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## A ‘Black Tax’ Costs US Cities Millions They Can’t Afford.

**Places like Memphis, where schools are crumbling, pay more when they borrow on Wall Street.**

Althea Greene walks under exposed pipes and into an auditorium, where the chairs are broken and splintering. Treadwell Middle School, built in 1943, looked pretty shabby when Greene was a student here in Memphis 50 years ago. On this August morning, Greene laments that little, if anything, has changed. “We’re lucky it’s still standing,” she says.

No doubt. That same month, a library’s ceiling collapsed in another Memphis school. It had been built 90 years ago. Greene is touring Treadwell because she’s vice chair of the school board, responsible for the 110,000 Memphis children in Tennessee’s largest school system. At another building she visits later that day, water leaks through the ceiling, seeping under the tiles of a classroom and rendering it unfit for students. Not far away, a burst water pipe overflowed into a high school football field, leaving the team to practice in the mud.

There’s a familiar reason the Memphis-Shelby County schools are in sorry shape: Lacking basics such as air conditioning, locks, intercoms, and outdoor lighting, they face $400 million in deferred maintenance. The system relies partly on local property taxes, and its students tend to come from poor families.

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