

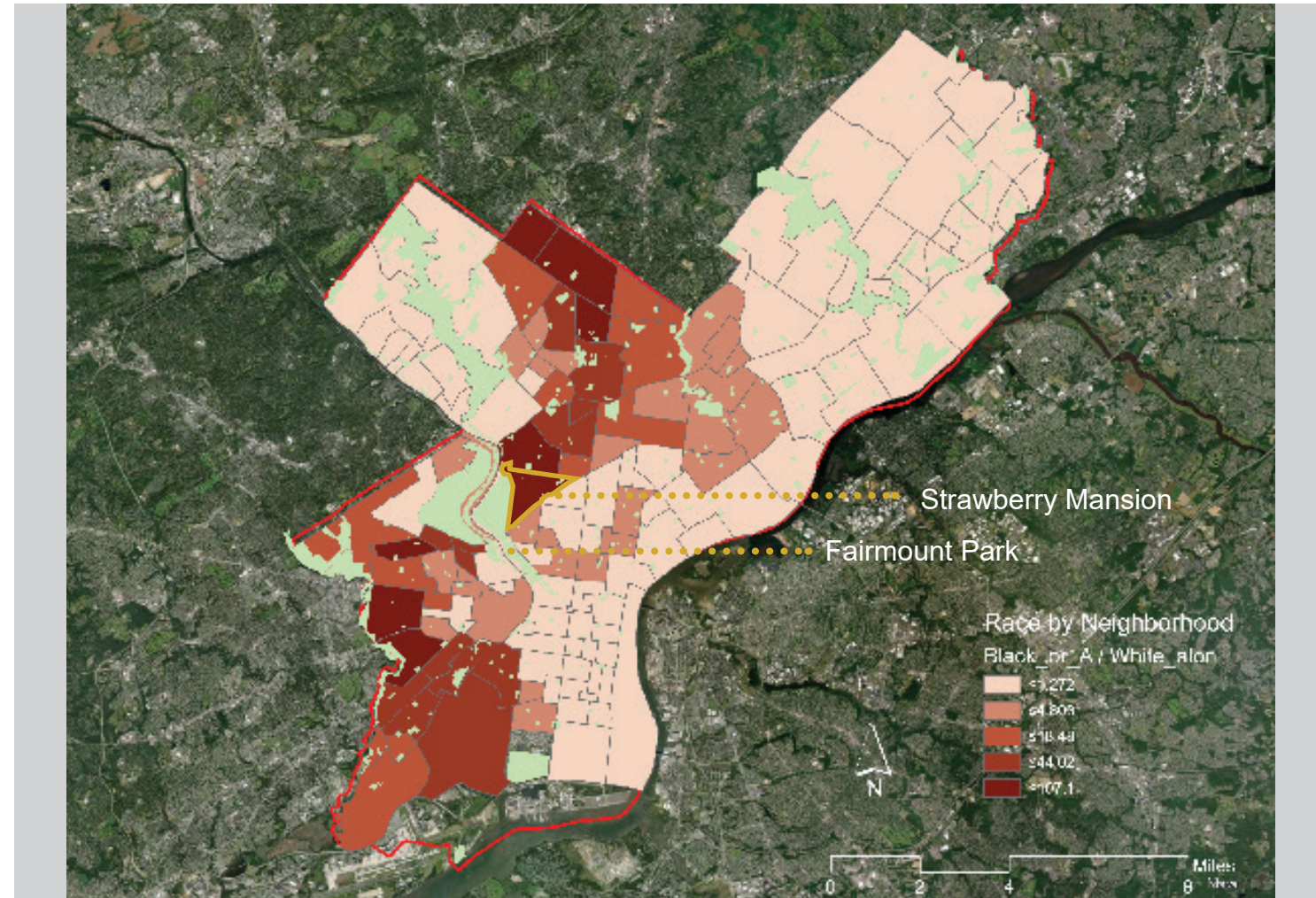
REIMAGINING FAIRMOUNT PARK
JAKE TIERNAN



IMAGINING A FUTURE AROUND FAIRMOUNT PARK

How Fairmount Park Can Provide For Surrounding Residents

Jake Tiernan



Race by Neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

INTRODUCTION

In 1861 King Charles II of England ceded land Southwest of New Jersey to William Penn in order to repay a debt owed to his father. A devout quaker, Penn promptly began to plan a city based on quaker ideals of equality, regardless of race or gender, alongside surveyor general Thomas Holme. Central to this vision was a rectangular street grid in which a publicly accessible greenspace would sit at the center of each block¹.

Today, 95% of residents within Philadelphia still live within walking distance to a park². However, proximity does not guarantee accessibility and Philadelphia, like much of the rest of the country, suffers from a

history where parks are often exclusionary spaces.

To create a just and truly accessible park system, these inequities must be explored fully; re-imagining a park not just as a place for recreation, but instead as a fully functional entity that can meet the community's needs. In the case of Philadelphia, Fairmount Park is reenvisioned as a place for gathering as well as provision, particularly focused on the neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion that lies adjacent to Fairmount Park and has historically been ignored.

1. "William Penn's Philadelphia Plan | The Cultural Landscape Foundation". 2021. Tclf.Org. <https://tclf.org/landscapes/william-penn-philadelphia-plan>.
 2. "Everyone Should Have A Park Within A 10-Minute Walk Of Home". 2021. The Trust For Public Land. <https://www.tpl.org/city/philadelphia-pennsylvania-weapon-in-the-war-on-dumping/>.

CONTEXT

Divisions of city and nature extend beyond forests and rivers, and to the people who inhabit them. Rhetoric pushed by champions of parks and conservation within America in the 20th century, such as Teddy Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold, promoted a view in which non-white, non-land-owning, urban dwelling people could not appreciate the sublime beauty of nature, as they were either too primitive or lacked the moral fiber to do so. This rhetoric can be traced in how and where cities have historically invested in their parks, Philadelphia included. In turn, how people use and experience their outdoor spaces showcases the pervasiveness of this rhetoric even now⁴.

ISSUES

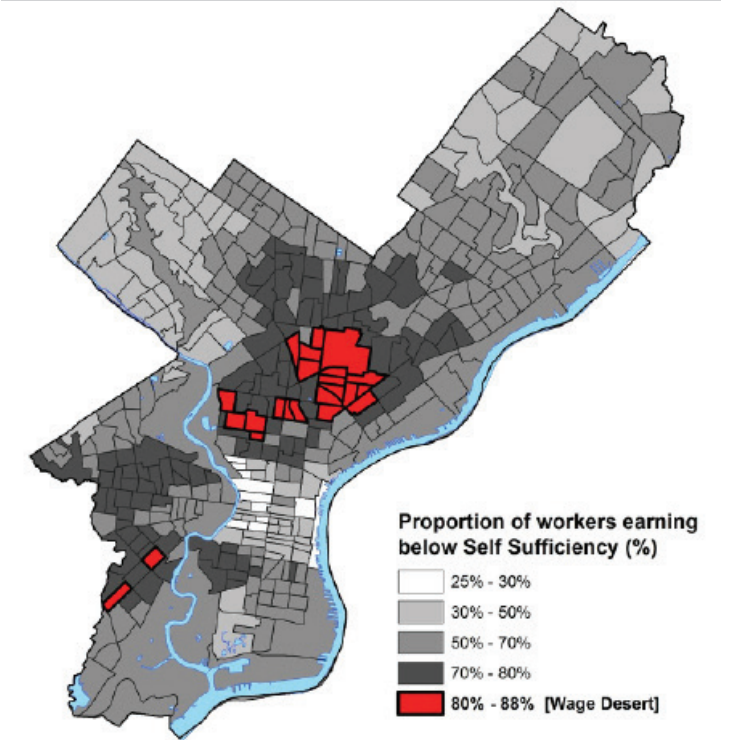
These views eventually evolved into legislation, as is the case with the first hunting licenses. Many Southern states, such as Georgia in 1863, first introduced hunting licenses as a way to keep Northerners from interacting with enslaved Africans and indigenous populations. In the post-civil war Jim Crow South, the hunting license then evolved as a way to force recently freed individuals into share-cropping by restricting their ability to gain economic independence through hunting and trapping³.

The restriction of what state-owned natural spaces then began to take shape. Whereas land once existed in a mutualistic relationship between the individual and the landscape, with the individual taking what they needed and stewarding it in return, there now existed an entity that sought to control that relationship. That control was enacted to keep the race and class deemed unfit by the "founding fathers of conservation" removed.

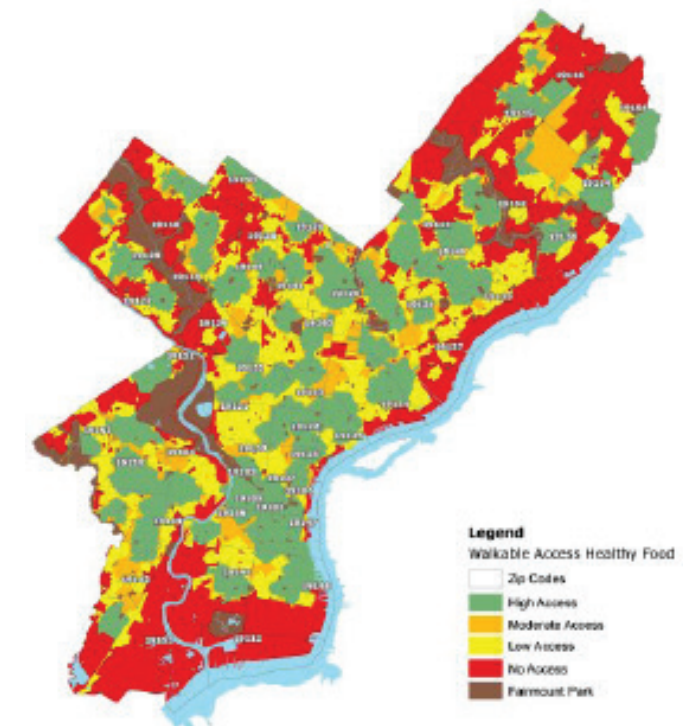
To ensure this plan worked, legislation was needed. Only it could not be as blatant as the language and ideas behind the original hunting licenses, so more codified measures had to be taken.

Take, for example, the restrictions placed on Fairmount Park. Philadelphia's largest park system, Fairmount splits much of the city, weaving its way between Philadelphia's low income, minority populations and its white populations. While these populations have different levels of access to quality of the park,

3. Giltner, Scott E. 2010. *Hunting And Fishing In The New South*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
 4. Muñoz, David. 2020. "Antiracism In Conservation". Presentation, The Pennsylvania State University, 2020.



Wage Deserts in Philadelphia. 5. "Food Deserts And Wage Deserts: The Importance Of Metaphor In Policy And Activism". 2021. Metropolitcs.Org. <https://metropolitcs.org/Food-Deserts-and-Wage-Deserts-The.html>.



Walkable Access to Healthy Food in Philadelphia. 6. <https://metropolitcs.org/Food-Deserts-and-Wage-Deserts-The.html>

they also face drastically different circumstances in their neighborhoods around it. Strawberry Mansion, a predominantly Black, poor neighborhood alongside the Fairmount's Northeast side, is stuck in the center of a food desert^{5,6}. The park has a plethora of available options in this category, as shown by the need for U.S. Department of Agriculture's sharpshooters to cull deer every winter⁷. Philadelphia park rules, however, prohibit harvesting anything from the park⁸. While it is not as blatant as the language of the hunting license, the message is clear. Fairmount Park is not meant for residents of neighborhoods like Strawberry Mansion.

Design Intent

To remedy this relationship, the Fairmount Park, and by extension the neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion and city of Philadelphia at large, must be rethought. A new relationship with nature emerges, one in which the park and city are transformed to provide for surrounding residents. They, in turn, offer stewardship for the land, blurring the artificially constructed boundary between human and nature.

To do this, problems such as disused lots and increasing flooding due to climate change are reimagined based on already existing community organizations in Strawberry Mansion and Philadelphia at large.

From there, a future is projected in which the residents live in tandem with Fairmount Park and the fluctuations of the Schuylkill River. Where cars and other crumbling infrastructure can no longer travel due to flooded highways, horses and boats provide access to navigating premier fishing spots throughout the city. The deer population in Fairmount is no longer culled by state agencies that simply dispose of the bodies, but harvested by community members to provide a rich, healthy source of protein while also keeping the deer population to a level sustainable within Fairmount. Finally, vacant lots and storefronts are reimagined as agrarian centers, where residents can work through aquaponics and vertical farming to grow and harvest their own food locally.

7. "Philadelphia Will Close Large City Parks At Night For Annual Deer Kill". 2021. Philadelphia Inquirer. <https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia-deer-kill-curfew-city-parks-fairmount-sharpshooters-20201127.html>.
 8. "Rules And Regulations | Philadelphia Parks & Recreation". 2021. City Of Philadelphia. <https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-parks-recreation/about/rules-and-regulations/>.

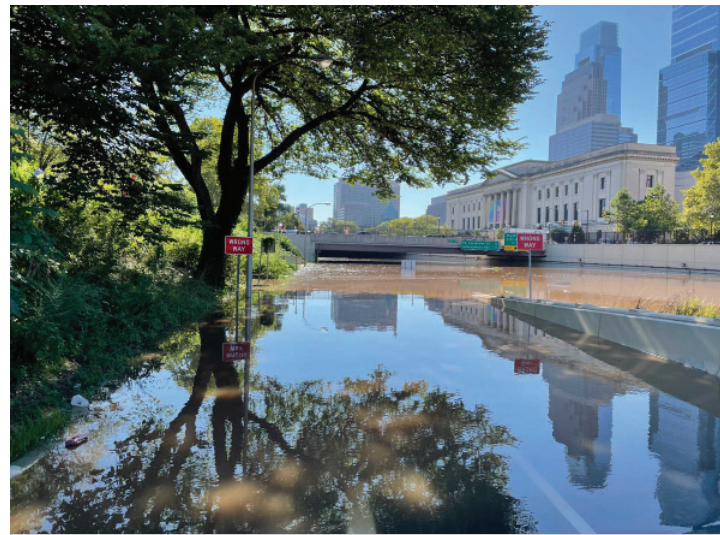


Image Caption 1. Under-utilized lots abound in Strawberry Mansion. 2. After tornadoes this past summer, the Benjamin Franklin parkway was flooded and acted as an extension of the Schuylkill River. 3. Residents in Strawberry Mansion have been active in creating community gardens.



Image Caption Many Philadelphians already fish along the Schuylkill River, as pictured above, but not many for sustenance. The Fletcher Street Riding Club in Philadelphia exists currently as a leisure and character building activity, but has become an integral part of Strawberry Mansion's identity.
 1. <https://magazine.hhd.psu.edu/2021/10/02/can-parks-address-inequity/>
 2. <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2017/02/fletcher-street-riding-club/515520/>

Strawberry Mansion streets and storefronts reimaged as spaces for agriculture and gathering.



Community gardens are utilized as Aquaponics spaces, offering residents fresh, healthy produce as well as fresh fish bred in this set-up.



Deer in Fairmount Park are harvested by residents instead of culled,



Increased flooding of the Schuylkill River due to climate change becomes an opportunity for residents to fish further up the river, potentially bringing in larger, and different, catches.



New structures span the river, allowing fishermen easier access as they harvest . Furthermore, it provides easier access to climb out of the water, meeting the Fletcher Street Riding Club who can then take their catch back to Strawberry Mansion and distribute it locally.

