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**Abstract:** White civic leaders worked with the Federal Housing Administration and Resettlement Administration on the Virginia Peninsula in the mid-1930s to build two suburban subdivisions for poor and working-class African Americans. In an era of "managed" race relations, the developments reinforced paternalistic white rule by extending urban practices of segregation into racially undefined suburban areas. The homes provided opportunity, not equality. However, the houses also challenged spatial boundaries concerning race and class and fractured public conceptions of monolithic racial unity along class lines. The developments were among the first in the nation to use federal tax dollars to support black families' aspirations for homeownership and middle-class living standards. Their occupancy, expense, and location angered working-class whites who lived nearby. The ensuing conflicts revealed the near impossibility of reconciling cautious federal experiments in racial betterment with expanding black demands for empowerment and white concerns that black gains occurred at their personal expense.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt flew to the shipbuilding city of Newport News, Virginia, in April 1936 to christen the aircraft carrier Yorktown and applaud the workers who welded and riveted the warship into existence. Before glad-handing naval officers, state politicians, and manufacturing executives, Roosevelt intended to tour two new housing developments built in neighboring rural counties for poor and working-class black families. Her inquisitiveness about homes for African Americans seemed to confound the local newspaper, the *Daily Press*. A reporter described her as holding "an unusual interest" in the projects.<sup>1</sup> A public-private partnership financed and constructed both subdivisions by pairing a mainstay local institution with a newly created federal agency. In Warwick County, Swantown was sponsored by Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock, the region's leading employer of black workers, and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), an agency established in 1934 to provide mortgage insurance and already criticized for its racially discriminatory practices. In Elizabeth City County, Aberdeen Gardens was championed by Hampton Institute, best known as Booker T.

Washington's alma mater, and a series of federal agencies, most notably the Resettlement Administration (RA), which specialized in issuing loans and grants to farmers, not home construction.

Roosevelt only toured Swantown. Unlike other stops on her overnight stay, no formal ceremony marked the visit. She spent thirty minutes or so talking to some homeowners and inspecting a house. She canceled a tour of Aberdeen Gardens. Heavy rains had flooded the low-lying dirt road that led to the isolated, uninhabited development. Before leaving Newport News, Roosevelt said she hoped to return someday to see whether the two "resettlement projects" had fulfilled their promise. "It is not the inauguration of them that counts so much," she said, "as their development and the benefit they will do in the future."<sup>2</sup> But turmoil soon ensued. Within one year, condemnation proceedings initiated by white neighbors ensnarled Swantown's homeowners, and white citizens pressured federal officials to convert Aberdeen Gardens to white tenancy before black buyers and renters could move in.

Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens were one-of-a-kind developments. The federal agencies that financed and built them seldom helped black families move into new homes. FHA administrators routinely dodged racial controversies by refusing to track the race of homebuyers who benefitted from their programs. This intentional obfuscation has hindered the scholarly study of federal home financing, however limited, for black suburbanites. Swantown is a notable exception because its existence was preserved in local court and property records, news accounts, and the memories of former tenants. For their part, federal officials never mentioned the subdivision by name or racial occupancy in their 1937 annual report, even though an agency lawyer had already characterized Swantown as the "only one" of the FHA's early projects to encounter "real difficulty."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Aberdeen Gardens was the only suburban development

for African Americans completed by the federal agencies that devised various housing ventures for industrial and rural workers. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads considered twenty-nine other developments for underemployed black industrial workers before it was transferred in 1935 to the Resettlement Administration. None of the other projects were built. Federal officials quietly rejected some. Local white opposition scuttled others.<sup>4</sup>

The disputes over the racial composition of Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens present historians with a case study that explores how New Deal housing policies contested spatial boundaries concerning race and class in suburban areas but also upheld the South's practices of segregation and discrimination. White municipal officials had steadfastly opposed African Americans' demands for adequate housing since the Civil War's end. By the early 1900s, custom and law confined most African Americans to inferior neighborhoods with dilapidated houses. Controversies erupted across the South as poverty, inadequate housing, and new employment opportunities prompted African Americans to repeatedly violate residential color lines. Economic self-interest encouraged southern black families to obtain better (but not fair) housing by manipulating the politics of paternalism to their own benefit. In the Upper South, white business and civic leaders discouraged open acts of racial violence in favor of "managed" race relations. They ceded modest gains in housing for African Americans to reinforce their authority. However, such concessions fractured public conceptions of monolithic racial unity along class lines. White residents broke ranks when broad concerns for civic well-being jeopardized individuals' property rights and home values. Black citizens debated the merits of segregated housing and whether the intangible gains that accrued to the entire black community outweighed the sacrifices demanded from the families who moved into disputed developments. Federal

officials stoked localized conflicts by providing the financing needed to jumpstart housing construction during a severe economic depression.<sup>5</sup>

Virginia's civic and business leaders prided themselves for holding what historian J. Douglas Smith characterizes as "a particularly genteel brand of paternalism."<sup>6</sup> Like the community leaders in William H. Chafe's classic study of Greensboro, North Carolina, elite white Virginians attempted to maintain labor tranquility and civic harmony by smothering demands for racial reform in polite language and gestures that improved black life without eroding the rule of white supremacy.<sup>7</sup> Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage argues that white municipal leaders throughout the Tidewater region, which included the port cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth as well as Newport News, discouraged lynching and other forms of racial violence because the profitability of the area's diverse industrial economy required a reliable black laboring class.<sup>8</sup> Elite Virginians made strategic concessions to African Americans for the sake of sustained economic growth.

Many white citizens, though, viewed interracial cordiality and negotiation with skepticism and outright opposition. They believed black gains too often occurred at the expense of working white families whose concerns were either ignored or downplayed by community leaders. Uncertainty arose at Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens when white neighbors – farmers and small business owners – concluded that their leaders asked them to sacrifice too much so African Americans could live in new houses. These neighbors believed the black subdivisions threatened to diminish the market value of their homes and wastefully misused federal tax dollars. As far as they were concerned, their pockets were picked twice to benefit undeserving black families.<sup>9</sup>

The Peninsula's black communities bought into paternalism only to the degree that it advanced and protected their own interests and values. They worked to subvert Virginia's system of managed race relations, even as they operated within it. Historian Earl Lewis argues that African Americans in Norfolk pursued imperfect opportunities for better roads and housing "to achieve power in whatever way possible."<sup>10</sup> On the Virginia Peninsula, black educators, professionals, and ministers applauded Swantown and helped plan Aberdeen Gardens. They backed the developments, even though both reinforced paternalism's aims by extending urban practices of segregation into racially undefined suburban areas. Segregated homeownership presented a striving black middle class with an opportunity to advocate the bourgeois values of racial uplift to working-class black families and to showcase black achievement to skeptical white officials.<sup>11</sup> "If Negroes could be encouraged to save their money, buy land, and become homeowners," said Thomas C. Walker, a prominent black Virginian lawyer, "they would be self-respecting and self-reliant citizens and we could pull down all the jails."<sup>12</sup>

Black laborers, domestics, and shipyard workers rushed to move into the new houses and escape overpriced, overcrowded, and deteriorating rental units. However, their commitment was qualified. While they expected to gain the most materially from participating in segregation's expansion, they also risked the most – their future financial solvency. They acted pragmatically, rebuffing calls from black leaders to forsake their personal concerns for the good of their race while also refuting white criticisms that black homeownership was impractical and detrimental to neighborhood integrity. When Swantown floundered, homeowners raised money to make expensive repairs and participated in court proceedings to maintain control of their houses. Meanwhile, prospective tenants let Aberdeen Gardens' homes sit vacant. After witnessing

Swantown's troubles, they insisted on assurances against future removal despite interracial pressure to unquestioningly embrace the planned community.<sup>13</sup>

The federal government functioned as an unreliable and reluctant arbiter in housing disputes that flared into public racial controversies. The sponsors of Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens sparked conflict because they were among the first in the nation to use the federal government's new housing initiatives for the benefit of black suburban homebuyers. In doing so, they linked the prewar acceptance of black families living in marginal and underserved suburban areas with what became identified as postwar suburbia's reason for existing – providing the accommodations that reflected and fulfilled middle-class aspirations. Local and federal sponsors catered to elite white Virginians' sense of progressive paternalism by touting the subdivisions as neighborhoods where impoverished lives could be salvaged through the virtues of hard work and fiscal responsibility. However, publicized federal involvement also highlighted the use of tax dollars – which were implicitly perceived as money provided by white citizens – for the promotion of black homeownership and upward mobility. The failure to offer a comparable housing opportunity for the benefit of prospective white homebuyers posed a serious and crippling violation of Virginia's paternalistic management of race relations. Despite the assurances of civic leaders, many white citizens were outraged. Such anger became increasingly commonplace across the nation as federal involvement in the housing industry expanded.

### **Federal Housing Policy and Race**

Before his election to the presidency in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had neither a concrete plan for rejuvenating the nation's housing industry nor a desire to jeopardize his campaign by rousing a controversy over direct government intervention in the private-sector

housing market.<sup>14</sup> However, with new construction and existing home sales virtually stilled by high unemployment and rising foreclosures, a Democratic-controlled Congress soon created a number of new agencies to stimulate the housing industry. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation helped refinance defaulted mortgages. The Federal Housing Administration spurred the construction of new houses by limiting bank losses on potential loan defaults. The Public Works Administration, and later the U.S. Housing Authority, used public funds to bulldoze slum districts and build government-owned, low-rent apartment complexes. Other agencies – including the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Resettlement Administration, Farm Security Administration, and Tennessee Valley Authority – authorized and completed a variety of community developments and individual homesteads to help industrial workers and small farmers survive the Great Depression.

In the 1930s and 1940s, economic crisis and wartime mobilization compelled hundreds of thousands of African Americans to leave the impoverished southern countryside, first for southern cities, and then for industrial centers in the North and West. Migrants often exacerbated existing housing shortages. Confined by segregation, low wages, and employment discrimination, recent arrivals typically paid excessive rents to live in neighborhoods with substandard housing. Local civic and business leaders turned to the federal government's various housing agencies to demolish dilapidated buildings and expand the supply of affordable houses. When black families attempted to obtain decent housing, they usually violated established residential racial boundaries, whether they stayed in urban neighborhoods or moved to the suburbs, whether they lived in apartments, public-housing complexes, or single-family houses. Proposed changes to racial boundaries inevitably drew federal officials into local controversies.

Negotiations frequently turned hostile, violence occasionally erupted, and the ensuing compromises dissatisfied nearly everyone.<sup>15</sup>

At each federal agency, administrators either skirted the correction of housing-related racial injustices for reasons of political expediency, or they pursued racial reform as a strictly secondary objective. Bureaucrats defended and obscured the racialization of federal housing policies by claiming that the profit-oriented, race-neutral forces of the free market determined the contours of residential housing patterns.<sup>16</sup> An extensive body of scholarship exposes how federal administrators routinely colluded with local real estate and homebuilding officials to exclude African Americans from equal participation in various housing programs and prevent neighborhood integration while extending segregation. As the decades passed, government policies worked to promote the notion that the nation's suburbs were the exclusive reserve of the white middle class. Slum clearance became associated with the destruction and permanent removal of black neighborhoods. And in the public mind, the purpose of public housing shifted from aiding the economically disadvantaged to confining poor minorities to assigned residential areas.<sup>17</sup>

Federal officials quietly sanctioned racial disparities in housing despite black families' well documented need for better homes. In Atlanta, one-third of black homes were unfit for occupancy. In New Orleans, black families occupied two-thirds of the city's slum dwellings. In Birmingham, slum neighborhoods took up just 10 percent of the city's total area but housed half of the black population. In four smaller southern cities — Gastonia, North Carolina, Sumter, South Carolina, and Griffin and Albany, Georgia — 60 percent of black families had no indoor water supply for their kitchens and 75 percent had none for their bathrooms. In contrast, only about 10 percent of white families lacked basic water connections.<sup>18</sup> Similar conditions existed

in the North. By 1940, half of all African Americans in northern cities lived in houses that required substantial repairs or lacked sufficient plumbing. They were more likely than whites to live in overcrowded dwellings and pay higher rents.<sup>19</sup>

Black leaders advocated comprehensive reforms to alleviate these “desperate conditions” before Roosevelt even took office. In a report for the President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, Fisk University sociologist Charles S. Johnson explained how segregation practices exacerbated existing economic hardships among African Americans. A committee of black social workers, academics, activists, and housing industry representatives endorsed the study. They called for the elimination of neighborhood segregation laws and the passage of local and state regulations to improve existing housing conditions. They asked federal officials to consider using public funds to provide subsidized housing for low-income citizens. They recommended including African Americans in the planning, financing, and building of new houses and apartments. They also encouraged African Americans to “follow the trend in urban communities and move out into subdivisions in which modern homes can be built.”<sup>20</sup>

While African Americans seldom lived in “modern homes,” their presence in suburban areas, particularly in the South, was not uncommon. The current wave of American suburban historiography has sought to acknowledge the significant racial and class diversity of suburbs before 1950, and correct Andrew Wiese’s criticism that “historians have done a better job excluding African Americans from the suburbs than even white suburbanites.”<sup>21</sup> Before World War II, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 1.5 million African Americans lived in areas its planners defined as suburban. Black families often lived where no one else wanted to stay. They typically resided in small communities or semi-isolated houses built on marginal land with inadequate infrastructure and few, if any, public services. Many black suburbs were located near

industrial employment centers. The quality of housing construction varied widely, but most communities were unplanned and their houses were cheaply built.<sup>22</sup> Exceptions existed, particularly in the South. Employers built company towns for their workers outside of Birmingham, Alabama, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Alcoa, Tennessee, and elsewhere. In nearby Portsmouth, Virginia, the federal government built the community of Truxton to house defense workers during World War I. Residents later bought those homes.<sup>23</sup> While private developers built new subdivisions for middle-class black families in or near large cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Richmond, and Dallas, few black neighborhoods resembled the suburbia of postwar imagination.<sup>24</sup>

### **Planning Swantown**

Created by the Housing Act of 1934, the FHA encouraged home construction by insuring local lenders against potential losses on low-interest, long-term mortgages. In turn, lenders required substantially smaller down payments from prospective homebuyers. Politicians and the general public applauded the agency for making homeownership more accessible for moderate-income families. Simultaneously, FHA administrators enthusiastically endorsed racially restrictive housing covenants, and they advocated neighborhood segregation into the 1960s. Whenever civil rights organizations accused the agency of discrimination, FHA officials blamed market forces for African Americans' inability to take advantage of their programs. "While it may be true that many [N]egroes and many neighborhoods cannot meet our required standards," Executive Secretary M.R. Young replied to Roger Wilkins, of the NAACP, "it is also unfortunately true that the same condition exists among people of many other races and the neighborhoods in which they live." The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights later reported that the

FHA insured mortgages on more than 2.7 million housing units between 1935 and 1950, financing 30 percent of all new residential construction. Black borrowers occupied only fifty thousand units – or about 2 percent of the total. Noted New Dealer and black economist Robert C. Weaver concluded that the “FHA’s chief contribution to Negroes was to complicate the ultimate solution of their housing problem.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite its antipathy toward black homebuyers, the FHA agreed to finance the houses at Swantown after being lobbied by Homer L. Ferguson, a nationally known industrialist who served as president of Newport News Shipbuilding from 1915 to 1946. A pair of Philadelphia contractors, M. Alexander Laverty and Donald M. Love, had persuaded Ferguson to endorse their plans for the subdivision. They enticed him by promising to build the initial forty-one houses cheaply – \$2,065 apiece. *Architectural Forum* hailed the development for its innovativeness, explaining that its cost savings resulted from “a unique construction system, chief features of which were the use of cinder blocks and precast concrete joists.” Laverty and Love formed Southern Homes Inc. specifically to build the development.<sup>26</sup>

As the leading industrialist in a company town, Ferguson made the deal happen almost singlehandedly. Incorporated in 1896, Newport News was a city built by ships, coal, and trains. Railroad baron Collis P. Huntington founded the city where the James River spilled into the Chesapeake Bay so he could sell coal dug from his mines in West Virginia to the world. Huntington shipped his coal from the mountains to the coast on his railroad, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway. He then loaded the coal onto his ships, which were built at his shipyard, Newport News Shipbuilding. By 1930, the city’s population topped 34,000, with African Americans making up nearly 40 percent of the citizenry.<sup>27</sup> By then, Newport News’ economic fortunes depended upon a bustling shipyard, and city officials protected and promoted the yard’s interests

and projects. Ferguson's overwhelming influence in Newport News and his concentrated involvement in establishing Swantown likely convinced FHA officials that the subdivision posed limited risk of either defaulted loans or public controversy. As president of the Newport News Land Corporation, Ferguson sold twenty acres of undeveloped land outside Newport News to Southern Homes for the low price of \$185 per acre. As president of the First National Bank of Newport News, he secured promissory notes for Southern Homes and mortgages for the homebuyers. As shipyard president, he employed most of the homebuyers. After being contacted by Ferguson, the FHA agreed to insure 80 percent of each \$2,000 mortgage. The federal guarantee allowed the bank to make the houses more affordable, with loan repayments occurring over twenty years, rather than the prevailing average of twelve years.<sup>28</sup>

Ferguson embodied the self-conceived sense of progressive paternalism embraced by elite white Virginians in the Tidewater region. A North Carolina native, Ferguson served on governing boards at Hampton Institute and the Virginia Commission on Interracial Cooperation. He urged Newport News officials to provide black residents with better schools and other municipal services to discourage workers from migrating to northern industrial centers. At the 1938 opening of a segregated recreation center built by the shipyard, Ferguson ignored the inequities of institutionalized racism when he urged an audience of black men and women to better their lives through hard work. "What happens to you, what you have in life," he said, "depends far more on what you do for yourself than on what others do for you." Under Ferguson's leadership, the shipyard promoted black homeownership by lending money at low interest rates to workers and by buying houses and reselling them at cost. The shipyard also allowed black members on its Employees Representatives Committee. Such gestures prompted a majority of black workers to oppose joining the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO).<sup>29</sup>

In 1939, researcher Wilhelmina Jackson concluded that “race relations seemingly are good” in Newport News and observed that middle-class black leaders believed they could “achieve things” if they dealt “correctly” with influential white citizens like Ferguson.<sup>30</sup>

Ferguson’s up-by-the-bootstraps philosophy did not alleviate racial discrimination inside the shipyard’s gates. Black employees earned less than white co-workers for the same work, were excluded from the shipyard’s apprentice school, and were denied higher-paying skilled positions.<sup>31</sup> Black workers spoke of paycheck envelopes stuffed with a note telling them who to vote for on Election Day.<sup>32</sup> Ferguson told U.S. Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont that he generally supported workplace and neighborhood segregation. Drawing on his experience employing black workers, Ferguson believed “the policy of segregation in residential areas is wise and the only one to follow in order to avoid that friction which always results in the Negro getting the worst of it.”<sup>33</sup>

The paternalistic outlook of Virginia’s white leaders sought to suppress an incipient racial stridency that, in Newport News, dated to World War I. Wartime mobilization more than doubled the city’s black population as the shipyard and ancillary businesses recruited industrial workers, and the Army established debarkation camps for soldiers. Frequent racial clashes erupted, and persistent rumors swirled of looming race riots. After the war, black longshoremen and other blue-collar workers transformed the region into a prime recruiting area for Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, even as the *New York World* claimed most of the city’s leaders were members of the Ku Klux Klan. In the mid-1930s, a black communist twice ran for a congressional seat and claimed his party was “quite effective” until it succumbed to harassment by local authorities. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the region’s leading black newspaper, characterized Newport News as a “paradise for religious leaders.” The popularity of

preachers labeled “black cultists,” such as Bishop “Daddy” Grace and native son Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux, spoke to black residents’ deep dissatisfaction with life on earth and their desire for self-empowerment.<sup>34</sup>

By the 1930s, even a comparatively conservative black middle class had grown increasingly frustrated with the empty pledges of paternalism. Black leaders more frequently looked to challenge inequality through confrontation rather than conciliation.<sup>35</sup> Local newspapers printed speculation in 1934 and 1936 about a black candidate possibly running for the City Council. Community activists held meetings to organize the Newport News Civic Association, an umbrella organization that sought to coordinate political activism among religious, fraternal, and social groups. (Organizers hoped for a tenfold increase in registered black voters.) Lutrelle F. Palmer, the principal of the city’s only black high school, assumed an influential leadership role in a statewide legal effort, coordinated with the NAACP, to win black teachers the same pay as white teachers. Palmer’s involvement prematurely ended his career in 1943 after the all-white School Board fired him months after a judge forced it to raise black teachers’ wages.<sup>36</sup>

Slum dwellings remained common in Newport News’ black neighborhoods nearly two decades after a Progressive-era municipal survey had encouraged city officials to improve their substandard housing. A 1919 report had recommended installing new sewers, but officials ignored enforcement of a sewer connection ordinance, particularly in black areas, throughout the 1930s. Property owners, who were mostly white, said they could not afford to pay the associated fee until the economy rebounded. In 1938, the City Council asked principal Palmer and members of his faculty to examine six to eight blocks within the city’s worst slum district. Palmer learned that hundreds of houses had no indoor toilets. Many others lacked outdoor privies. Tenants used

newspapers to cover falling plaster and block wind and rain from blowing into apartments. Palmer described dangerous overcrowding where “fire would not only wipe out most of the houses and destroy these people’s belongings, but persons living in the upstairs apartments would be easily trapped.”<sup>37</sup>

Amid such decrepit conditions, homeownership offered an elusive opportunity to secure a better quality of life. Nationwide, only about one in five black families owned their home. That figure held true in Newport News.<sup>38</sup> Black migration represented a relentless effort to improve living conditions by securing higher wages, attending better schools, and finding suitable housing. African Americans moved to cities and suburbs “to do better.”<sup>39</sup> In his study of black suburbs, Wiese finds that “early black suburbanites moved to suburbs for many of the same reasons as nonblacks.” They desired jobs and cheap land and a sense of country living but with urban amenities. They wanted the security of homeownership, of possessing shelter that could not be taken away. Unlike white suburbanites, they typically viewed their houses as permanent homes rather than as assets to be sold.<sup>40</sup> *Journal and Guide* publisher P.B. Young endorsed government involvement in housing by claiming homeownership reinforced citizenship. “Home-owning is a fundamental creed of the true American – whether it be a shack in shanty town, a boat-house on the river, a cabin in the cotton, or a pent-house in the metropolis. A nation endures in proportion to the quality of its homes and the characters which emerge therefrom.” Young also depicted homeownership as a bulwark against anti-Americanism. “Better homes, plus better living conditions for all Americans, are impregnable defenses against the invasion of doctrines alien to the American way of life.”<sup>41</sup>

## Planning Aberdeen Gardens

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads emerged from President Roosevelt's willingness to try nearly anything to combat joblessness – even constructing government-sponsored housing developments that critics compared to Soviet communes. New Dealer Sidney Baldwin said the homesteads program tapped into cherished notions of agrarian independence and utopian collectivist movements. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes created the division in 1933 after an obscure provision tucked into the National Industrial Recovery Act set aside \$25 million for such projects. Division officials devised several types of homesteads. They planned experimental farm colonies for struggling, small farmers. They designed rural communities near factories and mines for part-time farmers and industrial workers, hoping the combination of agriculture and industry could offer full employment. And they proposed suburban garden homes for urban industrial workers.<sup>42</sup>

In March 1935, Ickes approved a suburban development designed to provide decent housing for poor black families living in Newport News' slums. Officials intended to help struggling urban dwellers support themselves by relocating them to homesteads with enough land for them to plant gardens and raise livestock. Ickes justified construction by citing a survey that estimated the average weekly income for black workers in Newport News had fallen by nearly one-third to \$14 per week. Many laborers worked only two or three days a week. They paid high rents for substandard houses located at least a half-mile from garden plots. Division officials expected the development, later named Aberdeen Gardens, to consist of one hundred houses on two hundred acres about 2.5 miles northeast of Newport News. They intended to build three-, four- and five-room brick houses. They expected tenants to rent initially but with an option to either make mortgage payments or rent-to-own. Each house came with a garden,

orchard, chickens, and pigs. Tenants shared twelve mules and twelve milking cows. Other planned features included a park, community center, cooperative store managed by tenants, and playgrounds. Local families seized the chance to improve their lives. Within two months, the list of applicants doubled the number of proposed houses. “The project derives one of its most significant features,” said Charles E. Pynchon, a division official, “from the fact that it is a project by Negroes, for Negroes.”<sup>43</sup>

Bureaucratic shuffling and local white opposition jeopardized federal support for Aberdeen Gardens. The Resettlement Administration inherited the various projects planned by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads just two months after Aberdeen Garden’s construction was announced. The RA suspended many proposals. Its administrators preferred to focus on encouraging proper land-use planning, removing exhausted land from agricultural production, and awarding loans and grants to struggling farmers. The agency ultimately completed ninety-nine resettlement communities – sixty-one of them in the South — before the Farm Security Administration absorbed it in September 1937.<sup>44</sup> Of the thirty-two suburban developments built for industrial workers, more than half were located in the South. Black tenants only moved into Aberdeen Gardens.<sup>45</sup>

Federal administrators typically blamed local citizens for halting the construction of other black developments, but black activists accused federal officials of inviting white opposition by too readily endorsing segregation. Black leaders met with Eleanor Roosevelt in January 1934 to discuss their concerns with segregated homesteads as controversy engulfed the division’s first development outside Reedsville, West Virginia. The project manager for Arthurdale, a development with 165 houses for coal miners, refused to consider applications from two hundred African Americans. He said the project was reserved for “native white stock.” By a narrow vote,

prospective tenants agreed with him. Regardless of the vote's outcome, officials in Washington, D.C. ultimately decided the criteria for tenant selection at their various developments.<sup>46</sup> However, they preferred to defuse conflict and capitulate to local white demands. They abandoned plans for a black subdivision near Dayton, Ohio, after more than 1,100 residents signed petitions opposing the project. They shelved a development for Indianapolis after local citizens hindered land purchases and protested to their congressman. In spring 1935, division officials attempted to ameliorate their decision to only build segregated developments by promising to reserve 10 percent of their houses for black families – a number proportional to the percentage of African Americans within the nation's total population.<sup>47</sup> That summer, though, New Deal critic John P. Davis told an audience at the NAACP's annual convention that the government's handling of resettlement projects worked to extend the South's practice of segregation to the rest of the nation.<sup>48</sup> Within a year, Joseph H.B. Evans, a black affairs advisor for the Resettlement Administration, warned the acting director of rural resettlement that delays in building black homesteads and proposals to reduce the percentage of black occupancy could harm Roosevelt's bid for re-election.<sup>49</sup>

Amid this turmoil, Hampton Institute exerted a steadying influence over Aberdeen Gardens. Southern and conservative, the college still emphasized economic progress, self-help, and interracial cooperation, much as it had done since being founded in 1868 by white missionaries and philanthropists. By the 1930s, though, Hampton Institute was no longer the bastion of Washingtonian accommodation that it had been just a few decades earlier. The school's curriculum had steadily improved. It earned formal accreditation as a technical and professional college in 1927. Most students enrolled in the School of Education where they studied science, English, social studies, mathematics, and French. The college awarded its first

master's degree in education in 1934. Only about one-eighth of students enrolled in industrial education courses, such as carpentry, welding, and plumbing. Virginia's elite white leaders still applauded Hampton Institute, seeing its mission as an extension of their paternalistic interests. But such sentiment obscured the college's role in gradually eroding Virginia's system of managed race relations.<sup>50</sup>

Hampton Institute's administrators and faculty coordinated the initial planning of Aberdeen Gardens and later cooperated with the black managers, architects, engineers, and laborers who designed and built the houses. Arthur Howe, the school's white president, regularly consulted federal officials, suggesting improvements and advising them on local concerns. Howe met with local black officials before endorsing a segregated development. "This policy may not be ideal in all places, nor forever," Howe wrote to Pickett, "yet it appears to me to be a sure way of facing difficult facts as we find them."<sup>51</sup> William M. Cooper, a black educator who served as director of extension education, provided Howe with the information needed to make sound decisions. He scouted potential sites and screened prospective applicants. Howe and Cooper established a sponsoring committee of black community leaders to advise them on recruiting tenants and handling potential political complications. Together, the administrators and committee members secured interracial support for Aberdeen Gardens before the federal government even appropriated money for it. When the Resettlement Administration hesitated on moving ahead with the project it inherited, Howe sought the assistance of his congressional delegation and wrote letters to federal officials.<sup>52</sup>

## Opposing Federal Spending for Black Homeowners

In early 1936, as land clearing began at Aberdeen Gardens, Swantown's homebuyers settled into their new homes. The houses were located about one mile north of North Newport News, a small black neighborhood, and about one mile east of Hilton Village, a planned urban development built for white shipyard workers during World War I. The subdivision reportedly took its name from the Swanns, an extended black family that lived nearby and once owned the land. Built on one-quarter acre lots, Swantown's stucco houses came in two styles — two story or bungalow — and featured three bedrooms, a living room with a fireplace, linoleum floors, and indoor plumbing. Federal and local officials claimed the houses, which sold for \$2,400, could have sold for \$3,500 on the open market. The homeowners reduced their \$400 down payment by helping build their own houses. Relatives and friends lent their labor when the owners left to work their shifts at the shipyard.<sup>53</sup>

Swantown's new homeowners swelled with pride, despite the difficulties of distance and isolation. Residents sacrificed community connections and group security to obtain better living conditions and fulfill their dreams of homeownership. They left behind friends and relatives, churches and social clubs, workplaces and hangouts. They left behind urban convenience. Langston Powell, who was the four-year-old son of shipyard laborer John Powell and his wife Rosa, recalled longing to "get back uptown" to brag to friends about his new home. "We felt like we were really somebody who was worth something," Powell said. "You weren't renting. You were buying. That was a big deal to our father." Laborer James Brown and his wife Myrtle shared similar sentiments when they moved in with their three children. "They were just people who wanted something," said Joyce Brown Wilkins, a toddler when her parents moved. "They wanted their children to have a home."<sup>54</sup>

Swantown's unraveling began in August 1936 when five white residents – including a truck farmer, two storekeepers, and a funeral home operator – filed a public nuisance complaint against the FHA, Southern Homes, and the subdivision's homeowners. Only one complainant, farmer Stephen R. Maney, owned property adjacent to Swantown. The men alleged that the subdivision's sewage spilled from undersized septic tanks into Newmarket Creek and eventually flowed into a ditch that carried the waste into lakes at a public park and then into the James River. They blamed Southern Homes for installing septic tanks smaller than those mandated by county zoning law; the FHA for financing mortgages to houses with inadequate septic tanks; and the tenants for flushing their toilets. The complaint was legitimate. It also tapped a deep-seated fear among white southerners who often argued that epidemics originated in black neighborhoods because African Americans' inherent inferiority made them more susceptible to disease. One month later, a grand jury indicted the defendants, touching off nearly a year's worth of negotiations involving the FHA, Virginia highway department, Southern Homes, Warwick County, Newport News, and Maney. Those discussions proved fruitless.<sup>55</sup>

While Swantown's future remained uncertain, complaints surfaced publicly in February 1937 about Aberdeen Gardens violating the spatial boundaries of segregation. A petition signed by hundreds of white residents demanded a change in the development's racial makeup because its houses were surrounded by land owned and occupied by white farmers. The development's backers denied that characterization. The Peninsula Association of Commerce (PAC), a regional business group, accused the Resettlement Administration of inflaming local race relations, heedlessly dismissing earlier white protests, and even ignoring concerns raised by black leaders nervous about building black-occupied homes so close to white farms. Aberdeen Gardens' supporters rejected each assertion. The *Daily Press* initially reported that the PAC passed a

resolution asking federal and state officials to convert the development to white occupancy. Four days later, though, the newspaper published a second article correcting the initial report. Sherrod N. Vaughn, PAC secretary-manager, said the group had passed a resolution only asking federal officials to *study* whether Aberdeen Gardens should convert to white occupancy. Black residents questioned the legitimacy of the second news report. The *Journal and Guide* observed that the correction ran four days after the original story, even though Raymond B. Bottom was both PAC president and publisher of the *Daily Press*. The black newspaper suggested white real estate agents might have demanded the correction, worrying that a whites-only Aberdeen Gardens would siphon prospective clients and profits.<sup>56</sup>

Aberdeen Gardens' sponsors rallied to its defense. Howe wrote letters to ensure continued federal involvement and solidified the backing of local supporters. Lorenzo C. White, of Hampton Institute, argued publicly that converting the project to white tenancy would discourage future interracial cooperation and would prove that democracy "was but a shadowy nothingness" in Virginia. If Aberdeen Gardens was altered, White asked, what prevented white citizens from forcing "all Negroes or all Jews or all red-headed people" off the Peninsula and out of the state? Such bold questioning contrasted sharply with the public silence surrounding Swantown.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike Swantown, Aberdeen Gardens also enjoyed strong support in Washington, D.C. One of the South's most famous liberals, Will W. Alexander, took over as RA administrator in January 1937. Alexander had headed the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta for twenty-five years and briefly served as president of Dillard University, a black college in New Orleans.<sup>58</sup> Under Alexander's leadership, the RA insured rehabilitation loans for southern blacks in near proportionality to their numbers as farmers. (However, equivalence by population was

not the same as equivalence by need, meaning poor black farmers got fewer government loans than did poor white farmers.) Similar strides toward equality did not exist among the agency's homestead projects.<sup>59</sup> With Aberdeen Gardens as their only black development, Alexander and his officers steadfastly refused to alter it. Evans, the RA's black affairs advisor, rebuffed the PAC resolution. "The thing is too absurd to even discuss," Evans said. "That project was planned by Negroes, engineered by Negroes and is being built by Negroes and will be occupied by Negro tenants. Make no mistake about that."<sup>60</sup>

Ultimately, PAC's board of directors passed a face-saving resolution that declared the development too near completion to demand its conversion to white occupancy. Instead, board members recommended asking for federal assurances that the community would not expand beyond its existing boundaries. Bottom urged Alexander to endorse the recommendation and recognize "the need that no Federal project fly in the face of local sentiment." Howe supported the recommendation since it did not alter existing plans and seemingly quelled protest. Federal officials had already prepared such a contingency. A "greenbelt" buffer of woods and farms surrounded the development, either providing space for expansion or "the elimination of possible inter-racial neighborhood complications." To deflect future controversy, Howe and the all-black sponsoring committee created an interracial advisory committee for the purpose of improving public relations and keeping the general public better informed about plans for Aberdeen Gardens.<sup>61</sup> Compromise, though, did not secure the development's future.

Back at Swantown, the subdivision's developers and homeowners went to court in May 1937. By then, construction supervisor Donald Love had initiated liquidation proceedings against Southern Homes, claiming it owed \$40,000 to creditors, including himself. The company possessed virtually no assets. The outstanding debt and fraying partnership might explain why

the company pulled out of an agreed-upon remedy to the sewage problem just before the trial. The solution called for Southern Homes to fix the septic tanks after the highway department agreed to reroute its ditches, and Maney, one of the initial complainants, agreed to grant a right-of-way over his land. Judge Frank Armistead opened the weeklong trial by dropping the FHA from the lawsuit because the agency was not directly involved in construction. Also, jurors could not blame Southern Homes for violating Warwick County's zoning law since the county Board of Supervisors did not pass a law regulating the size of septic tanks until about eight months after construction began. The judge told jurors they could acquit Southern Homes and the black tenants if they faulted the state highway department for not properly maintaining ditches on State Highway 168, causing water to back into Swantown's ditches and flood the sewage system.<sup>62</sup>

The jury deliberated for four hours. It found Southern Homes and Love guilty and fined them \$1,000 and \$500, respectively. The jury also found the homeowners guilty and fined them a penny apiece. In his ruling, Armistead wrote that the homeowners were "only technically guilty and are the victims and are the victims of circumstance." The judge reportedly paid their fines. But he also ordered the homeowners to evacuate their houses within one month if the sewage problem was not corrected.<sup>63</sup> Besides an inadequate septic system, homeowners complained that Southern Homes had built shoddy houses and bad roads. They claimed the homebuilder had swindled them. Company officials had collected \$210 per household – or \$8,610 total – to install a new sewage system. They never did the work.<sup>64</sup>

Stalled negotiations and federal bureaucracy forced nearly all of Swantown's residents out of their homes and then into foreclosure within a month. Federal and state officials failed to reach a right-of-way agreement with farmer Maney that would have granted them an easement to build two ditches on his land to drain Swantown. Maney preferred one ditch. As the county

evicted the homeowners, FHA officials said they could not spend money to correct the subdivision's problems unless they held the property titles. Most of Swantown's homeowners allowed their houses to go into foreclosure – unwilling to lose more money on an investment they could not salvage. White county residents expressed sympathy but did not intervene. One resident acknowledged that Swantown's homeowners had been “badly treated,” but he believed “white property owners were treated definitely worse.” “What is Newport News going to do about the white property owners,” C.M. Elvin asked, “whose property was wantonly depreciated by the settlement being built in a supposedly white restricted district?”<sup>65</sup>

As Swantown's tenants contemplated their uncertain future, charges of wasteful spending further eroded public support for Aberdeen Gardens. Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd initiated attacks on the Resettlement Administration's management of homestead projects as criticism mounted against the Shenandoah Homesteads, a project built in the upper Shenandoah Valley near Byrd's hometown. As the chairman of a senate committee studying whether to reorganize executive agencies, Byrd soon expanded his attacks to take broad swipes at all homestead projects. His objections fit within southern politicians' tendency to oppose Roosevelt's welfare and relief programs. Southern legislators worried about accumulating too much debt and opposed policies and programs they suspected could undermine the social structure that sustained white supremacy. They professed a belief in rugged individualism and sought to fend off history-steeped fears of federal interference in state affairs.<sup>66</sup>

Peninsula officials shared Byrd's color-conscious fiscal conservatism. Even during the worst of the state's economic turmoil, the percentage of Virginians receiving direct relief was half that of the nation. Only two other states received less federal aid. Overall, Virginia ranked twenty-seventh in total dollars spent in New Deal funding and forty-third in per capita spending.

U.S. Representative S. Otis Bland, a Democrat who represented the Peninsula, often cast votes that mirrored Byrd's positions.<sup>67</sup> A delegation of Peninsula leaders sounded their support for curtailed spending policies when they visited their elected officials in Washington, D.C. A local circuit court judge spoke the underlying belief that fueled these men's opposition to expensive and expansive federal programs when he said, "We believe the country's wealth lay in the stamina of its manhood, and we know that this stamina is weakened by the mush-cake softness of doles and handouts and devices for the taking from Paul, who works to give [to] Peter, who chooses to be indolent and slothful."<sup>68</sup>

A series of *Daily Press* editorials focused local outrage on Aberdeen Gardens after Byrd denounced resettlement projects in July 1937 as a "sinful and absurd waste" with similarities to Soviet-style collectives. Expenditure overruns opened the development to attacks by white residents who believed black tenants were receiving more than they deserved or could appreciate. The project's federal planners had invited such political scrutiny by failing to finalize its scope and cost as responsibility for the development was transferred among different agencies. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads estimated in March 1935 that each of the one hundred houses would cost between \$2,000 and \$2,600. Byrd's committee estimated the houses would cost \$9,233 apiece. The final tally was \$8,515 per house. As Swantown's families left their homes, *Daily Press* editors labeled Aberdeen Gardens "the greatest white elephant this community has ever possessed."<sup>69</sup>

Byrd's criticisms did not alter plans for Aberdeen Gardens, but continued white opposition dampened black enthusiasm for the development. The first thirty-four families moved into their new homes in November 1937. William Peddrew, a plumber who graduated from Hampton Institute, told the *Journal and Guide* "we look forward to better living standards in our

own home and we are not so crowded here.”<sup>70</sup> Sponsors, though, struggled to find more tenants. By May 1938, only fifty families lived there, leaving 108 houses vacant. Families refused to move into the new homes after seeing Swantown’s owners evicted and witnessing repeated attempts to convert Aberdeen Gardens to white occupancy.<sup>71</sup> Federal and local sponsors held a series of public meetings in October 1938 to recruit more occupants. George S. Mitchell, regional director for the Farm Security Administration, assured black residents that the federal government intended Aberdeen Gardens “to be for colored people forever.” Officials promised prospective tenants that the houses remained affordable. They carefully explained rental and purchase options and outlined safeguards against foreclosure. “There is no sure protection for any piece of ground occupied by colored people,” Mitchell said, “except the protection that colored people themselves throw around it.”<sup>72</sup> Even then, families waited. About one-fifth of the homes – 36 of 158 houses – remained vacant in 1940.<sup>73</sup>

At Swantown, court-ordered evictions eased the transition to white occupancy. In March 1938, Maney signed a right-of-way agreement apparently similar to the one FHA officials had requested before evictions occurred. Swantown’s last original homeowners, Charlie and Susie Gayle, moved out in August. The Gayles had kept making monthly mortgage payments and had installed a new septic tank. They swapped their house in Swantown for one in Aberdeen Gardens – joining four other Swantown families who had already relocated there. After spending \$40,000 to renovate the vacant houses, the FHA readily acceded to the wishes of local banking and real estate interests. The next month, two local real estate firms announced Swantown’s swan song by changing the subdivision’s name to Warwick Village. Their agents sold the newly renovated houses to white homebuyers. Billed as Newport News’ newest suburb, Warwick Village’s houses sold out in three days. The First National Bank of Newport News again issued the

mortgages. White families paid less for the remodeled houses than black families had originally paid for their problem-plagued homes.<sup>74</sup>

### **Paternalism and the Fate of Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens**

Matthew D. Lassiter and Kevin M. Kruse have encouraged historians to study southern urban and suburban history by arguing it provides “a national framework for interpreting the ‘long civil rights movement’ that emphasizes the importance of federal policies and grassroots struggles over race and space in southern cities and suburbs.”<sup>75</sup> The South’s open commitment to Jim Crow segregation and discrimination clarified the federal government’s willingness to capitulate to racism in housing in the 1930s and 1940s as long as industrial workers received adequate shelter and excessive violence was avoided. On the Virginia Peninsula, the conflicts at Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens revealed the near impossibility of reconciling cautious federal experiments in racial betterment (backed quietly by white liberals and progressive business interests) with the countervailing forces of expanding black demands for meaningful economic and civic empowerment, and hardening white resistance against efforts to improve black life.

The Peninsula’s white leaders supported the two segregated subdivisions because the developments reaffirmed and extended their power. Ferguson and Howe used their social connections and the influence of their institutions to secure federal money for local projects. They then rewarded “colored workmen of good character”<sup>76</sup> with a chance to dramatically improve their lives. This benevolence came at a cost. African Americans who participated, and those who applauded, tacitly sanctioned the extension of segregation and upheld the rule of white supremacy. The developments provided opportunity for a few, but equality for none.

And yet, the two subdivisions also challenged how elite white Virginians managed racial issues in three fundamental areas: occupancy status, expense, and location. First, the developments' builders intended to sell rather than rent. Homeownership offered black families an independent means of acquiring wealth and fulfilling aspirations of obtaining middle-class living standards. It provided them with constitutional protections against warrantless searches and illegal seizures, which extended a measure of protection against segregation's abuses. The new homes expanded segregation but also improved residents' quality of life and opened once unthinkable opportunities as owners' paid off mortgages and their property values increased. Homeownership broadened tenants' perspectives on life's possibilities. After the sheriff evicted her parents from Swantown, Joyce Brown Wilkins moved into Aberdeen Gardens. She spent the rest of her childhood there. "Growing up in Aberdeen," she recalled, "we thought we were rich. I think all the kids did."<sup>77</sup>

Second, the new houses violated the South's policy of "whites first." Black citizens benefitted from conspicuous examples of federal spending without immediately comparable expenditures for white residents. White neighbors characterized such spending as a waste of public money. Newport News real estate agent Thomas J. Hundley said as much after becoming the chairman of the local housing authority. Hundley had headed the PAC committee that investigated the feasibility of white occupancy at Aberdeen Gardens. He was also a principal partner in one of the firms that resold Swantown's houses to white homebuyers. He welcomed federal involvement in the local housing market. As housing authority chairman, he sought federal money for slum clearance. But Hundley did not expect taxpayer dollars to disrupt local race relations. "God grant," he said, "there may never be another Aberdeen or another

Swantown. The local commission is trying to avoid the mistakes of those colossal [sic] failures.”<sup>78</sup>

Third, the developments established sizable black neighborhoods in rural areas that dispersed neighbors could claim, by default, as white-only districts. Nearby working-class whites feared the value of their most significant assets – their homes – would decline sharply if they did not protest the segregated subdivisions. They also worried that once African Americans breached the color line, future violations would occur with greater ease. Residents like C.M. Elvin, who complained of “wantonly” depreciated home values, shared the same sentiments as the Birmingham, Alabama, citizen who claimed, ““you’ve sold out the white people to the Negroes,””<sup>79</sup> after a zoning change altered the racial boundaries near his home. White neighbors pressured local leaders to renounce their support of Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens but also provided them political cover that explained their reversed decisions. By characterizing the developments as federal boondoggles, neighbors shifted blame from the local officials who had requested federal involvement to vilified and anonymous office workers toiling in the nation’s capital.

The developments’ street names perfectly captured their sponsors’ contrasting perspectives on handling racial controversies. Swantown’s backers decided to honor Virginian-born Confederate officers and named the streets after the likes of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, J.E.B. Stuart, and John B. Magruder.<sup>80</sup> Confederate surnames served as readily recognizable markers of an unrepentant, pro-slavery past. Aberdeen Gardens’ tenants voted to name their streets after prominent black Virginians, including banker Maggie L. Walker, newspaper publisher Matt N. Lewis, and U.S. Congressman John Mercer Langston. Residents selected those names “to stimulate pride in the achievements of Negro leaders.”<sup>81</sup>

In the end, the overlapping construction of the two developments reinforced efforts to convert Swantown to white occupancy. To maintain the facade of managed race relations and appease white neighbors, the Peninsula's leaders sacrificed one of the projects to satisfy the dictates of white supremacy. At Swantown, the installation of undersized septic tanks provided a legitimate reason to force black homeowners from their houses. Court-ordered evictions eased the transition to white homeownership with minimal social unrest – the outcome most desired by white political and business leaders. By abandoning Swantown, its sponsors removed the more visible challenge to Virginia's system of managed race relations. Unlike Aberdeen Gardens' tenants, families at Swantown bought houses the same way white families bought houses, and they moved into new homes that resembled the houses in white subdivisions. Despite segregation and flawed construction, Swantown presented the appearance of equality.

Swantown's demise stemmed from its sponsors' unwillingness to engage in a racial dispute on behalf of African Americans. Inaction and indifference, delay and silence, eased the way for white homeownership. Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock possessed the political influence to protect Swantown's black tenants, but Ferguson apparently took no public stand regarding the project. The FHA encountered numerous setbacks in its various attempts to salvage the houses for black homeowners, but its ultimate shortcoming stemmed from an institutional proclivity to concede to local white demands when entangled in racial controversies.

<sup>82</sup> Given FHA officials' hesitancy to openly discuss Swantown, one can only speculate on how much the development's precedent – the collapse of a locally-conceived subdivision for African Americans amid racialized public criticism – shaped the agency's future reluctance to assist black homebuyers. It seems fair, though, to suggest that the early example of Swantown discouraged federal interest in similar projects.

Swantown's black homeowners seized every opportunity to protect their houses. They borrowed money to help Southern Homes pay for a new sewage system, only to be cheated. They pleaded not guilty to the public nuisance charge, only to be declared guilty victims. They endured living conditions that county officials considered unhealthy, only to be forcibly evicted. Only then did most of them allow their homes to go into foreclosure. Wilkins once asked her mother Myrtle whether she regretted leaving Swantown. "There was no need banging your head against a brick wall when there's nothing you can do about it," she remembered her mother saying. Many families returned to Newport News, disillusioned and poorer. Langston Powell recalled a child's disappointment in leaving the new home he had boasted about to friends. He remembered sitting at the kitchen table as his parents told their children the disheartening news about the septic tanks. "They knew it was a sham," Powell said. "Nobody believed that was the reason why they had to move."<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, Aberdeen Gardens remained a black neighborhood because its local and federal sponsors aggressively defended the development before, during, and after public controversies. Officials at Hampton Institute continually solicited advice from local black leaders and listened to tenants' concerns and suggestions. The project's exceptionality and expense also worked to its favor. Federal officials had invested too much time and money to abandon Aberdeen Gardens, particularly since it was the only black development overseen by administrators who viewed themselves as progressive on racial matters. Repeated federal capitulations to racism elsewhere protected Aberdeen Gardens from Swantown's fate. The Peninsula Association of Commerce backed down from demanding white occupancy because both Hampton Institute and the Resettlement Administration defended Aberdeen Gardens. However, PAC representatives knew as they retreated that the racial occupancy of Swantown could yet change.

Aberdeen Gardens also posed less of a direct challenge to racialized conceptions of homeownership than Swantown. Aberdeen Gardens was a sizable development constructed with the direct oversight of the federal government, rather than a private homebuilder. Its future homeowners initially rented their houses. In many ways, Aberdeen Gardens resembled a public housing project, with even the justifications for its construction cloaked in the familiar rhetoric of racial uplift. Federal administrators claimed the community would raise its tenants “to a higher social and health level” and give them “a new economic stability.”<sup>84</sup> White opponents rationalized their failure to convert Aberdeen Gardens to white occupancy by chalking it up as a misguided waste of taxpayer money conceived by distant bureaucrats who did not know how race relations were handled on the Virginia Peninsula.

Black families knew better, and they moved to take control of the development once white hostility subsided. After moving in, tenants undermined the paternalistic interests of liberal whites and the uplift motives of middle-class blacks by seeking to assert full ownership over the development. Unlike their critics, the tenants did not view their homes as a government handout. Although subsidized by the federal government, the houses were not cheap. Monthly rents ranged from \$11.25 to \$15.50, and monthly payments for tenants planning to buy ranged from \$17.32 to \$21.47. Most tenants paid more than the \$12.96 per month a government survey had tallied as the average rent for the area’s black families.<sup>85</sup> Tenants believed their payments entitled them to a greater voice in the development’s management. In May 1938, they petitioned the Farm Security Administration, which succeeded the Resettlement Administration, to change exceptionally restrictive language in their leases. They wanted to be treated the same as other homeowners and renters. Residents claimed the changes worked “to promote the economic status of our residents, and to encourage the growth of our community.” The families also hoped to

ensure future consideration of their interests by placing three homesteaders on the development's sponsoring committee.<sup>86</sup>

Aberdeen Gardens' residents solidified their hold on their homes in the 1940s by nurturing a tight-knit community where neighbors looked out for one another and shared responsibility for the maintenance of their neighborhood. The development's contested origins and lingering opposition encouraged residents to foster close community bonds. The sponsors' decision to govern the homesteads through a tenant-led cooperative provided a daily means for strengthening neighborly commitments. Neighbors hosted dances, lectures, debates, spelling bees, club meetings, and other events at the community center. They worked side-by-side at the cooperative general store. The neighborhood's esprit de corps moved shipyard worker Wendell P. Cross to write a poem praising his community:

Nowhere are the gardens greener  
 Than in Aberdeen.  
 Nowhere is the hope keener,  
 Than in Aberdeen.  
 Where your neighbor knows you  
 And you know him,  
 And a pat on the back is a  
     glorious thing,  
 And you stand together through  
     thick and thin,  
 That's Aberdeen.<sup>87</sup>

After World War II, racialized housing controversies intensified in Newport News and elsewhere across the South. Mobilization for World War II and the Cold War transformed Virginia's Hampton Roads region. Local officials relied heavily on federal funds to build private and public housing to accommodate the workforce of a burgeoning military-industrial complex. Discrimination continued to shape decision-making. Mostly only white homebuyers moved into

single-family houses built in increasingly suburbanized Warwick County or suburban-like tracts annexed by Newport News. Most black families could only rent cheaper public-housing apartments within city limits.<sup>88</sup> Like Swantown and Aberdeen Gardens, though, these federally subsidized housing developments eroded the authority of progressive paternalism, even as they fulfilled elite white Virginians' goals. The influx of federal spending meant Virginia's white civic and business leaders were no longer viewed as the sole arbiters of residential boundary disputes. African Americans could challenge local housing practices before federal officials. Elite Virginians' power diminished even further as the modern Civil Rights Movement dismantled the racial caste system of Jim Crow segregation. By the 1960s, black protests for fair housing and supportive federal legislation shifted the focus of local housing conflicts from debating where to locate segregated neighborhoods to arguing over the integration of established residential areas. White neighbors again protested to protect their property values, but they increasingly fled older city neighborhoods for new suburban-style subdivisions where segregation was informally enforced.

Today, Aberdeen Gardens remains a vibrant black neighborhood. Homeowners are proud of their history, which earned the subdivision recognition by the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors can tour a home preserved as a museum. An annual celebration commemorates the neighborhood's heritage. In contrast, Swantown's racially contested origins have mostly disappeared from public memory. The subdivision that merited a visit from the First Lady is remembered primarily by the descendants of black families forced to abandon their homes and vaguely by the white families who moved in afterward. Others have chosen to forget its troubled history.

<sup>1</sup> “First Lady Rests Quietly at Hilton Before Launching,” (Newport News, VA) *Daily Press*, April 4, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> “Development of Swantown in Future May Bring New Visit from Mrs. Roosevelt,” *Daily Press*, April 5, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Housing Administration, *Fourth Annual Report of the Federal Housing Administration for the Year Ending December 31, 1937* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 97; and “Officials Discuss Swantown Problem,” *Daily Press*, June 19, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Holley, “The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program,” *New South* 27 (Winter 1972): 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> For case studies that discuss controversies over neighborhood segregation before 1950, see Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Dominic J. Capeci Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Charles E. Connerly, “*The Most Segregated City in America*”: *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, *Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995); and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>7</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 140-190.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin M. Kruse explores the class dimensions that shaped postwar Atlanta’s residential segregation controversies in *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). For a more general overview, see Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>11</sup> See Kevin K. Gaines’ discussion of urban pathology and W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Philadelphia Negro in Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 152-178.

<sup>12</sup> “A Valuable Negro Citizen,” *Norfolk (VA) Journal and Guide*, May 2, 1936.

<sup>13</sup> For black working-class resistance, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Histories of black migration frequently discuss housing disputes. See Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks’ Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and Joe William Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> David M.P. Freund, “Marketing the Free Market,” in *The New Suburban History*, eds. Kruse and Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11-32.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning race and federal housing policy, see Christopher Bonastia, *Knocking on the Door: The Federal Government’s Attempt to Desegregate the Suburbs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Kevin Fox Gotham, “Racialization and the State: The Housing Act of 1934 and the Creation of the

Federal Housing Administration,” *Sociological Perspectives* 43 (Summer 2000): 291-317; Hirsch, “‘Containment’ on the Home Front: Race and Federal Policy from the New Deal to the Cold War,” *Journal of Urban History* 26 (2000): 158-189; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don’t Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); and Gail Radford *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and “The Federal Government and Housing during the Great Depression,” in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szyvian (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 102-120.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas L. Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 168; and Richard Sterner, *The Negro’s Share: A Study of Income, Consumption, Housing and Public Assistance* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943; Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1971), 186-187, 190.

<sup>19</sup> Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 66-67.

<sup>20</sup> President’s Conference, *Negro Housing*, 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5. For the historiography of American suburbs, see Matthew D. Lassiter and Kruse, “The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History since World War II,” *Journal of Southern History* 75 (August 2009): 691-706; Kruse and Sugrue, “Introduction: The New Suburban History,” in *The New Suburban History*, 1-10; and Wiese, “The Other Suburbanites: African American Suburbanization in the North before 1950,” *Journal of American History* 85 (March 1999): 1495-1524.

<sup>22</sup> Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 11-33; and Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Rural Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930), 120.

<sup>23</sup> President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932), 110-113.

<sup>24</sup> Wiese, “Blacks in the Suburban and Rural Fringe,” in *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: African Americans in the Industrial City, 1900-1950*, eds. Henry Louis Taylor Jr. and Walter Hill (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 155-156. Also see William H. Wilson, *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> M.R. Young to Roy Wilkins, October 18, 1938, box 4, folder: Minority Group Housing, 1938-1947, Commissioner’s Correspondence and Subject Files, 1938-1958, *Records of the Federal Housing Administration*, Record Group 31, National Archives II, College Park, MD; *Daily Press*, June 19, 1937; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1959* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 463; and Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto*, 700.

<sup>26</sup> “Houses for Shipyard Workers,” *Architectural Forum*, June 1936, 518-519.

<sup>27</sup> Population of Newport News, total and by race, 1930, Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

<sup>28</sup> “Houses for Shipyard Workers,” *Architectural Forum*, 518-519. To confirm the homebuyers’ occupation, I consulted *Hill’s Newport News (Warwick County, VA) City Directory*, 1935. The directory also showed that the majority of Swantown’s tenants moved to Warwick County from Newport News.

<sup>29</sup> “Homer L. Ferguson Addresses Group at Negro Center,” *Daily Press*, April 4, 1938; Cerinda W. Evans, “Homer Lenoir Ferguson: Dean of American Shipbuilders,” TMs, p. 114-119, 192-199, The Mariners’ Museum, Newport News; and “3,000 Negro Workers on the Payroll,” *Journal and Guide*, July 10, 1937.

<sup>30</sup> W. Jackson, “Field Notes: Newport News, VA, Memorandum,” 10, 17, box 85, folder: “Political Status of the Negro,” *Ralph J. Bunche Papers* (Collection 2051), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Wilhelmina Jackson interviewed Newport News residents in 1939 while conducting research for the Carnegie study on American race relations that became Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944).

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Virginia, *The Negro in Virginia* (New York: Hastings House, 1940; Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1994), 345-346.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, “Field Notes: Newport News,” *Bunche Papers*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, “Homer Lenoir Ferguson,” 118-119.

<sup>34</sup> Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 50-55; “Klan Enrolls Public Officials,” *New York World*, September 21, 1921; Jackson, “Field Notes: Newport News,” *Bunche Papers*, 14; and “‘Emperor of Love’ Starts New Church,” *Journal and Guide*, June 19, 1937.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding black activism in the Hampton Roads region, see Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*.

<sup>36</sup> “Newport Newsians Ponder Chances of Electing Negro City Councilman,” *Journal and Guide*, January 13, 1934; “Council Campaign Actively On Foot in Negro Section,” *Daily Press*, February 29, 1936; Jackson, “Field Notes: Newport News,” *Bunche Papers*, 12-13; and J. Rupert Picott, *History of the Virginia Teachers Association* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1975), 111-120.

<sup>37</sup> Better Newport News Association, *Report on Municipal Survey of Newport News* (Newport News: Better Newport News Association, 1919); “Negro Educators to Begin Personal Part of Inquiry in Slum Section Saturday,” *Daily Press*, October 13, 1938; and “Palmer and Howe Believe Improved Homes would be Incentive for Clean-up,” *Daily Press*, April 24, 1938.

<sup>38</sup> Percentage of homeownership in Newport News by race, 1940, Historical Census Browser, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Louis Taylor Jr., “Creating the Metropolis in Black and White: Black Suburbanization and the Planning Movement in Cincinnati, 1900-1950,” in *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 68-69.

<sup>41</sup> “Better Homes,” *Journal and Guide*, February 13, 1937; and “Better American Homes,” *Journal and Guide*, December 18, 1937.

<sup>42</sup> Monographs that examine the institutional history of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and its successors include Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); and Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959). Also see Holley, *Uncle Sam’s Farmers: The New Deal Communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

<sup>43</sup> “Memorandum for the Press,” March 13, 1935, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1935), *Dr. Arthur Howe Papers*, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, VA.

<sup>44</sup> George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 422-425.

<sup>45</sup> Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 113.

<sup>46</sup> John P. Davis, “A Black Inventory of the New Deal,” *Crisis*, May 1935, 142. See C.J. Maloney, *Back to the Land: Arthur Dale, FDR’s New Deal, and the Costs of Economic Planning* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 100-103.

<sup>47</sup> Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 201.

<sup>48</sup> NAACP press release for 1935 annual conference, July 1, 1935, *Papers of the NAACP*, (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), microfilm, part 1, series B, reel 9.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph H.B. Evans to Walter Packard, February 24, 1936, box 36, Records of the Resettlement Division, *Records of the Farmers Home Administration*, Record Group 96, National Archives II.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Writers’ Program, *Negro in Virginia*, 304; and Carolyn Haldeman-Hawkins and Louise Watson Todd, “Education: Important from the Onset,” in *Hampton: From the Sea to the Stars, 1610-1985*, ed. James T. Stensvaag (Norfolk, VA: Donning Company, 1985), 101-103.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Howe to Pickett, August 30, 1934, box 7, folder: How, Records of Subsistence Homesteads Division, Record Group 96, National Archives II.

<sup>52</sup> William M. Cooper, “Development of the Armstrong Subsistence Homesteads Project,” January 22, 1935, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1935), *Howe Papers*.

<sup>53</sup> “Low Cost Housing Project Here Attracting National Attention,” *Daily Press*, November 10, 1935.

<sup>54</sup> Langston Powell, interview by author, October 30, 2002, Newport News, Virginia, oral; and Joyce Brown Wilkins, interview by author, June 19, 2003, Hampton, Virginia, oral. I also quoted Powell in “What Happened to Swantown?” *Daily Press*, August 3, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Complaint of Public Nuisance, August 31, 1936, *Commonwealth of Virginia v. Southern Homes, et al.* (Warwick County Cir. Ct., 1937); *Hill’s City Directory*, 1935; Warwick County Plat Map, Swantown, June 1935 (Newport News Cir. Ct.); “Grand Jury Makes Nuisance Charges in Swantown Case,” *Daily Press*, September 22, 1936; and “Trial of Charges in Swantown Case Postponed to May,” *Daily Press*, March 6, 1937.

<sup>56</sup> Committee Report to the Board of Directors of the Virginia Peninsula Association of Commerce, March 9, 1937, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1937), *Howe Papers*; “Resolution by PAC Asks Incorporation for Labor Unions,” *Daily Press*, February 10, 1937; “Corrects Report of Aberdeen Story,” *Daily Press*, February 14, 1937; and “Evans Scoffs at Idea of Racial Change in Virginia Housing Unit,” *Journal and Guide*, February 20, 1937.

<sup>57</sup> Lorenzo C. White, letter to the editor, “The Aberdeen Project,” *Daily Press*, February 12, 1937.

<sup>58</sup> For a biography of Will W. Alexander, see Wilma Dykeman, *Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>59</sup> Sterner, *The Negro's Share*, 298-300.

<sup>60</sup> *Journal and Guide*, February 20, 1937.

<sup>61</sup> Committee Report to the Board of Directors, March 9, 1937, and Raymond B. Bottom to Will W. Alexander, March 11, 1937, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1937), and Lewis B. Walton to R.G. Tugwell, October 30, 1936, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1936), *Howe Papers*; and "Inter-Racial Body on Aberdeen Work Receives Approval," *Daily Press*, May 25, 1937.

<sup>62</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia v. Southern Homes; Donald M. Love v. Southern Homes (Richmond, Va., Cir. Ct., 1937); and "Convictions, Fines Conclude Hearing in Swantown Case," *Daily Press*, May 29, 1937. Love's lawsuit against his partner, M. Alexander Laverty of Philadelphia, was dismissed because Southern Homes lacked enough assets to merit a court proceeding.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Press*, May 29, 1937; and "Swantown Cleanup Proposed by FHA before Evacuation," *Daily Press*, June 18, 1937.

<sup>64</sup> "Tenants Begin Desertion of Swantown Housing Project," *Journal and Guide*, June 5, 1937.

<sup>65</sup> *Daily Press*, June 19, 1937; and C.M. Elvin, letter to the editor, "The Swantown Project," *Daily Press*, August 17, 1937.

<sup>66</sup> For an overview of the New Deal in the South, see Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Ronald L. Heinemann, *The Enduring Dominion: Depression and New Deal in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983); Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South*; and Harvard Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners" in *The New Deal and the South*, ed. James C. Cobb and Michael V. Namorato (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 117-134.

<sup>67</sup> Heinemann, *Enduring Dominion*, 141, 175; and Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 611-612.

<sup>68</sup> Speech by C. Vernon Spratley, July 23, 1935, box 147, folder: Hon. H.F. Byrd, *Papers of Carter Glass*, (Accession #2913), Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>69</sup> "Byrd Charges Sinful Waste By Resettlement Regime in Homestead Projects in U.S.," *Daily Press*, July 5, 1937; "Memorandum for the Press," March 13, 1935, *Howe Papers*; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 334; and "Note on Aberdeen," *Daily Press*, September 6, 1937.

<sup>70</sup> "Many Families Get Chance for Better Life as Model Aberdeen Project Opens," *Journal and Guide*, November 6, 1937.

<sup>71</sup> "Aberdeen Project Formally Dedicated," *Daily Press*, May 9, 1938; and "Aberdeen Gardens," *Journal and Guide*, October 29, 1938.

<sup>72</sup> "Officials Call Aberdeen Challenge to Race Pride," *Journal and Guide*, October 22, 1938.

<sup>73</sup> Sterner, *Negro's Share*, 423.

<sup>74</sup> Warwick County Right-of-Way Agreement, March 1938 (Deed Book 73, Page 31, Newport News Cir. Ct.); "Last Family Evacuates Swantown Settlement," *Journal and Guide*, September 3, 1938; "Swantown Finally Vacant," *Daily Press*, August 24, 1938; "'Swantown' Now 'Warwick Village,' White Subdivision," *Daily Press*, September 21, 1938; "Warwick Village Residences Sold, Agents Announce," *Daily Press*, September 27, 1938; and Warwick County property deeds.

<sup>75</sup> Lassiter and Kruse, "Bulldozer Revolution," 696. Also see David R. Goldfield, *Cottonfields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>76</sup> *Daily Press*, November 10, 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth City County (VA) Property Deed for James and Myrtle Brown (Deed Book 141, Page 10, Hampton Cir. Ct.); and Wilkins interview, November 24, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> "No Housing Unless Poor Benefit, Chairman Warns," *Journal and Guide*, June 3, 1939.

<sup>79</sup> Connerly, *The Most Segregated City in America*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Press*, November 10, 1935.

<sup>81</sup> "Aberdeen Street Names Will Honor Leading Negroes" *Daily Press*, December 5, 1937.

<sup>82</sup> Regarding the FHA's readiness to follow the advice of local banking and real estate officials, see U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Banking and Currency, *Extension of Debentures Issued by Federal Housing Administration: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency*, statement of A.H. Ferguson, 75<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., January 26, 1937, 16.

<sup>83</sup> Wilkins interview, June 19, 2003; and Powell interview, October 30, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> "Memorandum for the Press," March 13, 1935, *Howe Papers*.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., and George S. Mitchell to Howe, September 6, 1938, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1937), *Howe Papers*; and *Journal and Guide*, October 22, 1938.

<sup>86</sup> Aberdeen Gardens residents to Farm Security Administration, May 31, 1938, box 22, folder: Aberdeen Homesteads (1938), *Howe Papers*.

<sup>87</sup> Wendell P. Cross, "Aberdeen," *Journal and Guide*, July 4, 1942.

<sup>88</sup> See James T. Sparrow, "A Nation in Motion: Norfolk, the Pentagon, and the Nationalization of the Metropolitan South, 1941-1953," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167-189.

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