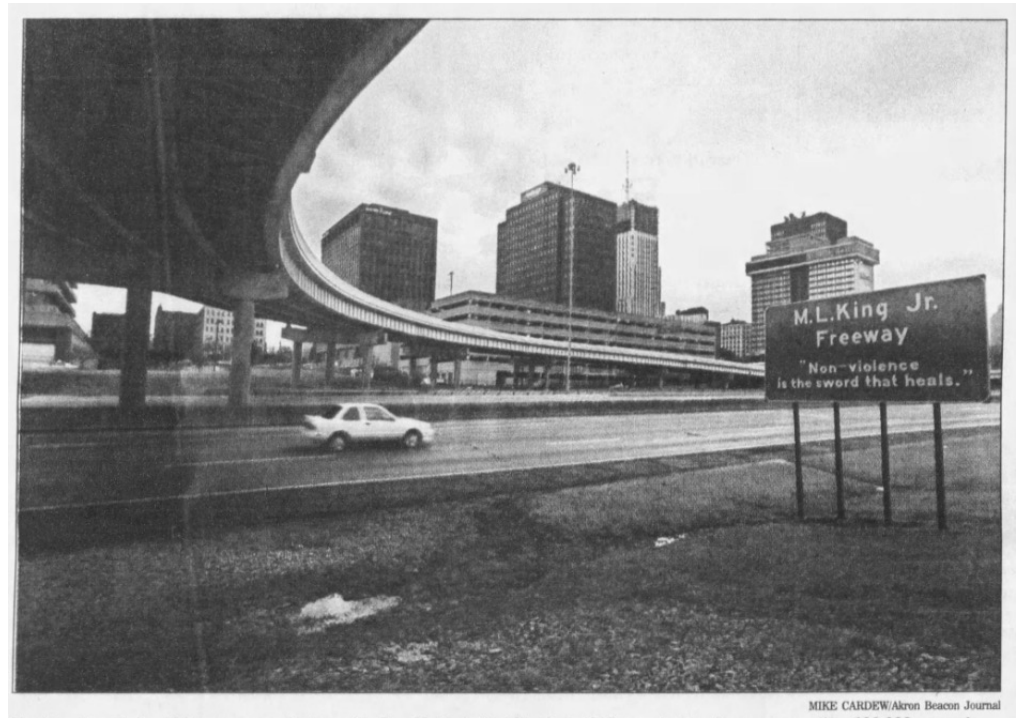
The work will continue for another 3 years.



Photos courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal

# 1993

The Innerbelt is renamed the  
Martin Luther King Freeway.

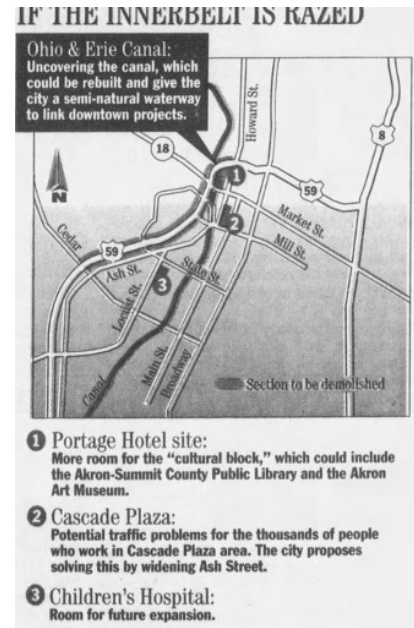


Photos courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal

# Akron mayor urges demolition of highway to develop property

## 1999

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic urges redevelopment of the Innerbelt.



Photos courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal

# 2015

San Francisco artist Hunter Franks coordinated 500 Plates, a meal on the Innerbelt in October 2015 to bring residents of all of Akron's neighborhoods together. Ace Epps read his poem, Food for Thought. The event was funded in part by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

## COMMUNITY MEAL UNITES NEIGHBORHOODS



Residents gather Sunday around a 500-foot table on a closed section of the Akron Innerbelt during 500 Plates, a shared community meal for residents of Akron's 22 neighborhoods. | ERIN MC LAUGHLIN/Special to the Beacon Journal

Photos courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal



# 2017

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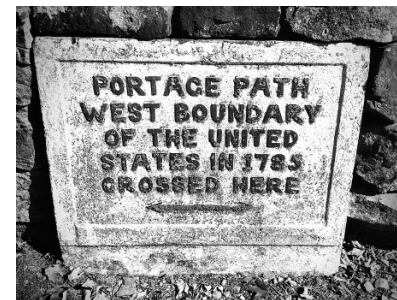
**Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan  
hosts a press conference  
with Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor  
announcing the decommission  
of the Innerbelt with plans for  
redevelopment in the future..**



Photo courtesy of Akron Beacon Journal

The ownership and development of the landscape have been a power struggle from the recognition of the potential of the portage path trail to the destruction of neighborhoods for the sake of interstate urban renewal.

Reconnecting Our Community, the initiative to reimagine part of the Innerbelt, will help create a new vision for a vibrant place that reconnects communities and honors what once was here.



Photos courtesy of Summit County Historical Society of Akron, OH and Metro Parks Serving Summit County