



**Milton B. Lewis' House
Before**



Milton "B for Bad" Lewis

The work we had ahead of us.



Day One: Hard at work.



End of day one and we are still smiling.

Day Two



The primitive means we resorted to after Will broke the sledgehammer.



The new fence.



The finished product.



Ms. Perry, our gracious interviewee.

Our trip to East St. Louis changed our perceptions of the area. We had expected to see debris everywhere, loitering, and numerous abandoned/broken in buildings. While these elements still existed their presence wasn't overwhelming, as we had surmised. In fact there were parts of East St. Louis that we felt resembled our hometowns. Yet some of the hostilities of the East St. Louis environment were still prevalent. Graffiti, buildings that were boarded up, vacant lots, litter, and deeply entrenched social attitudes continue to suppress the area.

The social issues that struck us the most are: segregation, inequality, and fiscal crisis. East St. Louis' very physical and social composition suggests segregation. The community is 98.5% African American and there is very little investment by middle and upper class individuals and businesses. White and green flight are exemplified in these neighborhoods. The socialization of inequality dives so deep that the members of the community themselves have internalized the racism, and see integration as the only way out. Fiscal crisis, (or corruption), in the city's government is also shown through the minimal benefits the community has received through the tax revenues from the Casino Queen. The culmination of all these issues enforces a downward spiral that is hard to stop.

Just like the weeds that ESLARP volunteers pull out year after year, these problems are deeply rooted. Only with persistence and numbers can their growth be stopped. Residents like Ms. Perry, hope that the younger generations of East St. Louis will invest themselves and their time in making their home a strong, healthy, and vibrant community.