

**A Planned Black Community:
Washington Shores and Black Suburbanization in Orlando, Florida**

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Suburbanization in the United States, particularly after World War II, has had profound impacts on American society. Scholars have examined the role of the federal government in the post-WWII era in facilitating suburbanization by providing loans through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Many white Americans benefited from housing policies that incentivized them to leave central cities to build new single-family housing in newly forming suburban developments. Kenneth Jackson, in his 1985 book *Crabgrass Frontier* points to the uniqueness of American suburbs. He sums up suburbanization as “affluent and middle-class Americans [living] in suburban areas that are far from their work places, in homes they own and in the center of yards that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous.”¹ Yet, while Jackson acknowledged the role of racism that excluded African Americans and other minorities from suburban areas, he concurs that Black suburbanization did not become a major phenomenon until the 1970s as more minorities entered the middle class.²

However, Andrew Wiese in his 2002 book *Places of Their Own* challenges the notion of African Americans as latecomers to the post-war suburban wave by stating that Black residents lived in and moved to suburbs throughout the twentieth century. He argues that the patterns of Black suburbanization occurred differently from whites in both intention and outcome as African Americans of all economic and social classes participated in this suburban wave, though limited by racism and discrimination. In the South, Black suburbs often occurred on the fringes of

¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6.

² William Wilson’s 1998 book on Hamilton Park as a Black suburban development in Dallas, Texas serves as one early exception of scholarship that examined Black suburbanization. Jackson, 301; William H. Wilson, *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

cities.³ Wiese's book helped to shape studies of Black suburbanization in the twentieth century by showing the agency of Black residents in suburban developments.

In the 1940s, Orlando, Florida existed as a heavily segregated city. With a modest population of about 36,000 in 1940, Black residents were largely restricted to the Parramore neighborhood west of downtown Orlando. The military and defense industries, beginning with the establishment of Orlando Air Field in 1940, would bring many soldiers and civilians to the area helping increase the city's population.⁴ Yet, Black residents faced overcrowded conditions in Parramore, high rent prices, and the lack of available rental property and open land for building new homes. A report by the Zoning Committee in 1945 stated that while Black residents made up twenty-five percent of the total population of the city, they were zoned to only five percent of the city's total area.⁵

As the city faced a growing population and shortages of available land for aspiring Black homeowners to build new homes in the area, Black leaders appealed to white civic leaders for a solution to the housing crisis. Through the help of John Graham, a white tile contractor and member of the city's Rotary Club, this collaboration provided the catalyst for Washington Shores. Forming Washington Shores Inc., the non-profit corporation led by Graham purchased around 279 acres of land west of the city limits.⁶ In hearing about the project, the FHA offered to

³ Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5; LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 3.

⁴ James C. Clark, *Orlando, Florida: A Brief History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 176; "Orlando Changes," *Orange County Regional History Center* (blog), May 27, 2020, <https://www.thehistorycenter.org/orlando-changes/>.

⁵ "Rotary Takes Lead in Setting Up Adequate Negro Housing Facilities for Orlando Area," *Orlando Evening Star*, December 19, 1945.

⁶ Johnny Graham and Paul Thompson, "Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan," *Orlando Sentinel*, June 16, 1953; "Washington Shores Corp. To Go Out of Business," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 5, 1956.

insure mortgages if fifty Black families agreed to buy homes on the new tract.⁷ Opening in 1947, new homes in Washington Shores would be continually constructed over the next few decades.

White and Black officials, both locally and nationally, would champion Washington Shores as a solution to the Black housing crisis and improving race relations. Raymond Foley, an administrator of the FHA praised the project “as a striking example of what can be done in supplying modern housing for Negroes.”⁸ Yet, in focusing on the development of Washington Shores between the late 1940s through early 1960s, this essay will argue that the idealized conception of Washington Shores differed from the reality that African Americans continued to face in a segregated housing market. While helping to expand the Black population beyond the boundaries of Parramore, developments like Washington Shores maintained and reinforced the status quo of residential segregation. Moreover, while Black leaders and residents played a significant role in what geographer Tim Cresswell calls the social construction of social spaces or places, the white-led Washington Shores Inc. and the Orlando Housing Authority (OHA), during the community’s early years, dictated the development of the community.⁹ This essay will examine both the broader post-war developments that shaped the community as well as what made Washington Shores unique.

Black Orlando Before Washington Shores

Residential segregation in Orlando followed the trends of many Southern towns and cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries though segregation did not occur uniformly. The process of segregation in the South occurred more rapidly in newly established

⁷ Douglas Larsen, “The Orlando Plan: Southern City Solves Its Negro Housing Problem,” *Orlando Evening Star*, June 15, 1948.

⁸ “FHA Lauds Orlando’s Negro Housing Setup,” *Miami Herald*, March 14, 1948.

⁹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2004), 11–12, 30.

cities, as well as cities that experienced rapid growth versus older or slowly growing cities.¹⁰ While Orlando, incorporated in the 1870s, initially had a sparse population and an even smaller Black population, the laying of railroad tracks, beginning with the South Florida Railroad in 1880 provided an economic boom to the area through expanding the citrus and cattle industries. More importantly, the railroads facilitated the migration of new residents.¹¹ Still, for African Americans living in Orlando, the roots of residential segregation existed from the very foundation of the city's incorporation in 1875, though largely dictated by local customs rather than the legal enforcement of segregation that would occur later in the early twentieth century.¹²

Black Orlando developed from scattered settlements that would cohere into three distinct areas. In several settlements, white employers constructed separate, but nearby housing for their Black domestic workers and grove laborers. The first settlement, Jonestown emerged around 1880 where Sam Jones, a former slave, and his family settled in an area to the southeast of downtown Orlando with other Black families soon following. In 1890, James B. Magruder, a white developer, platted and constructed over forty homes for Black residents, many of whom worked for white families throughout Orlando. Located next to a large sinkhole by the Greenwood Cemetery, Jonestown often experienced flooding, including a severe flood in 1904

¹⁰ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 15th Anniversary (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

¹¹ The city of Orlando grew from eighty-five residents in 1875 to 2,856 residents by 1890, with a Black population of 1,031 residents. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Population 1890 Vol. I Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 387, 454; Tana Mosier Porter, "Orange County," in *Historic Orange County: The Story of Orlando and Orange County*, by Tana Mosier Porter et al. (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2009), 14.

¹² Clark, *Orlando, Florida*, 28; Wali R. Kharif, "Black Reaction to Segregation and Discrimination in Post-Reconstruction Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (1985): 170, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30146655>.

which forced many residents to evacuate the area.¹³ Jonestown would be the exception to the spatial makeup of Orlando as the only Black settlement located east of downtown.

Across the railroad tracks and west of downtown, the remaining two Black settlements, which today are known collectively as Parramore, would emerge. This area became the center of Black Orlando where residents established churches, schools, businesses, and other institutions that helped them survive and endure the separate Jim Crow world.¹⁴ The second settlement emerged after James B. Parramore, who moved to Orlando in 1881, platted land in west Orlando.¹⁵ In 1882, George Macy, who owned a blacksmith shop in the area, commissioned Whildom Whildin to build the first Black housing in the area. In 1886, Andrew Hooper, a minister, built several small cottages to house Black domestic workers, which became known as Hoopers Quarters. As many Black employees lived in Jonestown, housing development in this area brought Black employees closer to their white employers while still enforcing residential segregation. The area would be known by various names such as Black Bottom, Pepperhill, and presently the Callahan neighborhood, named after Dr. Jerry Callahan.¹⁶ The third settlement, known as the Holden neighborhood (also Holden/Parramore), emerged in the 1880s with land platted and homes built in the eastern areas of the neighborhood. In the 1910s, more homes would be constructed on the

¹³ For years, Jonestown disappeared from records as the 1907 City Directory makes no mention of the community, though the community would reappear by 1916. Tana Mosier Porter, "Segregation and Desegregation in Parramore: Orlando's African American Community," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 292–93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30149526>; Tana Mosier Porter, "This Was Jonestown," Orange County Regional History Center, August 13, 2020, <https://www.thehistorycenter.org/this-was-jonestown/>; *A Guide to Orlando's Afro American Heritage* (Orlando, FL: Central Florida Society of Afro American Heritage, Inc., 1990), 5.

¹⁴ Currently, the Parramore community is broken into three neighborhoods, Lake Dot as the northern neighborhood, Callahan as the center neighborhood and Holden/Parramore as the southern neighborhood. Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), xvii.

¹⁵ Parramore later served as mayor of Orlando from 1897 to 1902. McKay, "Building Begins in Parramore"; Dickinson, "Exploring the Path to Parramore's Past."

¹⁶ The neighborhood would be named in memory of Dr. Callahan, a prominent Black doctor in the community, after his death in 1947. LeRoy Argrett, *A History of the Black Community of Orlando, Florida* (Fort Bragg, CA: Cypress House Press, 1991), 21; *A Guide to Orlando's Afro American Heritage*, 5; Porter, "Segregation and Desegregation," 293; Benjamin D. Brotemarkle, *Beyond the Theme Parks: Exploring Central Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 20.

western end. Unlike Jonestown and the Callahan neighborhood, Holden had a higher concentration of owner-occupied housing versus rental housing. Thus, until the development of Washington Shores in the 1940s, many of Orlando's Black middle-class residents lived in the Holden neighborhood.¹⁷

Black Housing Crisis

The 1920s would see Orlando officials attempt to use zoning to restrict where African Americans lived as Black residents became an increased presence in the city. During the decade, Florida experienced a land boom where nearly half a million new residents migrated to the state between 1920 and 1925, pouring into cities like Orlando, Miami, and Fort Lauderdale.¹⁸ During the decade, Orlando grew from 9,282 residents to 27,330 residents while the Black population increased from 2,552 residents to 7,590 residents, representing about twenty-eight percent by 1930.¹⁹ In 1923, Orlando established the City Planning and Zoning Commission and in the following year proposed the establishment of six zoning districts, including a "Colored Section." While the city never established a racial ordinance over concerns of its legality, city maps, council minutes, and newspaper articles from the 1920s through the 1950s clearly allude to an understood Black section of town consisting of Parramore along with Jonestown. Despite the growth of the city both in population and size over the following decades, the city only made minimal expansions within Parramore, further constraining the Black population.²⁰

¹⁷ *A Guide to Orlando's Afro American Heritage*, 6.

¹⁸ Gary Ross Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, Florida History and Culture Series (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 45.

¹⁹ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census: Population 1920, Vol. III* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 196; Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census: Population 1930, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 196; Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census: Population 1930, Vol. III, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 421; Gramond McPherson, "Making Our Voices Heard: Power and Citizenship in Central Florida's Black Communities" (Master's Thesis, Orlando, FL, University of Central Florida, 2019), 33, <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/6537/>.

²⁰ Kristin Larsen, "Harmonious Inequality? Zoning, Public Housing, and Orlando's Separate City, 1920-1945," *Journal of Planning History* 1, no. 2 (May 2002): 166-70, 178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/153132001002003>.

Housing conditions for Black residents only worsened in the late 1930s and early 1940s. By 1939, Jonestown consisted of sixty-six residences, a few churches, a school, and a grocery store. As white residents surrounding Jonestown complained of the community as a “cancer,” city officials began considering the complete removal of Black residents from Jonestown. Following another flooding in 1941, the city declared Jonestown a slum and called for the community to be demolished. Gradually, residents would be forced from their homes, and by 1951, Jonestown had largely faded as a community. While homeowners received some reimbursement, many Jonestown residents could not afford to buy or build homes elsewhere.²¹ In dealing with the housing shortages in the late 1930s, cities like Orlando turned to public housing, first proposed with the establishment of the Public Works Administration in 1933. Techwood Homes in Atlanta, Georgia became the first public housing project in the nation in 1935 after the clearance of the mixed-race shantytown named Tanyard Bottom. Still, Techwood Homes would be established as a whites-only rental unit. In 1936, Liberty Square in Miami, Florida would become the first Black public housing project in the South.²²

Nationally for African Americans, public housing and slum clearance went hand in hand. Wiese states that while public housing structures proved to be an improvement over the housing stock available to most Black residents, these structures hardly eased the housing shortage. Moreover, the National Housing Act of 1937 gave local cities control over the placement of public housing. As a result, civic elites and agencies established white-only and Black-only public housing, and pressure from white homeowners concentrated public housing in already

²¹ Porter, “This Was Jonestown”; “Jonestown Negro Section Removal Planned in Project,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, February 24, 1939; Barbara Knowles, “Vanishing Communities,” in *Historic Orange County: The Story of Orlando and Orange County*, by Tana Mosier Porter et al. (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2009), 81; “Jonestown Fades from Orlando Scene After Years of Endeavor,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 25, 1951.

²² N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 85–86; Lands, *The Culture of Property*, 173.

dense urban neighborhoods.²³ In 1938, Orlando established the Orlando Housing Authority (OHA) and by 1940, the city opened its first public housing project, Griffin Park. Built exclusively for Black residents in the southern boundaries of the Holden neighborhood, many of Jonestown's exiled residents would move into the 250 rental units. In 1945, the city built its second Black project near Griffin Park, the 160-unit Carver Court. Initially for Black war workers and the families of Black servicemen, after the war, it became a general unit for Black families.²⁴

Yet, new public housing projects only provided temporary relief to the housing crisis as segregation not only limited where African Americans could live but made them vulnerable to exploitation by realtors and landlords. In acknowledging the steady growth of the Black population, a March 1944 editorial in the *Orlando Sentinel* encouraged the expansion of quarters for the Black population, warning that delaying such action each year would eventually cause an explosion of racial tension between whites and Blacks. In acknowledging that the city depended on the Black population, the editorial called for the powers-that-be to provide an area "where they may live in health and peace, free from encroachment of the white population."²⁵ As Parramore became more congested, white civic leaders and Black leaders searched for solutions beyond the confines of Black Orlando. This desire would culminate in the establishment of Washington Shores.

Conception of an Idea

²³ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 176; Lands, *The Culture of Property*, 171; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9–10.

²⁴ Porter, "Segregation and Desegregation," 309; "Housing Authority Completes Seventh Project Here," *Orlando Sentinel*, November 25, 1951.

²⁵ "A Situation Which in Time Must Be Faced," *Orlando Evening Star*, March 22, 1944.

In the early to mid-1940s, Eugene Guinyard, a Black employee of a local tile manufacturing company in Orlando aspired to own his own home. As the story is told in various accounts, his boss John Graham, a white tile manufacturer had begun passing out pay envelopes to his Black employees. In receiving his envelope, Guinyard asked his boss to hold a portion of the money, which he continued to do for several weeks. After accumulating \$200, Guinyard asked Graham to help him in buying a lot so he could build a house. In seeking housing options in the Black section of town, Graham encountered the dynamics of housing segregation for local Black residents. First, most available housing remained rented property. Second, the area had a scarcity of available land. Third, what small lots remained proved to be exorbitantly priced, with one such estimate being as high as \$800.²⁶ For Black residents like Guinyard, homeownership stood as a sign of middle-class status, a basis for upward mobility, shelter for families, and most importantly, freedom from the exploitations of tenancy.²⁷

As a businessman and a member of the city's Rotary Club, Graham proved to be an influential person in Orlando. Determined to address the issue of Black housing, Graham took his dilemma to Orlando's mayor William "Billy Beardall. Soon after, Beardall would appoint Graham as the chairman of a special committee to study the issue of Black housing in the city. The committee consisted of seven men, including Graham and William Mullin, the chair of the city's Zoning Committee. One report from the committee in 1945 reflected the conditions for Black residents in Parramore. First, while Black residents made up twenty-five percent of the total population, they remained zoned to only five percent of the city's total area. Second, the

²⁶ "Local Negro House Project and Graham Praised by Agency," *Orlando Evening Star*, March 13, 1948; Graham and Thompson, "Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan"; Martin Andersen, "Locked Up Houses- The Klan and Xmas," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 20, 1945.

²⁷ Todd M. Michney, *Surrogate Suburbs: Black Upward Mobility and Neighborhood Change in Cleveland, 1900-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 12; Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 86-88.

report classified many of the homes as being in bad repair and without adequate sanitary facilities. Third, their report pointed out the lack of available land to be purchased by Black citizens without paying prohibitive prices.²⁸

In reflecting on the experience years later, Graham stated that the first efforts of the committee failed miserably, stating “it seemed that everybody in Orlando agreed that something should be done, but nobody could figure out what.”²⁹ One example includes the response to the committee’s report, recommending rezoning an area of the city south of Gore Avenue, the southern boundary of Parramore, for Black housing. In stating only a few residents lived in the proposed area of 220 acres, the committee believed the process would be simple with plans to properly reimburse those displaced. However, at a Rotary meeting in December 1945, over 200 white residents from the proposed area voiced their objection to the rezoning of Black housing. Additionally, residents of Holden Heights, located to the south of the proposed area and outside of the city limits also objected, believing the move would “embarrass them in efforts to be included in Greater Orlando at the proper time.”³⁰ Later, at a meeting at the Grand Avenue Women’s Club on January 3, 1946, white residents of southwest Orlando led by their spokesperson J.E. Cousins Jr., a well driller, demanded that expansion of land for Black housing occur in another direction besides south of Gore Avenue.³¹ Bowing to pressure, Graham and the committee would explore other options.

Yet, in seeking to avoid racial strife, through shifting strategies, Graham and the committee asked prominent citizens of the city to become members of a non-profit corporation to

²⁸ Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan”; “Rotary Takes Lead in Setting Up Adequate Negro Housing Facilities for Orlando Area.”

²⁹ Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan.”

³⁰ “Rotary Takes Lead in Setting Up Adequate Negro Housing Facilities for Orlando Area”; “200 Residents Protest Negro Rezoning Plan,” *Orlando Evening Star*, December 24, 1945.

³¹ “Negro Rezoning Up Again,” *Orlando Evening Star*, January 3, 1946; “Orange County Board Gets Letter Warning of a ‘Race Riot’ If Negro School Built,” *Tampa Tribune*, July 22, 1950.

start a Black housing project. In finding land for sale to the west of the city between Lake Mann and Clear Lake, the committee agreed on a proposed location to develop 370 acres of land with about 270 acres being cut up and divided into a thousand lots for homes.³² In setting a goal for \$50,000 in subscriptions, after the first meeting of potential investors at the Orlando Country Club on April 16, 1946, the group received pledges of \$37,000 in one night. Soon after, they surpassed their goal of receiving over \$53,000 in pledges from the community. The pledges ranged from as low as \$25 to major pledges as high as \$5,000 from businesses like the Dr. P. Phillips Company led by Philip Phillips, a citrus mogul who became well known in Orlando for his philanthropy.³³

While a non-profit organization, the corporation would sell stock to bear three percent interest. The corporation would be run over ten years after which, any lots left behind would be auctioned off by the zoning committee. For many like R.D. Robinson of the Dr. Phillips Company, in purchasing stock, he believed the project would be a sound investment.³⁴ Fifty Orlando men volunteered to advance money for the project after Graham advertised the project in the newspaper. Dr. I. Sylvester Hankins, a Black doctor, in a 1977 interview stated, “I was one of the first to subscribe and the only Black. The money was paid back with interest, but the real dividend was the satisfaction.”³⁵

³² “Support the Negro Housing Project,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1946.

³³ “Negro Homesite Fund Near Top,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 16, 1946; “Entire U.S. Watches Progress of Washington Shores Project,” *Orlando Evening Star*, August 28, 1947; Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan.”

³⁴ “The Right Plan of Attack,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 2, 1946; “Negro Housing Sponsors Will Meet Monday,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 18, 1946.

³⁵ A native of Orlando and graduate of Freedmen’s Hospital Medical School (now Howard University Medical School) in Washington D.C., Hankins served as a physician for the city’s Black residents beginning in 1926. Over a fifty-year career, he worked as an advocate and spokesman for equal opportunity and fair treatment for the city’s Black residents. Ed Hayes, “Dr. I. Sylvester Hankins Retiring Rich with Memories,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 6, 1977; “Dr. I. Sylvester Hankins, Black Civic Leader,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 25, 1991.

After receiving a state charter required for non-profit benevolent corporations, by May 1, 1946, Washington Shores Inc. would be officially formed with Graham as president. The board of directors included prominent white civic leaders and figures including Mayor Beardall and future mayor Robert “Bob” Carr.³⁶ The corporation in a paternalistic way stated its purpose as followed:

The organization is formed as a benevolent association for the purpose of improving the living conditions of the negro population of the city of Orlando and its surrounding territory, to develop and zone subdivisions for the exclusive use and occupation of negroes which subdivisions shall contain recreation centers, playgrounds, places for religious and fraternal gatherings, etc.: to purchase and develop such subdivisions and divide them into lots suitable for residential purposes, and the same will be sold only to colored citizens without profit to the corporation, in order that they may be encouraged to erect and own homes, and thereby become permanent residents of the community and have better, more sanitary and healthier living conditions.³⁷

However, the location of Washington Shores still caused issues among some white citizens. In writing an editorial in the *Sentinel* published April 30, 1947, L.C. and Luola Cox, E.A. and Erma Sawyer and other families described their community between Lake Mann and Clear Lake as a quiet and peaceful community with orange groves and dairy farms. The Cox family stated that their business Cox’s Dairy had provided milk to Orlando residents for twenty-five years as well as Sawyer Farm Dairy for twelve years. Moreover, as the city sought permission from state officials in Tallahassee to formally incorporate Washington Shores into the city limits of Orlando, these residents objected to being used as a connecting link between the project and the city. Bluntly, the Coxes, Sawyers, and other families stated that the proposed site intruded upon a white community and that nobody in their community wanted the project, stating

³⁶ Marshall C. Dendy served as vice president, Lloyd Gahr as secretary, and Herman P. Langford as treasurer. “Negro Housing Project Group Seeks Charter,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1946; “Negro Home Organization Gets Charter,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 1, 1946.

³⁷ “Negro Home Organization Gets Charter.”

that the project would be better on the west side of Lake Mann (opposite the proposed Washington Shores project) with the Black settlement there.³⁸

The settlement in question, Washington Park, had formed in January 1926 when Edwin Pascal Beeman purchased 282 acres of land on Lake Mann from James L. Giles, a former mayor of Orlando.³⁹ Edwin's father Harry served as president of the Orlando Bank and Trust Company and owned the San Juan Hotel in Orlando. A veteran of World War I, Edwin worked for his father in both industries before transitioning to work for one of the largest real estate firms in Florida.⁴⁰ During the increase of the Black population in the 1920s, Beeman bought land to develop a Black subdivision as well as set aside forty acres for a school. Beeman developed a reputation as a "friend and benefactor of the [Black] race" by Black leaders like Dr. H.K. Hill, pastor of the First Baptist Church. Yet, before Beeman could carry out his vision, on July 10, 1926, he suddenly died on his thirty-fourth birthday from pneumonia following an appendicitis operation.⁴¹ While Beeman's estate would attempt to carry on his vision, including breaking ground on the establishment of a Black college, the United Baptist College in 1928, neither the school nor the housing development ever materialized.⁴²

Years later, in petitioning the city to move forward on the Washington Shores project, the *Sentinel's* editorial board in a 1946 article reminded readers of the failure of Washington Park

³⁸ "Protests Negro Project Location," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 30, 1947.

³⁹ "Buys Property for Negro Subdivision," *Orlando Sentinel*, January 7, 1926.

⁴⁰ Beeman came from a prominent and wealthy family as his grandfather Dr. E.E. Beeman, an Ohio-based physician and researcher, invented Beeman's chewing gum that utilized pepsin from the stomach of pigs, which he argued could aid digestion. "Edwin Pascal Beeman," *Orlando Sentinel*, July 11, 1926; "Edwin P. Beeman Dies at [Sic] Orlando on 34th Birthday," *Tampa Tribune*, July 11, 1926; "The True Story of Beemans- Pig Guts and Pepsin," True Treats Candy, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://truetreatscandy.com/true-story-beemans-pig-guts-pepsin/>.

⁴¹ "Negroes of City Pay Fine Tribute to Edwin Beeman," *Orlando Sentinel*, July 13, 1926; "Edwin P. Beeman Dies at [Sic] Orlando on 34th Birthday."

⁴² Eve Bacon, *Orlando: A Centennial History*, vol. 2 (Chuluota, Fla: The Mickler House, Publishers, 1977), 25; "Negroes of City Pay Fine Tribute to Edwin Beeman"; "Florida Normal Gets 38 Acres from Trustees," *Tampa Bay Times*, September 5, 1956.

due to the prices of lots being too expensive and the city failing to connect hard surfaced streets to the area. As this prevented bus service to the area, the editorial stated the Washington Park project died a natural death.⁴³ Yet, this time, white resistance to the project would prove futile as the project had the support of the mayor and city councilmen, the business community such as the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce, and the Black community. In late June 1947, the Washington Shores area would officially be incorporated into the city limits of Orlando.⁴⁴ The following month on July 31, officials marked the birth of Washington Shores with a groundbreaking dedication for the first thirty homes, turning the conception of an idea into reality.⁴⁵

Post-War Suburban Trends

The creation of Washington Shores appeared in the context of increased suburbanization in the nation after World War II. Between 1950 and 1970, the suburban population doubled from 36 million to 74 million. As Kenneth Jackson argues, suburbanization did not result from historical inevitability caused by geography, technology, and culture but as a product of government policies.⁴⁶ Federal agencies like the FHA and Veterans Administration (VA) helped to stimulate homeownership and suburban developments by insuring and guaranteeing individual home loans against default.⁴⁷ Together, the two agencies insured or guaranteed over \$117 billion in loans by 1961. Yet, each agency enforced racially discriminatory practices such as requiring neighborhoods to be racially segregated to qualify for loans. While helping to fund white suburbanization, by the late 1950s, only two percent of individual homes built since World War

⁴³ “Face the Problem Sanely and Compassionately,” *Orlando Evening Star*, January 1, 1946.

⁴⁴ City of Orlando Minutes, October 23, 1946, Orlando, FL; City of Orlando Minutes, April 23, 1947; “Overhaul Florida’s Tax Structure, Legislators Urge,” *Orlando Evening Star*, June 29, 1947.

⁴⁵ Bacon, *Orlando Vol. 2*, 2:147.

⁴⁶ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 283, 293.

⁴⁷ The FHA would be established under the National Housing Act of 1934. Andrew R. Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 45.

II with FHA support had been occupied by African Americans or other minorities.⁴⁸

Suburbanization also occurred in the context of large migrations of African Americans to cities across the country, further constraining housing within urban areas. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor states, as suburbs experienced investment and development, the urban core experienced extraction and deterioration.⁴⁹

In the post-war period, Black demand for suburbanization increased, especially in the aftermath of the Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kramer* in 1948 which declared racially restrictive covenants within the housing industry as unconstitutional. In response, some white politicians and developers would encourage Black suburbanization. To some whites, all-Black subdivisions could serve as instruments of racial containment, yield a financial profit for developers, and maintain peaceful residential growth. On the other hand, for African Americans, particularly those of financial means, the suburbs offered promises of comfort and security for families to raise their children away from the conditions of the overcrowded central cities. In cities in the North and West, Black suburbanization often occurred through the racial transition of housing within existing neighborhoods and scattered construction in older suburbs. However, in the South, this process largely occurred on the fringes of cities and metropolitan areas through new housing construction. Developments existed both within and just outside city limits with some outside developments like Washington Shores later being annexed by adjacent cities.⁵⁰ In the Miami area, new subdivisions like Richmond Heights, Carver Ranches, and Bunche Park developed as tens of thousands of Black residents fled Miami's overcrowded Central Negro

⁴⁸ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 100–101; *U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: Housing: 1961* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 59.

⁴⁹ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 32.

⁵⁰ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 164–65; Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 243.

District (now Overtown). Other developments like McCrorey Heights in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Pontchartrain Park in New Orleans, Louisiana would house a large proportion of the region's Black middle class. Like white residents, Black visions of suburbanization included acres of detached single-family homes and green spaces as well as freedom from rent collectors, dirt streets and roads, and crime. To protect these visions, residents formed homeowners' associations and parent-teacher associations in exercising their rights as property owners.⁵¹

Like Washington Shores, many of the new suburban developments in the South formed from collaborations between private housing developers, city and county officials, federal housing officials, and white and Black community groups. For instance, between 1945 and 1960, growing cities like Atlanta and Houston, Texas constructed over 10,000 new dwellings, half being single-family homes. Miami and Memphis, Tennessee during this same period, constructed over 4,000 homes. Still, smaller cities like Orlando as well as Nashville, Tennessee, and Tampa, Florida produced at least 1,500 homes and apartments.⁵² Yet, Orlando and Washington Shores also proved to be unique as the community would be developed through the non-profit Washington Shores Inc. corporation. An early proponent of non-profit corporations for dealing with the Black housing crisis would be Harland Bartholomew, the city planner for St. Louis, Missouri.⁵³

Bartholomew gained prestige nationally through his consulting firm, Harland Bartholomew & Associates, which provided consulting to cities on issues like city planning and zoning during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Bartholomew and his firm

⁵¹ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 165; Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 244.

⁵² Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 169, 188.

⁵³ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Master Plan for Dallas, Texas, Report 10: Housing," December 1944, Dallas, Texas, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, crediting Dallas Municipal Archives, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph803915/>.

during the mid-1920s had helped draw up zoning plans for Orlando.⁵⁴ In consulting for Dallas in 1944 about Black housing, Bartholomew called for the following:

Erection of low cost housing on vacant land or by rebuilding substandard areas, particularly in and adjoining outlying non-white areas by urban redevelopment corporations organized on a non-profit or a philanthropic basis with the city making a substantial contribution to the total cost through providing sewer and water mains, street paving, and parks...In outlying areas they should be chiefly composed of single-family dwellings...There is no reason why housing should not be provided for those unable to afford standard housing.⁵⁵

While it is unknown if Graham, Washington Shores Inc., or Orlando city officials directly drew their inspiration from Bartholomew, these entities would adopt the non-profit corporation model to establish Washington Shores.

Unheralded Black Role

In the media coverage of Washington Shores during the late 1940s through the 1960s, white male civic leaders like John Graham receive significant recognition. Raymond M. Foley, the administrator of the FHA in praising Washington Shores in 1948, stated that “credit for the Orlando project goes largely to one man...He is a tile manufacturer, named John Graham.”⁵⁶ The same year, Graham would be awarded the Book of Golden Deeds Award by the Orlando Exchange Club for outstanding and unselfish community civic service.⁵⁷ On the other hand, these same accounts largely portrayed Black leaders and residents as marginal characters who appeared at dedications for new houses, churches, and other institutions in Washington Shores, but who played a marginal role in the development of the community.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 11; “New City Zoning Ordinance Presented at Council Meet,” *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, December 16, 1926.

⁵⁵ Harland Bartholomew and Associates, “A Master Plan for Dallas,” 37.

⁵⁶ “FHA Lauds Orlando’s Negro Housing Setup.”

⁵⁷ “Golden Deeds Winner,” *Orlando Evening Star*, March 17, 1948.

Black leaders in Orlando, largely of affluent and middle-class status, operated in what N.D.B. Connolly calls the Jim Crow's conference room, serving as brokers between white economic and political power and the needs of the Black community. At the conference table with white leaders, Black leaders pushed for pragmatic solutions to community issues within the limits of Jim Crow.⁵⁸ In Orlando, this took the form of the Inter-Racial Committee, established in 1926 to coordinate the concerns and requests of Black leaders to the mayor and Chamber of Commerce. Despite the name, the committee functioned as an all-white committee until 1957. The Negro Committee, composed of Black leaders, reported monthly to the larger committee in an advisory role. Nevertheless, on important decisions like racial zoning in the 1920s and the clearance and relocation of Jonestown residents in the late 1930s, the Negro Committee would be excluded from decision-making.⁵⁹ Additionally, until 1950, the White Voters Executive Committee controlled city elections and successfully excluded Black voters from the political process. Even as Black political power gradually increased, Black leaders still had to rely on the Jim Crow conference room and the goodwill and philanthropy of white civic and business leaders.⁶⁰

Yet, while living in an unequal world, behind the scenes, Black leaders played an unheralded role in the development of the community. In the postwar era, as African Americans aspired for greater social and political influence, they established independent political

⁵⁸ Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 203; Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3.

⁵⁹ Larsen, "Harmonious Inequality," 167–68; Porter, "Segregation and Desegregation," 302; McPherson, "Making Our Voices Heard," 33–34.

⁶⁰ Prior to 1950, the White Voters Executive Committee controlled the city's political machine for forty-six years, which included excluding Black voters from voting in city elections. After attempts by four Black residents to challenge the exclusion of Black voters, in 1950, Orlando complied to a recent Supreme Court ruling on primaries, became the last city in Florida to end the exclusion of Black voters from primaries. October 3, 1950 served as the first election that permitted Black citizens to vote in a primary election. Bacon, *Orlando Vol. 2*, 2:165–66.

organizations to petition for the needs of their community.⁶¹ On May 27, 1945, a group of Black men in Orlando met in the home of Arthur “Pappy” Kennedy, a future city commissioner, to discuss ways to assist the city on worthwhile civic projects. This informal meeting birthed the Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce with Pappy Kennedy serving as the first president. The following year on November 26, 1946, under the leadership of Z.L. Riley, the organization became a permanent group.⁶² Leaders in the organization played significant roles in the creation and development of Washington Shores. Graham credits Riley and James Walker, among other Black leaders, for helping to find suitable land for the development of Washington Shores. Riley served as the president of the organization from 1946 to 1950, later serving as the executive secretary. Walker, since 1940, served as the supervisor of all-Black public housing developments in Orlando, which would later include housing units in Washington Shores. Walker served as the business manager of the organization during the early years, later serving as president from 1952 to 1954.⁶³

Included within Washington Shores Inc., a Black advisory committee served as a sounding board for the corporation’s all-white board in dealing with issues concerning the development. While sources are scarce concerning the specific members of the Black advisory committee, Black leaders like Riley and Walker certainly played a role in representing the interests of the Negro Chamber of Commerce.⁶⁴ Black leaders and residents turned the physical space of southwest Orlando into the place of a new Black community. Cresswell states that

⁶¹ Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 8; McPherson, “Making Our Voices Heard,” 52.

⁶² Pappy Kennedy would be elected as the first Black commissioner of Orlando in 1972, serving two terms between 1973 and 1980. His district included Washington Shores. Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, “Business Directory 1960-1961,” 1960, 6, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/329107>; Mildred A. Williams, “Orlando May Honor 1st Black Official,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 16, 1985.

⁶³ Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, “Business Directory 1960-1961,” 6–7; “Hubert Manager at Lake Mann,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 25, 1951; Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan.”

⁶⁴ Nelson C. Jackson, “Candlelights in the Darkness,” *Survey Graphic* XXXVI, no. 12 (December 1947): 694.

“place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power.”⁶⁵ As such, the community would be named for Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute (now University) in Alabama and one of the most prominent Black figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the reason for the coining of the community’s new name is unclear, Black culture would become a prominent feature in the community’s development. Local streets like Domino Drive, Mahalia Place, and Bethune Drive referenced past and current Black figures of the time like jazz musician Fats Domino, gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, and educator Mary McLeod Bethune.⁶⁶ While largely unheralded, without the desires of ordinary Black citizens like Eugene Guinyard for new housing and the petitioning by Black leaders to white civic leaders, the project would have not gained the momentum to become a reality.

Homes for Black Homeowners

The development of housing in Washington Shores occurred with two similar visions, but differing tools for its execution. While Black leaders and residents welcomed additional housing to ease overcrowded conditions in Parramore, the primary aim for developing Washington Shores remained the hope for increased homeownership for African Americans in Orlando. Yet, for most white civic leaders and developers, this area simply served their interests in providing housing in whatever form (i.e., public housing or private homes) to the expanding Black population.⁶⁷ As such, Black leaders often had to compromise their vision to the dictates of white leaders who possessed political power and who controlled capital. For instance, before the incorporation of Washington Shores into the city limits of Orlando, Black leaders petitioned city

⁶⁵ Cresswell, *Place*, 12.

⁶⁶ Jackson, “Candlelights in the Darkness,” 694; Mike Oliver, “Street Names Mean a Drive Through Black History,” *Orlando Sentinel*, December 21, 1991; Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan.”

⁶⁷ “Orlando-A New Subdivision Is Created,” *Journal of Housing* 12 (October 1955): 320; “Need of Savings, Loan Seen,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 23, 1962.

officials to provide municipal services like police and fire protection as well as utilities to the area. At first, city officials did not enthusiastically support providing such expensive services without solid evidence of the community's future potential. Black leaders and housing developers knew that without such services, the community had little chance of success. The OHA would provide a solution to the city's ambivalence. Led by Colin Murchison, the executive director since February 1939, the OHA proposed that if public housing could be planned and built into Washington Shores, the community's future would be secure. With the support of the OHA, city officials endorsed the recommendations of Black leaders to provide essential services to Washington Shores.⁶⁸ Thus, while idealized as a refuge for homeowners, from the start, Washington Shores would be a community composed of both homeowners and tenants.

Nevertheless, in the early years of Washington Shores, the construction of homes for aspiring Black homeowners remained a high priority. The white-led First National Bank in Orlando broke its precedent in providing financial aid to Black residents seeking to purchase homes in the first subdivision of the neighborhood. Still, significant funding in the early years came from the FHA. By mid-1946, the FHA became interested in the Washington Shores project and reached out to Graham and the corporation, offering to insure mortgages on homes in the first section of the project area if fifty Black families agreed to buy tracts of land to build homes.⁶⁹ On November 27, 1946, M.M. Parrish, the State FHA Administrator based in Jacksonville, Florida, met with Black and white residents at Shiloh Baptist Church, a Black church in Orlando. Parrish noted that the agency had authorized \$500,000 in home loan

⁶⁸ "Orlando-A New Subdivision Is Created"; "Housing Authority Completes Seventh Project Here"; Graham and Thompson, "Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan."

⁶⁹ "Sales Begin Soon," *Miami Herald*, June 27, 1946; "Realty Firm Plans Meeting," *Orlando Evening Star*, October 12, 1946; D. W. Wyatt, "Better Homes for Negro Families in the South," *Social Forces* 28, no. 3 (March 1, 1950): 297-303, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2572014>.

mortgages for Washington Shores. At the meeting, Black citizens adopted a plan that called for the FHA to build 100 new homes for Black war veterans, which would serve as the nucleus for the development. Parrish agreed that the FHA funding would be the most feasible way to initiate home building on the site.⁷⁰

As an agency, FHA policymakers helped to set standards for building regulations and zoning codes to protect residential neighborhoods from “inharmonious land uses.” Due to redlining, and the discriminatory practice of denying mortgages to residents deemed to be a poor investment, most Black residents in Black neighborhoods between the 1930s through 1960s did not qualify for loans to the standards established by the FHA. In encouraging suburbanization, the agency required all new developments to include sidewalks, paved roads, sewers, and other utilities. Failure to meet these conditions could result in the cancellation of new residential projects.⁷¹ In leading the corporation, Graham ensured that the community met these guidelines. For Washington Shores, one immediate requirement involved installing culvert pipes for drainage at the entrance of homes. During an April 18, 1947 meeting of the Orange County Board of County Commissioners (BCC), an estimate approved by the commissioners cost approximately \$500 to install pipes at the entrance of twelve proposed homes. Another requirement saw county officials address the need to improve the streets in the same subdivision. In the following meeting on May 16, 1947, the county passed the responsibility of the streets to the developers of the housing subdivisions.⁷²

⁷⁰ “Parrish Will Talk Here on Shores Plan,” *Orlando Evening Star*, November 26, 1946; “FHA Okays \$500,000 For Shores Plan,” *Orlando Evening Star*, November 26, 1946.

⁷¹ Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress*, 45–47, 108–9.

⁷² At this time, the Washington Shores project remained outside the city limits of Orlando and under the jurisdiction of the county. Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Minutes, April 18, 1947, 32, Orange County, FL; BCC Minutes, June 6, 1947, 357.

The involvement of the FHA and the VA in the Washington Shores project likely arose from developments of the late 1940s. Wiese states that pressure from civil rights organizations, legal precedents, and evolving state legislation led the agencies to modify some of their practices. While refusing to promote fair housing practices in the private market well into the 1960s, both agencies made mild commitments to open housing by devoting limited resources to increasing housing for minority residents.⁷³ In 1947, the FHA appointed five race relations advisors to aid local communities regarding the production of housing for minorities. The advisors, all Black men, served at one of the five regional offices of the FHA. They each reported to their division chief Dr. Frank Horne, another Black official who served as the advisor on race relations for the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) based in Washington D.C. The advisors' responsibilities included working with contacts in the Black finance and real estate industries, offering technical support to prospective developers, serving as the middlemen between buildings and financial institutions, and making routine field inspections to identify suitable areas for minority housing. According to Wiese, Horne and his team had their greatest successes in promoting Black housing in the South.⁷⁴

As the race relations advisor for the Atlanta FHA office, Albert Thompson (often referenced as A.L. Thompson) worked throughout the southeastern states in securing funding and overseeing the construction of Black housing developments. For example, in Tennessee in 1951, Thompson and his staff helped the McKissack Brothers secure FHA insurance for their College Hill development in Nashville. Moreover, he convinced the Black Atlanta Life Insurance

⁷³ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 138.

⁷⁴ The HHFA is the predecessor agency to the current Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The five FHA regional offices included Atlanta, Georgia, Dallas, Texas, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Chicago, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California. Wiese, 138–39; *Independent Offices Appropriations for 1961: Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Eighty-Sixth Congress, Second Session* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 1072.

Company to purchase FHA-insured mortgages from Black homebuyers in the Elliston Heights subdivision near Memphis.⁷⁵ Earlier in Orlando, Thompson had helped secure FHA funding for Black residents renting from the Carver Court public housing project that had been established in 1945. After the dedication of Washington Shores in July 1947, the *Sentinel* reported in August that Thompson would be sent to Orlando to oversee the development of Washington Shores.⁷⁶

With financing from the FHA, Graham, Washington Shores Inc. along with their Black advisory team worked to develop housing in the area. The Black committee assisted in setting prices for lots and approving plans for home construction.⁷⁷ In the first published business directory by the Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce in 1949, the directory dedicates a section to Washington Shores, praising the community for setting a pattern throughout the nation for meeting the housing shortage for minorities. The directory featured an image and description of an inspection of a completed home in the area by Orlando citizens, members of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, and visitors like Mary McLeod Bethune, then the president emeritus of Bethune Cookman College (now University) in Daytona Beach, Florida.⁷⁸ Additionally, a Black real estate firm organized and bonded the sales of homes and plots under the advice of the corporation.⁷⁹

In late August 1947, Graham reported to *the Sentinel* the status of the project. Of the fifty blocks or 279 acres that encompassed the total project, the first phase involved developing a third of the land immediately with the remaining two-thirds being developed on a house-by-house

⁷⁵ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 139.

⁷⁶ "Entire U.S. Watches Progress of Washington Shores Project."

⁷⁷ Jackson, "Candlelights in the Darkness," 694.

⁷⁸ In the image featured for the inspection of Washington Shores, standing to the left of Mary McLeod Bethune is an older white gentlemen, likely John Graham, though the quality of the photo makes this hard to solidly confirm. Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, "Business Directory 1949," 1949, <http://orlandomemory.info/organizations/orlando-negro-chamber-of-commerce/>.

⁷⁹ Wyatt, "Better Homes for Negro Families in the South," 301; Jackson, "Candlelights in the Darkness," 694.

basis. He stated that each home would cost \$3,000 and up, though the first houses eventually sold for prices between \$6,000 and \$7,000. Interested residents paid ten percent of the value of the home upfront with the remaining ninety percent paid by the FHA or VA. Homeowners then paid a monthly mortgage to the appropriate agency over time.⁸⁰ During this time, over 100 Black families received notices of being ousted from the Carver Court and Griffin Park projects due to earning a higher salary than stipulated for its residents. In stating that the FHA did not advocate renting homes in Washington Shores, Graham encouraged these families to buy a home in the area, stating “it would be foolish for someone to pay rent, when it is just as cheap to buy [a] home.”⁸¹ However, as Taylor argues, Graham failed to realize that some Black homeowners, especially lower-income, did not always have the discretionary funds available to make home improvement and maintenance, which could impact their ability to pay their mortgages and risk foreclosure.⁸²

During a tour of Florida in January 1948, Thompson, representing the FHA, and Dr. Horne, representing the HHFA, stopped in Orlando on January 18 for a special ceremony in Washington Shores for the opening of Better Homes Week. Individuals who spoke at the event included Thompson, representing the FHA, and Dr. Horne, representing the HHFA. Horne stated that the federal agency approved and endorsed the development of Washington Shores as a step forward in better racial relations. After the ceremony, the crowd inspected five houses that had been recently completed and furnished along with other dwellings under construction.⁸³ By the

⁸⁰ He reported the current construction of eleven homes with another nineteen homes recently receiving permits. The corporation established the prices of lots at \$600 and up with the smallest lot comprising 9,000 square feet. Additionally, more than \$40,000 worth of lots have already been sold. “Entire U.S. Watches Progress of Washington Shores Project”; Larsen, “The Orlando Plan”; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 238.

⁸¹ “Entire U.S. Watches Progress of Washington Shores Project.”

⁸² Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 5, 49, 111.

⁸³ “Negro House Project Here Gets Praise,” *Orlando Evening Star*, January 19, 1948; “Better Housing in South Gains,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 7, 1948.

1950 Census, Washington Shores contained fifty-two homes where residents dwelled. Of these fifty-two, forty-one are listed as owner-occupied.⁸⁴

The 1950s would see additional owner-occupied houses constructed in Washington Shores including a planned subdivision of 200 new homes (later reduced to 166 homes) for Black veterans developed during the mid-1950s by J. Hilbert Sapp Inc., a contracting firm based in Orlando. The low-price homes financed by the VA, included two bedrooms, a living room, a bath, a kitchen, and a dining area. At the time, the plan called for homes to sell for \$6,950 based on a \$50 down payment and monthly installments of \$39. J. Hilbert Sapp even offered a contest to name the new subdivision. Prizes for the best three names received included a down payment on one of the homes. In seeking to mobilize Black churches, clubs, and charities, Sapp offered \$200—\$100 for first place, \$75 for second place, and \$25 for third place—to the top winners of the contest as these institutions helped to distribute blank contest forms to the entrants. The winning submission by David L. Brewer Jr. of Johnson’s Village commemorated Eugene Vann Johnson, a local Black soldier killed during the Korean War.⁸⁵

Washington Shores Inc. directly controlled the community’s development until 1955. After fully paying back interest to those who had financially backed the project, officers, directors, and note holders voted to dissolve the corporation and expressed their confidence in the future of the community by turning over control of the development to the Black families that

⁸⁴ The blocks containing the Washington Shores community are Blocks 540-551. At the time, only three, Blocks 545, 547, and 549 featured housing. Dwelling units are defined as a group of rooms or a single room that is occupied or intended for occupancy as separate living quarters, by a family or other group of persons living together or by a person living alone. Block 545 contained seven dwelling units, six owned and one rented. Block 547 contained 34 dwelling units, twenty-six owned, four rented, and four vacant. Block 549 contained eleven dwelling units, nine owned and two rented. Bureau of the Census, “Orlando, Fla. Block Statistics,” in *Seventeenth Census: Housing: 1950, Vol. V, Part 6* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 1, 15.

⁸⁵ “Million-Dollar Housing Project Set for Negroes,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 5, 1954; “Washington Shores Home Contest Is Set,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 28, 1955; “J. Hilbert Sapp, Land Developer,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 19, 1980; “Construction of 25 New Homes Starts,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 30, 1956.

lived there. The corporation also began to wind down obligated improvements to the community. By 1956 as the corporation prepared to liquidate, Graham stated the corporation still had \$5,000 in cash and \$20,000 in purchase contracts to turn over to the county, which he hoped would be used for the construction of a community center or recreation building for residents.⁸⁶ Even afterward, Graham well into the late 1950s continued to have input into the community. Nearly ten years after the conception of the idea, the corporation felt its vision of providing homes to aspiring Black homeowners had largely been fulfilled.

Construction of Public Housing

Nonetheless, in addition to owner-occupied homes, the early 1950s also saw the rapid construction of rental public housing units within Washington Shores. In previously noting the role of the OHA in helping facilitate city services for Washington Shores before its incorporation, the conception of public housing in Washington Shores began with the community's dedication in 1947. However, Murchison, the OHA administrator, stated that additional housing for both Black and white tenants hinged on the passage of the Taft-Wagner-Ellender housing bill in Congress. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) helped to craft the bill, first introduced in 1946 that called for rent control in forcing landlords to provide safe and standard housing to their tenants.⁸⁷ Eventually, Congress passed the bill and President Harry Truman signed the legislation that became the Housing Act of 1949. The act reaffirmed the goal of the New Deal in providing for the housing needs of the

⁸⁶ Joe K. Rukenbrod, "Washington Shores Inc. Pays Off Dream With Interest," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 10, 1955; "Negro Center Hits Snag in Washington Shores," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 4, 1956.

⁸⁷ "Politics Delays Building of Orlando House Units," *Orlando Evening Star*, July 18, 1947; Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 138–39.

country's poor. The act poured millions of dollars into the construction of new public housing across the country.⁸⁸

With the act, many cities used their slum clearance powers to bulldoze homes to construct new public housing developments. In cities like Nashville and Baltimore, Maryland, officials used their powers to bulldoze Black homes and replace them with white-only developments.⁸⁹ In Orlando, with the clearance of Jonestown in the late 1930s, the OHA developed the ninety-unit Reeves Terrace as a white-only housing project, which opened in 1942.⁹⁰ By 1947, in addition to Reeves Terrace, fifty units would be converted from abandoned barracks at Orlando Air Force Base to become Forrest Homes, reserved for white tenants. Griffin Park and Carver Courts, which together numbered 410 units, remained reserved for Black tenants. Murchison in 1947 called for the addition of 264 additional units in the Jonestown area for white tenants and 200 units for Black tenants. At the time, he preferred the placement of new Black housing in an area of Parramore known as “Black Bottom,” long considered one of the city's most unsanitary sections due to filth deposits and overflowing sewage.⁹¹ With the passage of the Housing Act in 1949, the government approved 300 housing units—210 units for Black residents and 90 units for white residents.⁹² By then, the creation of Washington Shores provided an open area to construct new Black public housing developments.

In his work on Detroit, Thomas Sugrue examines opposition to public housing by real estate developers, business groups, and homeowners—both Black and white—who hoped to benefit from New Deal subsidies for private housing. Some opponents framed their hostility in

⁸⁸ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 60.

⁸⁹ Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 161.

⁹⁰ *A Guide to Orlando's Afro American Heritage*, 32; “Jonestown Fades from Orlando Scene After Years of Endeavor”; “Negro Housing Bids Called,” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 29, 1950.

⁹¹ “‘Black Bottom’ Park Area Urged,” *Orlando Evening Star*, August 14, 1946; “Politics Delays Building of Orlando House Units”; “Housing Authority Completes Seventh Project Here.”

⁹² “Lake Mann Dream Homes to Be Dedicated in City Today,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 25, 1951.

viewing these projects as the infiltration of socialism that threatened to erode the value of private enterprise. Opponents in Detroit achieved success as the city constructed few public housing projects and the projects the city did construct remained racially segregated.⁹³ As Murchison in Orlando announced plans in 1950 to construct two projects, a Black project of 210 units in Washington Shores and the expansion of ninety more units for the white-only Reeves Terrace, the city's realtors expressed their disapproval. The Orlando Board of Realtors submitted a resolution to Mayor Beardall requesting a city-wide referendum by voters on the issue before the city undertook any additional projects. Like Detroit, Robert Duckworth, the president of the realty board expressed the group's preference for private enterprise financing of future public housing programs versus using federal funding. In response to the realtors' request, Mayor Beardall stated that the city council had already given their stamp of approval for the new public housing development in arguing for its importance to the city's expanding Black population.⁹⁴

By 1950, this new housing development would become the Lake Mann Homes, reserved for Black families of low income who currently lived in substandard housing. The OHA placed these homes immediately north of the Washington Shores subdivision containing nearly 100 Black houses in 1951. Murchison awarded the bid to J. Hilbert Sapp Inc., then based in West Palm Beach, Florida, at an estimate of \$1.6 million. The project included 209 dwelling units in eighty buildings along with an office maintenance building. The project also included a public beach reserved for Black residents as well as a regulation-size baseball field.⁹⁵

With construction beginning in late October 1950, the project took over a year to complete. Input from Black families to OHA officials saw a limited number of two-story buildings constructed as

⁹³ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 62–63, 72.

⁹⁴ "Realtors Ask Beardall for Vote on Housing," *Orlando Evening Star*, March 3, 1950.

⁹⁵ "Negro Housing Bids Called"; "Negro Homes Bids Asked," *Orlando Evening Star*, August 28, 1950; "Lake Mann Dream Homes to Be Dedicated in City Today."

many families preferred a single-story residence. The area included wide paved streets with electric wires and sidewalks. Built to last forty years, the homes included all-electric kitchens, tiled roofs, and door entrances flanked with brick to eliminate staining by children's hands. The city also provided a bus service to the area.⁹⁶ The city hosted a dedication ceremony on November 25, 1951, in preparation for occupancy beginning on December 1. Over 500 Black and white spectators attended the event as the Jones High School Band, representing Orlando's segregated Black school, performed the national anthem. Statements by Murchison and members of the OHA board, local Black and white ministers, and R.V. Gripper, as president of the Negro Chamber of Commerce praised the purpose and future aims of the housing project.⁹⁷

Shortly after the completion of the Lake Mann Homes, the OHA in late January 1952 announced plans for a new 190-unit Black housing then called Clear Lake Homes (later called Vineland Court). By March 1952, the project would be awarded to Fred Howland Inc., a Miami-based firm for a bid of \$1.3 million. During the construction of these new units, C.W. [Bill] Hickey, who became the new director of the OHA after the death of Murchison in December 1952, announced that after the completion of the Vineland Court project, the OHA would terminate its present building program facilitated by the Housing Act of 1949. Hickey stated that with the completion of the new project, the city would have a total of 1,140 units for low-income families. In April 1953, the new housing project, located near the Lake Mann Homes, opened as Murchison Terrace, likely named in honor of the recently deceased Murchison.⁹⁸ In 1953, the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) awarded the OHA

⁹⁶ "Lake Mann Section," *Orlando Sentinel*, November 25, 1951; "Lake Mann Homes Project to Help Solve Housing Problem in Orlando," *Orlando Evening Star*, October 20, 1950; "Lake Mann Dream Homes to Be Dedicated in City Today."

⁹⁷ "New Negro Housing Units Dedicated Here," *Orlando Sentinel*, November 26, 1951; "Lake Mann Dream Homes to Be Dedicated in City Today."

⁹⁸ "Hickey Executive Director of Local Housing Board," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 5, 1952; "Bids Ready on Housing Bonds Today," *Orlando Evening Star*, September 22, 1953.

with its highest annual award for outstanding achievement in cooperation with city agencies and private groups.⁹⁹

True to Hickey's word, Murchison Terrace would be the last public housing project constructed during the decade. By 1959, the OHA's total housing units remained at 1,140 units, 330 white units, and 810 Black units. The creation of Washington Shores provided the opportunity and space for the OHA to construct new public housing for lower-income Black residents in Orlando. Of the 810 total Black units in Orlando, 400 would be in Washington Shores with the remaining 410 in Parramore.¹⁰⁰ Yet, while the OHA ended the construction of government-funded public housing, developers continued constructing private rental units. While many Black leaders in the early 1950s praised the presence of public housing and private apartments to address the Black housing crisis, by 1960, some now expressed their discontent. During one meeting in March of 1960 before the city council, thirty-five Black property owners appealed to the city council to prevent the rezoning of an area north of their homes to build more apartments. Their spokesperson, Paul Perkins, a Black attorney, reminded the council that the community already had 643 rental units and stated these new units "are the future slums of the city." City commissioner W.M. Sanderlin assured the Black property owners that these

⁹⁹ Originally known as the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO), the organization formed in Chicago in 1933 in Chicago. In 1953, the NAHO expanded to include redevelopment officials and changed its name to become the current NAHRO. Composed of housing officials and community development providers and professionals through the country, the current mission of the organization aims to create and manage affordable housing for low and middle-income families and support vibrant communities to enhance the quality of life for all. "Orlando, National Leader," *Orlando Sentinel*, November 7, 1953; "Orlando-A New Subdivision Is Created"; "About," The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), accessed May 3, 2021, <https://www.nahro.org/about/>.

¹⁰⁰ By 1953, the OHA operated eight facilities: Griffin Park, 250 units for Blacks, Carver Court, 160 units for Blacks, Lake Mann Homes, 210 units for Blacks, Murchison Terrace, 190 units for Blacks, Reeves Terrace, 90 units for whites, Reeves Terrace Addition, 90 units for whites, Orange Villa, 100 units for whites, and Forrest Homes, 50 units for whites. "Orlando, National Leader"; "Housing Units Settles Up," *Orlando Evening Star*, September 23, 1959.

apartments would be the last kinds constructed unless a particular church that owned the last remaining undeveloped parcel decided to sell their property.¹⁰¹

“Solution to the Race Problem”

In 1948, Douglas Larsen, a Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA) Correspondent in Washington D.C. published an article titled “The Orlando Plan: Southern Cities Solves Its Negro Housing Problem.” In the article, which appeared in the *Orlando Sentinel* on June 15, 1948, Larsen presents Washington Shores as a successful formula for cities in providing good homes to Black residents, which he calls “the toughest angle of the nation’s whole housing problem.” He tells the story of Guinyard and Graham, the support from the city’s prominent Black leaders, the funding from the FHA to construct homes, and the integration of city services for the community. He closes the article by expressing the view of government housing experts that the Orlando Plan will be taking root elsewhere.¹⁰² Various newspapers across the country published the article including the *Bakersfield Californian* in Bakersfield, California, the *Springfield Leader and Press* in Springfield, Missouri, and the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* in Knoxville, Tennessee.¹⁰³

The FHA evangelized Washington Shores to interested audiences. During a spring meeting in 1947 with community groups, Douglas Rosenblum, an FHA official, spoke positively about Washington Shores Inc.¹⁰⁴ The FHA pointed to Washington Shores in 1948 as “a striking example of what can be done in supplying modern housing for Negroes.”¹⁰⁵ Even into the mid-

¹⁰¹ “City Gets Good News on Parking,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 3, 1960.

¹⁰² Larsen, “The Orlando Plan.”

¹⁰³ Douglas Larsen, “The Orlando Plan: A Southern City Solves Its Negro Housing Problem,” *Springfield Leader and Press*, June 15, 1948; Douglas Larsen, “Orlando Plan Provides Negro Housing,” *Bakersfield Californian*, July 2, 1948, sec. Orlando Plan; Douglas Larsen, “Orlando Plan: A Southern City Solves Negro Housing Problem,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, November 7, 1948.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 40–41.

¹⁰⁵ “FHA Lauds Orlando’s Negro Housing Setup.”

1950s, federal officials continued to sing the praises of Orlando, appealing for cities to follow the example of Washington Shores. A.L. Thompson, continuing his role as the race advisor for the Atlanta FHA branch, toured the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater in 1954 to address the need to expand and improve Black residential areas there. Thompson pointed to Orlando “as an outstanding example of what can be done when the city and organizations in the city work together on the expansion project for Negroes.”¹⁰⁶

However, viewing suburban developments like Washington Shores as a model or “solution to the race problem” obscures the reasons that allowed some of these developments to have success in the first place. First, despite facing some opposition at its conception, Washington Shores developed through a nearly unanimous collaboration of interests between the Black community and white civic and business elites, something not guaranteed in any city. For instance, in Miami during the late 1940s, developers there faced heavy resistance from whites over the development of a \$120,000 apartment building project for Blacks. City officials refused to provide a permit for the project even though the developers, anticipating opposition from white property owners, offered to erect an eight-foot wall to separate the project from a white residential area and a 250-foot buffer strip as a “no-man’s land.”¹⁰⁷

Even then, for Orlando, an important conciliatory factor for broader support by prominent whites for Washington Shores came from the fact that white leaders like Graham and Washington Shores Inc. controlled and dictated the development of the community. Graham, as president of the corporation, appeared and spoke on behalf of Washington Shores at the Orlando City Council and Orange County Board of County Commissioners meetings. Often, he appeared to petition for the community’s needs such as the installation of sewers, street signs, and a community center

¹⁰⁶ “Study Being Made of Negro Housing Here,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 22, 1954.

¹⁰⁷ Wyatt, “Better Homes for Negro Families in the South,” 301.

for Black residents, even presenting checks from the corporation to cover such expenses.¹⁰⁸ As a white man, his status and influence certainly helped to ensure that the needs of Washington Shores would receive proper attention. In his absence, the city council would vote to refer issues about the community back to him. For example, on December 7, 1953, the council received an application from Essie Mae Sills to obtain a permit to operate a beauty parlor from her home due to health issues. In referring the matter to Graham, on January 4, 1954, the council denied Sills's request as Graham, in a letter read before the council, stated that restrictions within property deeds prohibited businesses in residential areas and that the corporation would not alter such restrictions.¹⁰⁹

Second, Washington Shores Inc., as a non-profit corporation, liberated Orlando from total dependence on developers with limited resources. William Wilson points to the influence of Washington Shores on Hamilton Park, a Black suburban development founded in the early 1950s in the northern part of Dallas. In dealing with overcrowded Black neighborhoods and violent bombings in South Dallas as Black residents attempted to move into white blocks, Black leaders searched for a solution.¹¹⁰ Leaders like A. Maceo Smith, the race relations advisor for the Dallas FHA branch and John W. Rice, secretary-manager of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, placed a spotlight on the problem of Black housing. Wilson states that as part of the FHA, Smith likely would have been aware of the Orlando Plan from its inception and thus would have

¹⁰⁸ City of Orlando Minutes, December 1, 1954; City of Orlando Minutes, December 22, 1954; BCC Minutes, September 16, 1957, 292; "Building Accepted for Citizens," *Orlando Evening Star*, April 15, 1958.

¹⁰⁹ City of Orlando Minutes, December 7, 1953; City of Orlando Minutes, January 4, 1954.

¹¹⁰ The community would be named for Richard T. Hamilton, a prominent Black physician and community leader. During the 1940s, he worked with whites and Blacks to restore racial peace after a series of bombings in South Dallas in 1940 and 1941, which repeated a decade later in response to Black residents buying homes in previously all-white residential areas. Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 25, 39–40, 57.

advanced this model for Dallas. Yet social customs prevented Smith, Rice, and other Black leaders from direct access to the public and private sectors.¹¹¹

Jerome Crossman, a Reform Jew, the president of the Ryan Consolidated Petroleum Corporation, as well as an attorney, helped to turn the idea of Hamilton Park into a reality. Like Graham in Orlando, Crossman proposed the establishment of a non-profit corporation in Dallas and helped to mobilize support from white civic leaders and white philanthropists like Karl Hoblitzelle, the founder of the Interstate Theater movie chain. Through Crossman's efforts and a state charter, October 1951 saw the birth of the Dallas Citizens' Interracial Association. Crossman served as president of the association composed of fifteen directors. Despite the name, the association only included two Black directors, Rice and Samuel W. Hudson Jr., managers of the Roseland Homes public housing. The association also included an advisory council of 176 white and Black leaders. In purchasing 233 acres of land in 1953 and with guarantees of FHA and VA financing for homebuyers, Hamilton Park would be dedicated in October 1953 and formally opened in May 1954. Spurred by the demand for middle-class Black housing, by 1961, the community included 742 single-family houses, an apartment complex, a shopping center, a park, a K-12 grade school, and several churches.¹¹²

But third and most importantly, Washington Shores did not threaten the status quo of residential segregation and delayed attempts by Black residents to integrate into all-white neighborhoods in Orlando. Black residents would transfer old institutions from Parramore and create new institutions within Washington Shores including schools, churches, and businesses. As such, Washington Shores between the late 1940s through the early 1960s largely extended the

¹¹¹ Wilson, 13, 39–41.

¹¹² Wilson, 38, 43; William H. Wilson, "Hamilton Park, TX," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/hamilton-park-tx>.

boundaries of the Jim Crow world into a new area of Orlando. Yet, Wiese argues that while some Black leaders and intellectuals nationally begin to push for the end of desegregation in society, many African Americans, especially in the South, expressed pride and comfort in their separate Black places and institutions. Black residents clung to the idea of racialized space and worked hard to achieve equality within “separate but equal” facilities as they hoped to reap the fruits of suburban life for themselves and their families.¹¹³

Schools served as one primary example of this. Beginning in the early 1930s, Jones High School, then located in Parramore, served as the main secondary school for African Americans in Orlando. Despite the inadequacies of the facility, the white-led school board refused to improve the facility. In the early 1950s, in reaction to the funding of \$6 million by the school board to build two new white high schools Edgewood and Boone, the Black community led by Attorney Perkins and Mary McLeod Bethune to file a successful suit which forced the school board to appropriate \$1 million for a new Jones High School.¹¹⁴ In 1950, George W. Johnson, the chairman of the school board originally favored building the new high school in Washington Shores. However, Black leaders pushed for an alternative site as most Black residents lived in Parramore, though Black leaders stated they would accept the final decision. More authoritatively, the State Board of Education rejected the site because of the excessive expense that would be involved in transporting Black children from Parramore to Washington Shores.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 205–6; Wilson, *Hamilton Park*, 121, 137.

¹¹⁴ The first Black school in Orlando dates to 1886, then known as Orlando Black. The school would undergo various moves and names. In 1912, L.C. Jones became principal of Johnson Academy and under his leadership, the school built a new school on land donated by his family. The school became Jones High in 1921 to honor the Jones family, then teaching students between grades six through ten. By 1931, the school graduated its first twelfth grade class. Clark, *Orlando, Florida*, 52–54; Argrett, *Black Community of Orlando*, 30–32.

¹¹⁵ “Negroes Ask School at Gore Ave. Site,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 11, 1950; “Negro High School Site Selected; More Living Space Seen,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 4, 1950; “Orlandons Protest Negro School Site,” *Tampa Bay Times*, June 24, 1950.

Yet, the alternative site, located immediately west of Parramore and within reach of Washington Shores, created even more controversy among white citizens as this site intruded upon a white-occupied area. J.E. Cousins Jr, who previously led a charge against the rezoning south of Gore Avenue for Black occupancy in the mid-1940s, similarly led a charge against the selection of this school site. Cousins and other property owners sought to prevent the migration of Black residents to the area between Washington Shores and Orange Blossom Trail. As head of the South Side Vigilance Committee, Cousins and the group sent a letter to the school board threatening a riot between whites and Blacks if the proposed site moved forward.¹¹⁶ Karen Benjamin argues that school boards in the South placed the newest and best high schools for whites in newly developing suburbs while building Black schools in older neighborhoods. Thus, school sites played a key role in shaping the development of cities.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, despite the threat, the school board would move forward on the site, located west of Orange Blossom Trail and north of Gore Avenue. On August 30, 1950, the city council would recommend rezoning this area for Black occupancy. In May 1952, the new Jones High School opened at its current site in May 1952.¹¹⁸ With Jones High within adequate reach of Washington Shores, the growth of the community saw the construction of two new elementary schools by 1960. Washington Shores Elementary opened in 1957 due to an appeal by Black residents as early as 1954 to ease the burden of the busing of Washington Shores children to the Holden Street Elementary School in Parramore.¹¹⁹ In the 1960 Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, Felix Cosby, the principal of the school, praised the ultra-modern facilities and the

¹¹⁶ “Orange County Board Gets Letter.”

¹¹⁷ Karen Benjamin, “Suburbanizing Jim Crow: The Impact of School Policy on Residential Segregation in Raleigh,” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (March 2012): 226, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144211427114>.

¹¹⁸ The old Jones High School in Parramore is currently the Callahan Neighborhood Center. City of Orlando, August 30, 1950; “Orange County Board Gets Letter”; Argrett, *Black Community of Orlando*, 31–32.

¹¹⁹ “Negroes Petition Board for New School, Buses,” *Orlando Sentinel*, October 12, 1954; “Elementary School Limits Set,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 26, 1957.

belief of the school as community centered. In 1958, a second elementary school, Eccleston Elementary School opened for students. The school originally opened as Eccleston-Callahan Memorial Hospital for Crippled Children in 1952, which served Black special needs children in the Orlando area.¹²⁰

In addition to not solving the race problem, suburban developments like Washington Shores exacerbated the class problem that existed between professional and middle-class Blacks and working-class and poorer Blacks. For Black leaders, many who owned property, real estate served as a symbol of racial equality and a means of social uplift. As such, Black leaders claimed the right to govern and speak for “the race,” in promoting their suburban vision. Black suburbanites in “escaping the ghetto” would subtly or openly express disdain towards poorer and working-class Blacks, even viewing them, like white residents and the real estate market, as threats to property values.¹²¹ Kevin Gaines states that a major problem with racial uplift ideology involved the unconscious consequence of internalized racism. The promotion of self-help in building Black homes and promoting family stability came to displace broader visions of uplift and often blamed Black citizens who failed to achieve standards placed by the affluent and middle-class Blacks.¹²²

In Orlando, distinctions between the older Parramore community and the newer Washington Shores community would be emphasized by leaders. Black leaders employed politics of respectability and self-uplift in seeking to maintain the “good qualities” of the new community. In the 1949 Negro Chamber of Commerce directory promoting Washington Shores,

¹²⁰ The school and hospital honored the memory of Dr. Cecil B. Eccleston who died in 1948. Originally from Jamaica, Eccleston came to Orlando in 1925 serving the Black community as a dentist. Eccleston donated the land that became the hospital and later school. Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, “Business Directory 1960-1961,” 16, 23, 30; *A Guide to Orlando’s Afro American Heritage*, 23; Argrett, *Black Community of Orlando*, 47.

¹²¹ Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 7, 284.

¹²² Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6.

Black leaders stated that the purpose of conducting inspections on new homes in the community served to ensure “that all homes...be standard and eliminate the possibility of creating a slum.”¹²³ In 1960, Perkins and other Black homeowners’ viewing new apartments near their homes as future slums further confirmed these viewpoints of respectability.¹²⁴ In their advisory roles with Washington Shores Inc., Black leaders aimed to control the development of commercial areas and place restrictions on the general residential area of Washington Shores, such as barring establishments like saloons, juke joints, and other undesirable places that existed within Parramore.¹²⁵ Alzo J. Reddick, who became the first Black state representative for Orlando in 1982, called the creation of Washington Shores “the most pivotal event that changed [Parramore].” As many Orlando Black professionals relocated to Washington Shores and other areas by the late 1960s, Parramore would experience a steady economic decline that has continued into the present era.¹²⁶

By 1960, Orlando had grown to a total population of 88,135 residents. Between 1940 and 1960, Orlando’s Black population nearly doubled, rising from 10,470 to 20,579 residents. Washington Shores had nearly 5,000 Black residents. The 1960 Census recorded that most Black residents in the area lived in a different home five years prior and while over 2,000 of these residents lived within the Orlando area in 1955, over 800 new residents had migrated from outside of the area.¹²⁷ Yet, while the creation of Washington Shores aimed to increase

¹²³ Orlando Negro Chamber of Commerce, “Business Directory 1949.”

¹²⁴ “City Gets Good News on Parking.”

¹²⁵ Jackson, “Candlelights in the Darkness,” 694; Graham and Thompson, “Graham Gave Nation Orlando Plan.”

¹²⁶ Benjamin D. Brotemarkle, “Crossing Division Street: A History of the African American Community in Orlando, Florida” (Ph.D. diss, Cincinnati, Union Institute and University, 2002), 23, 42.

¹²⁷ Washington Shores is contained within Census Tract 0018, which includes residents within and outside of the Orlando city limits. The figures presented reflect only the 5,193 residents of the tract that live within the city of Orlando. Of these residents, 4,984 are African American and 209 are white. This tract contains all the entirety of Washington Shores but may contain adjacent areas. In Orlando, African Americans are almost the entirety of the non-white population in 1960. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census: Population 1940, Vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 124; Bureau of the Census, *Eighteenth Census: Population 1960, Vol. I, Part A*

homeownership, the dream had often been dictated more by social mobility and financial capability. Even more, for families who could not obtain FHA or VA funding, discriminatory practices in the real estate market made the costs of homeownership that much more difficult, especially for lower-income Black families.¹²⁸ In fact, of the 1,272 housing units listed in the 1960 Census for the Washington Shores area, 486 non-white units are listed as owner-occupied while 670 non-white units are listed as renter occupied. While Washington Shores had more non-white rental units than owner-occupied units, this paled in comparison to Parramore where out of 5,621 total units, only 729 are listed as non-white owned versus 3,659 listed as non-white renter occupied.¹²⁹

Back in 1945, when Graham and members of the Rotary Club idealized plans to solve the Black housing crisis, they concluded that a large area of 200+ acres would solve this issue for some twenty-five years. Yet, not even fifteen years later, Black residents faced similar challenges in 1960 that they faced in 1945, but now with an even larger Black population.¹³⁰ In 1962, economic consultants and experts collected data on Black life in Central Florida. In their report on Orlando, they found that twenty-four percent of the city's Black population lived in owner-occupied dwellings compared to eighty-one percent of the white population. Of the 15,549 owner-occupied housing units in the city, only 1,233 or 7.3 percent had Black owners.¹³¹ This report would be presented to the Federal Bank Board in Washington D.C. as proof of the need for a Federal Savings & Loan Association bank for Black residents in Orlando. In seeking

(Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 11–63; Bureau of the Census, *Census Tracts: Orlando, Fla. Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961), 14.

¹²⁸ Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 31.

¹²⁹ Parramore's population is contained within Census Tracts 0004, 0005, and 0006 which are entirely within the city limits of Orlando. Bureau of the Census, *Census Tracts: Orlando, Fla. Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area*, 46–47.

¹³⁰ "Rotary Takes Lead in Setting Up Adequate Negro Housing Facilities for Orlando Area," 200; "200 Residents Protest Negro Rezoning Plan."

¹³¹ "Need of Savings, Loan Seen."

to address these problems, a group of Black men, led by Attorney Perkins and businessman Charles Hawkins, aimed to create the Washington Shores Federal Savings & Loan Association “to help everyone and anyone to become a home owner and to save.”¹³² On May 26, 1962, the group received permission to officially organize, becoming the first all-Black savings and loan association in Florida. As the group aimed to reach a minimum of \$400,000 in pledges by June, they surpassed that goal by August 1962, receiving over \$500,000 with liberal donations from Black churches, organizations, residents, and white philanthropists alike.¹³³ Bob Carr, an original member of Washington Shores Inc. and the mayor of Orlando in 1962, offered his support to the group in providing opportunities to teach thrift and homeownership to the Black community.¹³⁴

As African Americans had difficulty receiving mortgages from white-owned banks, the Washington Shores bank sought to fill this vacuum. In aspiring to serve an area within fifty miles, Perkins and Hawkins believed that “by saving money, a person can build [their] own home and allow someone else to do the same, thereby making our community and city a better one.”¹³⁵ On October 30, 1962, the bank officially accepted its charter by electing a board of directors. Dr. James R. Smith would be elected as president, Charles Hawkins as vice president and manager, Dr. Isaac Manning as vice president, and Leighler Maulsby as treasurer. Perkins, who served as chairman of the bank’s board also served as the secretary and general counselor.¹³⁶ Officially opened in 1963, amid the Civil Rights era, the bank would play a major role in providing mortgages, loans, and other financial services to Black customers. Yet, the following decades would not be as fruitful for the bank as Black residents of means moved to

¹³² “Need of Savings, Loan Seen.”

¹³³ “Pledges Total Half-Million Dollars,” *Orlando Sentinel*, August 20, 1962.

¹³⁴ “S&L Pledges Hit \$200,000 Mark,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 14, 1962.

¹³⁵ *A Guide to Orlando’s Afro American Heritage*, 37; “Pledges Total Half-Million Dollars.”

¹³⁶ “Washington Shores S&L Elects Directors,” *Orlando Sentinel*, November 5, 1962.

other areas of the metropolitan area and integration brought increased opportunities for loans from mainstream white institutions.¹³⁷ Furthermore, key figures of the institution would be involved in scandals that tarnished the reputation of the bank. Yet, the legacy of the bank for those long denied mortgages helped in their endeavors to achieve homeownership with newer housing constructed during the 1960s.¹³⁸ While suburban developments like Washington Shores and Black initiatives like the Washington Shores Federal Savings and Loan Association did not completely resolve the Black housing crisis or fix “the race problem,” it does demonstrate how Black leaders and residents fought to achieve equality within an unfair society.

Conclusion

As suburbanization became one of the defining features of the post-World War II period, Black suburban developments like Washington Shores demonstrate the centrality of African Americans and race within these developments. Yet, in contrast to white Americans, African Americans faced far greater hurdles to achieving this suburban dream. Racism in American society limited Black access to employment, credit, and public facilities and institutions as well as determining where they could or could not live through residential segregation and redlining. Yet, these challenges did not temper the resolve of Black families to “create places of their own.”¹³⁹ The post-war period saw even greater boldness by Black leaders and residents, working within the limits of the Jim Crow system, to create Black suburban communities. This is the

¹³⁷ As of 2020, the bank on 715 South Goldwyn Avenue in Washington Shores is part of the Axiom Bank branch. Richard Burnett, “New Owner to Reshape Black-Owned Market Bank,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 1, 2006; “Axiom Bank, N.A. Announces New Flagship Branch in Winter Park,” *Markets Insider*, February 28, 2020, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/axiom-bank-n-a-announces-new-flagship-branch-in-winter-park-1028950852>.

¹³⁸ Charles Hawkins, one of the six founders of the bank, served for twenty years as the president and chief executive officer. In 1983, he would be convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for interfering in a federal investigation of the bank. He would also be convicted of tax evasion and embezzling \$400,000 from accounts at the institution. “Charles Hawkins’ Banking Skills Built Community, Tarnished Career,” *Orlando Sentinel*, September 13, 2002.

¹³⁹ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 7–8.

legacy of Black suburbanization that should be promoted and emphasized within the historiography of suburbanization and urban history, particularly from the 1940s forward.

Orlando's Washington Shores provides a unique case study in showing the distinctive features of Black suburban development. Like many growing cities across the country with significant Black populations, residential segregation restricted the Black population into cramped geographic areas. Similarly, Black leaders worked with white civic leaders and businessmen to find solutions to solve the Black housing crisis, even utilizing federal funding from the FHA and VA agencies. This interracial collaboration between Blacks and whites, a feat not guaranteed in any city, helped to turn an idea into a new suburban community. One particularly distinctive feature of Washington Shores involved the model of non-profit corporations like Washington Shores Inc. taking the lead to "solve the housing crisis." While sources and images from the period portray African Americans in the periphery of these developments, even in their advisory roles, Black citizens contributed significantly to the creation and maintenance of Washington Shores.

At the same time, Washington Shores reveals the limits to the creation of a model Black community. While idealized as a haven for aspiring Black homeowners, compromises such as allowing public housing within the community ensured from the start that Washington Shores would be a community of both single-family, public housing, and private rental units. Furthermore, the white-led corporation, with Black assistance, set the standards for the development of the community. However, as Washington Shores would be composed of African Americans of various economic classes, intraracial conflicts between affluent and lower-income African Americans emerged as Black leaders set the parameters for proper representation of the race. In seeking to distinguish Washington Shores from the original Black community of

Parramore, the fear of what Washington Shores could become (i.e., a slum) remained a constant worry for Black leaders.

The question of Washington Shores as a success story is complicated. For those Black families of means or veterans eligible for funding, they certainly benefited from the ability to move beyond the confines of Parramore and create a new Black middle-class identity. Even for some Black families who moved into public housing, these new structures proved to be of more sound quality than their previous housing units. However, for others, Washington Shores would be a dream deferred. While initiatives like the Washington Shores Federal Savings & Loan Association helped to reinspire the dream of homeownership during the 1960s, the impact of desegregation would create opportunities for some Black families to explore the greener pastures beyond segregated society while leaving other Black families to continue their struggle to survive. Examining these stories of Black suburban developments like Washington Shores reveals a wide-encompassing history that crosses racial and class lines. Studying the success and failures of this period may provide insight into the challenges to African Americans continue to face within the housing market in the present.