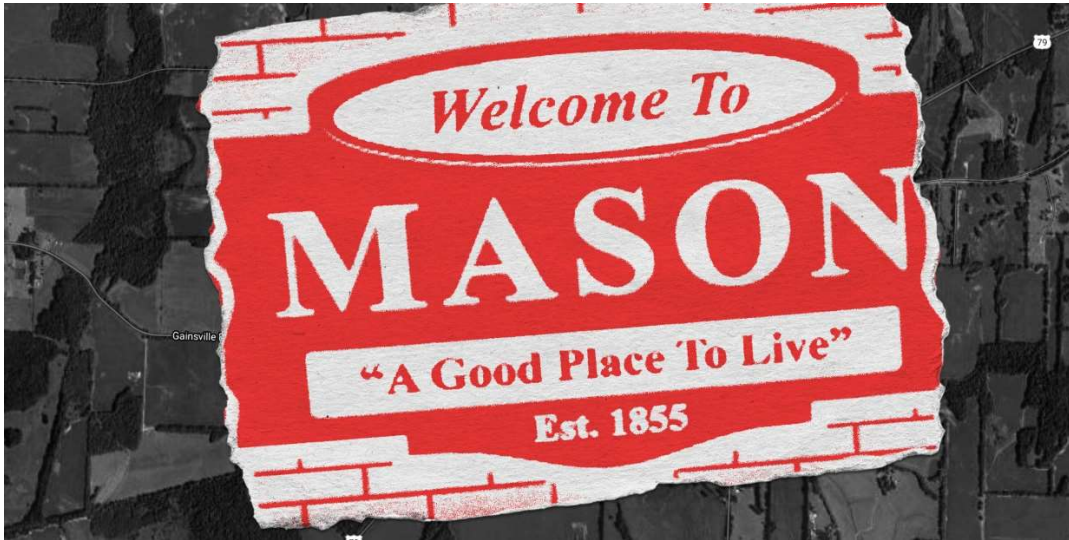


## Opinion

## Why Tennessee comptroller's racist 'hostile takeover' of a Black town may fail after all

Mason, Tennessee, a predominantly African American town of about 1,500, should benefit from the construction of a \$5.6 billion Ford plant planned nearby.



— As the majority-Black town of Mason, Tenn., is set to benefit from a planned Ford plant, state Comptroller Jason Mumpower, a white Republican, has argued the town should surrender its charter. [MSNBC](#)

March 24, 2022, 12:08 PM CDT

**By Anthea Butler, MSNBC Opinion Columnist**

Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower, a white Republican, took a step back Tuesday from his racist plan to [essentially erase from the map Mason, Tennessee](#), a predominantly African American town of about 1,500 that stands to benefit from the construction of a \$5.6 billion Ford plant planned nearby. Accusing Mason of 20 years of financial mismanagement, Mumpower threatened to block town leaders from spending more than \$100 without his say so and sent property owners in town a letter arguing that “government is not working in Mason.”

“In my opinion, it’s time for Mason to relinquish its charter,” he said.

---

### His demand that Mason surrender its charter was reminiscent of historical expropriation of African American land.

But [according to the Tennessee Lookout](#), on Tuesday, after what he called a “very positive meeting” with Mason officials, Mumpower acknowledged the steps they’ve taken to get out of debt and said his office’s financial oversight could end as soon as July. But Mumpower’s statement that oversight could end soon doesn’t eliminate the stench of racism that’s accompanied his dealings with the town. His demand that Mason surrender its charter was

reminiscent of historical expropriation of African American land and resources by white political leaders and landowners.

"People try to tap-dance around it but the truth is this is happening because of who we are," Virginia Rivers, the vice mayor of Mason, a Black woman, [told the Tennessee Lookout](#) before Tuesday's meeting.

"This is our home. We were born and raised here. The majority of the town is homegrown people that live here," [she said](#). "He is trying to conquer and divide us. It's akin to a hostile takeover and it's not hard to figure out why here, why now."

In response to Mumpower's statement that he saw evidence Tuesday that Mason has been paying off its debt, Rivers said that evidence was available from the start, but Mumpower didn't request it. "He just came in with a demand," [she said](#).

---

#### How African-Americans are still being kicked off their land



Tennessee law allows for the comptroller's office to take financial control over municipalities it deems fiscally irresponsible, but a [spokesman for that office said](#) it was "unprecedented for us to publicly call for a town charter to be relinquished." In Mason's case, the comptroller demanded the city give up its charter just as the predominantly African American town stood to make millions in revenue from a new neighbor.

"For at least 20 years, Mason has been poorly managed regardless of who was leading the town," a [March 17 news release from the comptroller's office said](#). "Comptroller Jason Mumpower believes Mason's citizens and taxpayers deserve an accountable government that is capable of providing services and improvements to the community."

All of Mason's leadership was white until 2016. Now the mayor, vice mayor and all but one of its six aldermen are Black, the [Tennessee Lookout reported](#). If the problem goes back 20 years, town officials say, why didn't the comptroller's office try to take over the town when white people were responsible for the financial mismanagement? Or before Ford announced its plan to make one of the country's largest manufacturing investments in a new town near Mason called Blue Oval City? Given Mason's proximity to the planned Ford plant and the fact that a highway and railroad to the plant pass through town, "there's no way Mason won't prosper and grow," Rivers said last week. "And now they want to take it away from us."

## Why didn't the comptroller's office try to take over the town when white people were responsible for the financial mismanagement?

Mason is 60 percent Black and heavily Democratic. If the city is disbanded, residents will only belong to Tipton County, [where 75 percent of residents are white](#) and 71 percent voted Republican in the 2020 presidential election.

Mason was founded in 1869 and is home to many whose ancestors were enslaved in the area. Since the Civil War, Black communities (in similar fashion to the Indigenous communities before them) have been destroyed with a range of methods including including [violence](#), dishonest legal maneuvering and even the construction of [freeways](#). Only recently was the beachfront property in Manhattan Beach, California, taken from Willa and Charles Bruce in 1924 through eminent domain [returned](#) to their descendants. While the situation in Mason is different, it was still an attempted takeover of that which belongs to African Americans.

### More from MSNBC Daily

Must reads from Today's list



DISINGENUOUS

**Josh Hawley wanted a gotcha moment. How Ketanji Brown Jackson shut him down.**

Joyce Vance



SHAMELESS POLITICS

**Eric Greitens' shamelessness puts these hypocritical Republicans in a bind**

Charlie Sykes

What is the right of a city to exist? Does the answer change if the city is predominately African American and about to benefit from a lucrative business enterprise bringing money and jobs?

What's happening in Tennessee is disturbing. The state has already been making regrettable policy decisions related to what subjects should be taught in school and how the state should address the pandemic. Combined with the hostility shown to Mason, Tennessee is looking less like a site for a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant for Ford's electric trucks and more like a state that's just emerged from the Civil War.

### Subscribe to MSNBC Daily

Get the Daily Roundup delivered right to your inbox

Enter your email

[SIGN UP](#)

THIS SITE IS PROTECTED BY RECAPTCHA  
[PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [TERMS OF SERVICE](#)



Anthea Butler

