

# GORDON PLAZA TIMELINE

## 1909-1939

Agriculture Street Landfill (ASL) opens. It will eventually receive up to half of New Orleans' trash, including large amounts of industrial waste. Widespread use of disinfectants to control flies, rats, smells emanating from the dump as the city triples the incinerator's capacity.

## 1948

Louisiana state law prohibits open-air landfills. The City of New Orleans "sanitizes" the fill with weekly applications of carcinogenic chemicals including DDT, Malathion, Diazinon to circumvent the new law.

## 1951-1958

Neighborhood residents sue the City for negligent operation of the ASL as City Council members publicly discuss transforming the ASL into a housing development. ASL closes as it reaches capacity and garbage is redirected 10 blocks away, to the newly constructed Florida Avenue Incinerator.

## 1965

ASL reopens for six months to accommodate more debris from Hurricane Betsy.

## 1974-1978

Under the administrations of Mayors "Moon" Landrieu and his successor "Dutch" Morial, the City developed plans for elderly and low-cost housing on the former ASL, in part by applying for federal funding.



## 1978-1981

Construction of single-family homes, apartments in Press Park, and the Senior Center in Gordon Plaza are underway. By 1981, homeowners and renters have moved into the neighborhood.

## 1983

Soil tests at site proposed for Robert R. Moton Elementary School find potentially hazardous materials.

## 1985

Groundbreaking ceremonies for Moton Elementary School postponed over contamination concerns.

State environmentalists recommend air and soil testing for Gordon Plaza.

Gordon Plaza residents begin seeking relocation because of potential exposure to toxins and poor construction.

## 1986

EPA conducts tests based on 1982 Hazard Ranking System (HRS), focusing mainly on lead. Construction of Moton Elementary School cleared to proceed after excavation and replacement of two feet of top soil.

## 1987

Moton Elementary School opens.

## 1993-1994

Testing following a sewage break at Moton Elementary reveals high levels of lead and other known carcinogens in the soil. Gordon Plaza residents file a class-action lawsuit against the City of New Orleans. EPA test results qualify Gordon Plaza, Press Park, and Moton Elementary School for status as a Superfund site. EPA updates HRS model and ASL is added to National Priorities List in August 1994.

## 2001

EPA replaces two feet of topsoil throughout Gordon Plaza. Some homeowners refuse remediation since it fails to address the devaluation of their homes and unsafe living conditions.

## 2005

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Gordon Plaza residents' homes are flooded, likely washing away much of the EPA's topsoil.

## 2006

Half of the proposed monetary settlement is awarded to each of the nine original plaintiffs. Meanwhile, remaining residents are barred from receiving federal aid for post-Katrina reconstruction due to the neighborhood's Superfund status.

## 2018

To compensate for their exposure to hazardous materials, Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) is ordered to pay \$12 million to former students of Moton Elementary School. Every student is awarded \$1000 for each year they attended Moton Elementary. With help from the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, Gordon Plaza residents file first successful federal lawsuit against Mayor Mitch Landrieu and the City of New Orleans.

## ????

**WHEN WILL WE SEE FULLY FUNDED RELOCATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF GORDON PLAZA ON THIS TIMELINE? IT IS LONG OVERDUE.**

**Background Image** Agriculture Street landfill, April 4, 1939, WPA Photography Collection, New Orleans Public Library

**Inset** Gordon Plaza Single Family Dedication, Mayor Ernest N. "Dutch" Morial (center); Councilman Philip Ciaccio (right), n.d. City Archives, Ernest N. Morial Photograph Collection, New Orleans Public Library.

**Timeline** researched by History of Environmental Justice students at the University of New Orleans, in conjunction with the Humanities Action Lab at Rutgers- Newark. Produced in collaboration with Gordon Plaza residents and People's Assembly Phase 2.