

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Birwood Wall

Other names/site number: Eight Mile Wall, Detroit Wall, Wailing Wall Name of related multiple property listing:

The Civil Rights Movement and the African American Experience in 20th Century Detroit
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: Along the alleyway between Birwood Avenue and Mendota Street from Eight Mile Road to Pembroke Avenue

City or town: Detroit State: Michigan County: Wayne

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

 Deputy SHPO	December 21, 2020
Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Michigan SHPO</u>	Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain:) _____

James Gabbert
Signature of the Keeper

1/27/2021
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
Public – Local
Public – State
Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
District
Site
Structure
Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Street Furniture/Object

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Street Furniture/Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style _____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Birwood Wall, built in 1941, is a concrete wall located in the residential neighborhood of Eight Mile-Wyoming, in the northwest part of the city of Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan. The wall is located along an alleyway between Mendota Street and Birwood Avenue, running approximately 2,200 feet in length in a north-south direction across three city blocks between Eight Mile Road on the north side, the city of Detroit's northern boundary, and Pembroke Avenue on the south side. The wall is constructed of concrete panels one foot wide by six feet high and twenty feet long set between three foot by three-foot H-shaped posts. Finishes on the wall range from exposed concrete to white paint to a mural featuring scenes of African American history. The wall remains largely intact, however some changes have occurred. A section of the wall was removed at the intersection of the alley and Chippewa Street at an unknown date between 2009 and 2019. Utility equipment has been installed in its place. Additional sections may have been removed for similar reasons, but other such removals are not known at the time of this writing. A small section of the wall at the Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground, between Chippewa and Norfolk Streets, steps out of plane with the rest of the wall, and is built of concrete block rather than precast panels. It is unclear when this alteration occurred. Despite

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these alterations the Birwood Wall is remarkably intact. The historic aspects of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association are all present. The Birwood Wall, therefore, retains historic integrity.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Birwood Wall (also known as the Eight Mile Wall, the Detroit Wall, or the Wailing Wall) was built in 1941 and is located within a predominantly residential neighborhood on the northwest side of Detroit. The neighborhood, Eight Mile-Wyoming, is a historically working class African American neighborhood that was developed in the early twentieth century as an alternative to the highly segregated Black Bottom, or Paradise Valley, area immediately east of downtown Detroit. The Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood was relatively isolated at the time of its initial settlement, with the city growing around it as it expanded in the mid twentieth century. It is bounded approximately by Eight Mile Road on the north, Santa Barbara Drive on the east, Pembroke Avenue on the south, and Mendota Street on the west.

At the north end of the wall is Eight Mile Road, the city's northern boundary. Eight Mile Road is a major east-west boulevard trunkline lined with commercial, retail, industrial, and office development. North of Eight Mile Road in this vicinity is Royal Oak Charter Township, a remnant of a larger township that originally included a number of what are now suburban cities including Oak Park to the west and north, and Ferndale to the east. The commercial development along the south side of Eight Mile Road is relatively shallow, transitioning immediately to residential neighborhood beyond the row of businesses fronting the road. At the south end of the wall is Van Antwerp Park, a City of Detroit park. East and west of the wall are residential streets.

The neighborhood is arranged on a typical city grid pattern. The blocks are rectangular and longer north to south than east to west. Houses are oriented chiefly along the north and south streets and have uniform setbacks. The streets are lined with sidewalks and have mature vegetation, including street trees and alley trees, front and rear lawns, and domestic plantings. The houses are typically one to one-and-a-half stories, of frame construction with horizontal siding and side or front gabled roofs. A few houses have brick exteriors, or brick or stone accent walls. Most are vernacular in character and date from the early to mid-twentieth century with some later additions.

Within the neighborhood is the Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground, a small park between Mendota Street, Norfolk Street, Griggs Avenue, and Chippewa Avenue. Birwood Avenue, which would bisect the park, has been closed off in the center with cul-de-sacs at each end. The playground contains a central rectangular asphalt playing surface, a small dirt area with playground equipment, and various benches. The remainder of the park is manicured lawn with meandering concrete and asphalt paths and mature deciduous trees.

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Photograph of the Birwood Wall dated June 27, 1941, from an unknown location. The African American side of the wall is at right. Courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, *Detroit News* Photograph Collection.

The Birwood Wall is a discontinuous concrete masonry wall that stretches from just south of Eight Mile Road to Pembroke Avenue, approximately 2,200 feet in length, or approximately half a mile. The wall stretches across three city blocks. It is located between Mendota Street on the west and Birwood Avenue on the east, running in a north-south direction along the alley or rear lot lines where parcels fronting on each street meet in the middle of the block. At each cross street, the wall stops just short of the sidewalk on either side, and on the north side it terminates at the east-west alley just south of the commercial lots fronting on Eight Mile Road. It appears to be continuous within the blocks, but is obscured by heavy vegetation in some areas. The wall is generally in a straight line, except for one area on the west edge of Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground, where it steps out to the east for several yards. This was likely a later modification as its construction is different from the rest of the wall.

For almost its entire length, the wall is constructed of concrete panels, approximately one foot thick by six feet high by twenty feet wide. The panels were pre-cast and slotted into channels within three foot by three-foot H-shaped posts. Regular indentations visible on the wall panels

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are formwork lines. At the stepped-out location, the wall is constructed of standard eight inch by sixteen-inch concrete blocks. The wall has a variety of finishes from exposed concrete to paint. While most of the painted portions are white, the central three hundred feet of the wall adjoining Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground is painted with a colorful mural, dominantly blue in hue. The mural depicts multiple scenes featuring African American history and people, such as Sojourner Truth leading children through the Underground Railroad, on the backdrop of a stylized residential streetscape. The mural was painted in 2006 and is a direct response to the history of the wall as a symbol of segregation due to the practice of redlining.

Historic Integrity

The wall is largely intact along its entire length, and retains historic integrity. Its location, materials, workmanship, design, feeling, and association are evident. Some changes have occurred to the wall over time, however. Most of these changes occurred in relation to a circa 1959 urban renewal project.¹ A small section of the wall within what is now Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground steps out of plane with the rest of the wall, and is built of concrete block rather than precast panels. It is unclear why or when this alteration took place, as aerial photographs are not at a high enough resolution to evaluate changes at this scale. Aerial photographs from 1997 show a section of wall removed on the west side of the park and an outbuilding that appears to be related to a parcel on Mendota Street. The outbuilding is no longer present so the block section of wall may have been constructed after the demolition of the outbuilding. A 1959 report in the *Detroit Free Press* that describes a number of physical changes to the greater neighborhood indicates the alley near 8 Mile Road was to be widened to forty feet “by acquisition of the first lot south of the alley on each residential street.”² If this change occurred it may have impacted the wall at that end. A section of the wall was removed at the intersection of the alley and Chippewa Street at an unknown date between 2009 and 2019, and utility equipment installed in its place. Aerial imagery appears to show that a half-parcel-width section of the wall toward the southern end of the 19900 block of Birwood Avenue. Additional sections may have been removed for similar reasons, but other such removals are not known at the time of this writing, nor did aerial or street view imagery suggest such modification.

The setting at the south end of the wall has changed since the mid-1940s. Pembroke Avenue was formerly in a straight east-west line between the southern end of the neighborhood and what is now Van Antwerp Park. The park had been used for an anti-aircraft installation between 1950 and 1959. The City of Detroit acquired the property after that. It is not clear when the park was expanded north into the neighborhood adjacent to it. The section of Pembroke Avenue between Pinehurst Street on the west and Wyoming Avenue on the east is out of alignment with the rest of the avenue by about one hundred feet. The encroachment by the park does not appear to have altered the southern end point of the wall, but the way the wall relates to its southern physical context has changed slightly. Other changes in setting are minimal and likely relate to the circa 1959 urban renewal project.

¹ Don Schram, “Wyoming ‘Face Lift’ Readied, *Detroit Free Press*, July 24, 1959.

² Ibid.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/black
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1941-1950

Significant Dates

1941

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Birwood Wall (also called the Eight Mile Wall, the Detroit Wall, or the Wailing Wall), is significant under National Register Criterion A, at the local level, for its association with the history of segregation and discriminatory lending practices during the mid-twentieth century in the city of Detroit. The Birwood Wall is a physical embodiment of the practice of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation in the United States during the middle years of the twentieth century, in which federal and local government policies and private real estate and banking institutions conspired to enforce African American segregation and limit the free exercise of their civil rights. The Birwood Wall meets the registration requirements for structure under the "Sites, Structures, and Objects," as described in *The Civil Rights Movement and the African American Experience in 20th Century Detroit* Multiple Property Documentation Form. The period of significance for the Birwood Wall is from 1941, when it was constructed, to 1950, when African American families first moved beyond the wall to the formerly White neighborhood to the west.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

A note about terminology: In June 2020 the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) published a statement on its website, www.nabj.org/page/styleguide, that provides a standard for the capitalization of color when referring to race. In part, the NABJ message states, "it is important to capitalize "Black" when referring to (and out of respect for) the Black diaspora." The NABJ further recommends, "that whenever a color is used to appropriately describe race then it should be capitalized, including White and Brown." Likewise, the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) announced in June 2020, <http://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/black-and-white-a-matter-of-capitalization/>, that it, too, recommends the capitalization of colors when referring to racial and ethnic identity. In this nomination the State Historic Preservation Office will follow the NABJ and CMOS in the capitalization of Black, White, and other colors when they are used to "appropriately describe race."

The Birwood Wall (also called the Eight Mile Wall, the Detroit Wall, or the Wailing Wall) is nominated under the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) *The Civil Rights Movement and the African American Experience in 20th Century Detroit*, which is prepared concurrently with this nomination. The Birwood Wall meets the registration requirements for the property type of structure, as described in "Sites, Structures, and Objects," in Section F of the MPDF. The wall is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the broad patterns of African American civil rights history in Detroit, particularly housing and housing policy. The Birwood Wall is significant at the local level of significance. The Multiple Property Documentation Form is organized according to four periods of significance identified in *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*, prepared by the National Park Service in 2002 and 2008. The significance of the Birwood Wall falls under the second period covered in that document, "Birth of Civil Rights, 1941-1954." More specifically, the period of

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significance begins in 1941, when the wall was constructed, and ends in 1950, when African American families first moved west, beyond the wall to the formerly White neighborhood.

As described in the MPDF, the demand for fair housing was one of most important civil rights issues in Detroit, and it became increasingly critical as more and more African Americans arrived in the city as part of the Great Migration from the South. While most of the city's Black population was crowded into the segregated Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods on the lower east side, a few middle- and working-class enclaves were founded in less developed areas, including the West Side, Conant Gardens, and Eight Mile-Wyoming. However, Blacks who attempted to move outside of segregated neighborhoods met resistance, frequently violent, and were often forced to abandon the homes they had legally purchased. Public housing in the 1930s, such as the Brewster Homes, and defense housing in the 1940s, such as the Sojourner Truth Homes, provided some relief, but in the case of the latter, also touched off violent protests from nearby White neighbors. White neighborhoods also enforced the color lines around their neighborhoods through the formation of "improvement associations" that informed residents if a Black family tried to purchase or rent a home in the neighborhood, and applied pressure on White homeowners not to sell to Blacks. Despite the Supreme Court decision in the *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *McGhee v. Sipes* cases in 1948 that overturned the legality of racially restrictive covenants, *de facto* segregation and social pressure continued to limit housing choices of African Americans, as well as their economic opportunities and often their personal safety well past the end of the theme period.

The Birwood Wall was built in 1941 as what planning historian June Manning Thomas terms a "bizarre" outcome of the practice of redlining,³ a phrase often attributed to John McKnight, who described the practice in Chicago during the 1960s, when he was the Director of the Midwestern Branch of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. The term can be defined as "lending (or insurance) discrimination that bases credit decisions on the location of a property to the exclusion of characteristics of the borrower or property."⁴

While most of redlining played out at a macro scale—the placement of subdivisions, the legacy of disinvestment and discrimination in majority African American cities—the Birwood Wall is a rare surviving, tangible, human-scale example of the lengths to which federal and local governments, the real estate profession, private developers, and White residents went to preserve racial segregation and to deny African Americans the economic benefits of homeownership available to Whites in the mid twentieth century. In various accounts, the Birwood Wall has been called Detroit's "Wailing Wall," the Eight Mile Wall, so named for the northern boundary of the neighborhood, Eight Mile-Wyoming, in which the wall is located, and the Detroit Wall. The wall is most commonly known and referred to as the Birwood Wall.

³ June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 85-86.

⁴ Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation," *Journal of Urban History* 29 no. 4 (May 2003), p. 395.

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The Development of Eight Mile-Wyoming as an African American Working-Class Neighborhood

The Birwood Wall is located in a historically African American neighborhood on the northwest side of Detroit. In the early twentieth century, as African Americans began migrating to the city in large numbers from the South, most were confined to the existing lower East side neighborhoods of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. Some middle-class Blacks were able to move into residential enclaves far from established White districts in the 1920s, like Conant Gardens on the northeast side and the West Side neighborhood. Working class Blacks found it very difficult to leave the confines of Black Bottom, but during the same period, a community of about one thousand people founded a small settlement on former farmland in the Eight Mile Road and Wyoming Avenue area of northwest Detroit. There were no racially restrictive covenants on land in this area due to its remoteness from the more settled parts of the city; the upper middle-class White neighborhoods of Palmer Park and Sherwood Forest, settled around the same time, were about half a mile to the east. The prospective residents of Eight Mile-Wyoming, unlike their wealthier counterparts in Conant Gardens and the West Side, had very little means to purchase their land or to build houses. Instead, they bought land on contract and scraped together the resources to slowly build very modest houses.

The neighborhood, bounded approximately by Pembroke Avenue, Santa Barbara Drive, Eight Mile Road, and Mendota Street, was platted in the late 1910s and early 1920s, while the area was still Greenfield Township. The land on which the wall stands was platted as the Grand Park Subdivision by Hugo Miller and Hugo Scherer of the Hugo Scherer Land Company in 1920. It encompassed both sides of Mendota, Griggs, and Washburn Avenues and the west side of Wyoming Avenue between Eight Mile Road and Pembroke Avenue.

Burniece Avery, an early resident of Eight Mile-Wyoming, painted a vivid portrait of the remoteness of the neighborhood in its early years. There was no public transportation to the area, so residents traveling from downtown Detroit had to walk from Woodward Avenue two miles west to the neighborhood or take one of the irregularly scheduled private buses. Here, Avery recorded, “(o)ne pushed aside giant ferns to travel the path that wound diagonally through the neighborhood. Here and there, small spaces were cleared for gardens, otherwise, the undergrowth was broken only by towering trees, until one reached the house and lot of a distant neighbor.”⁵

After paying between 800 and 1,200 dollars for a forty-foot-wide lot on contract, there was little cash left over for the working-class residents to build houses. Most embarked on what they considered temporary houses, built by their own labor. Avery recalled that:

“(b)uilding material was purchased on the pay-day plan - \$10.00 worth now, and \$15.00 worth again...” and that “it was not unusual to hear the ringing of

⁵ Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 1.

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hammers late at night, putting down the flooring, or nailing on the beaver board walls by flickering lamp light...tar paper siding was the fashion—rooms were added as the family grew.”

Residents looked forward to the day they could build permanent houses “with running water instead of the old pump, and modern sanitation to take the place of outside toilets and the tin tub to bathe in.”⁶ While the lot sizes were not large, the amount of unused space in the area meant that residents could use the adjoining empty lots to raise food. Children attended the small brick Lockwood School (location undetermined).

Portions of the neighborhood east of Wyoming Avenue were annexed into the city of Detroit in 1922, with the rest added in 1925. While the annexation brought city services like bus transportation into the neighborhood, the steady expansion of White people into the area brought difficulties for the established Black residents. Birdhurst School, built in the early 1920s on Woodingham Drive just south of Eight Mile Road, was initially intended to be open to both White and Black students. However, according to Avery, White parents objected to an integrated school after only two years in operation, and it was closed, forcing the Black students to return to the old Lockwood School. The Detroit Board of Education did build Higginbotham School at the northeast corner of Chippewa Avenue and Indiana Street in 1927, well within the borders of the segregated neighborhood, but not before their attempts to build a school on Pembroke between Roselawn and Northlawn ran up against “the invisible, impassable line over which no common path may be beaten.”⁷ In other words, Pembroke was the *de facto* segregation line.

The Great Depression and the Creation of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC)

For a community already on the economic edge, the Great Depression that began in 1929 was devastating, and it “wiped out” many of Avery’s neighbors, as it did many others in the Detroit area and across the country. Homeownership was already a difficult achievement for many middle- and working-class Americans even before the Depression. Lending agencies required upwards of half the loan amount as a down payment and repayment in less than ten years, making the financial commitment out of reach for many. With the onset of the Depression, widespread unemployment, and the failure of numerous banks, many homeowners were forced to default on their mortgages, which were in many cases already overinflated due to the pre-Depression real estate bubble. In 1931, Americans carried more than twenty-one billion dollars in residential mortgage debt – a sum nearly half of the combined federal, state, county, and municipal debt of the nation, at that time.⁸ By 1932 housing values had collapsed by some fifty percent,⁹ and by early 1933 millions of Americans were threatened with losing their homes, banks faced the loss of those payments as well as being saddled with properties at a greatly

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 2-3.

⁸ John H. Fahey, “The Government’s Program for the Organization of the Nation’s Home-Financing System,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1934): 3.

⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985): 193.

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reduced value, and construction work, which in normal times was a significant contributor to economic growth, had virtually ceased.¹⁰ By the end of the year the various funders of mortgages held a collective 900,000,000 dollars in foreclosed first mortgages.¹¹ A significant increase in the number of foreclosures resulted. Prior to the Depression, residential foreclosures in the United States averaged approximately 78,000 per year. As the effects of the Depression rolled across the country, the number of foreclosures increased to 273,000 in 1932 and 271,000 in 1933,¹² an increase of about 250 percent from the pre-Depression average.

In addition to the concern about mortgages and the increase in foreclosures, home repair expenditures and home construction also significantly decreased. Spending on repairs fell by ninety percent and new residential construction by ninety-five percent between 1928 and 1933.¹³

In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought legislation from Congress that addressed these concerns. The Associate Press reported in April 1933 that “bills were introduced in the senate and house at once to carry out his recommendations.”¹⁴ The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), which was created by the Home Owners’ Loan Act of 1933. HOLC was authorized for three years,¹⁵ and administered by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB), which had been created in 1932. HOLC was initially funded with two hundred million dollars, and initially allowed to issue bonds up to two billion dollars. That amount was extended to nearly five billion dollars by the end of the program.

As originally conceived, HOLC had a dual function – it provided relief to homeowners and, at the same time, relieved banks and lending institutions of troubled mortgage debts. Mortgages threatened by foreclosure were refinanced by HOLC, and reissued with lower interest rates and longer repayment schedules (up to fifteen years). Additionally, payments were applied to both principal and interest so homeowners could build equity in their properties. HOLC loans could refinance a mortgage, pay unpaid interest and unpaid taxes, and pay for essential repairs.¹⁶

Within a few months FHLBB had established offices across the country and had begun accepting applications.¹⁷ The Michigan HOLC headquarters had opened in the forty-story Barlum Tower (now Cadillac Tower) in downtown Detroit in July 1933.¹⁸ By the spring of 1934 some nine thousand Michiganders had refinanced their mortgages through the Michigan HOLC office.¹⁹

¹⁰ C. Lowell Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation*, (New York: H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Co., Inc., 1951): 7-9.

¹¹ John H. Fahey, “The Government’s Program for the Organization of the Nation’s Home-Financing System,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1934): 4.

¹² “The Future of Private Mortgage Financing,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1934): 3.

¹³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 193.

¹⁴ “President Seeks Help for Buyers of Small Homes,” *Battle Creek Enquirer and Evening News* (April 13, 1933).

¹⁵ The HOLC issued its last loan in 1936 and ceased operations in 1951, after its loans had been repaid. The original 200 million dollars was returned to the United States Treasury along with a surplus of fourteen million dollars.

¹⁶ Rosalind Tough, “The Life Cycle of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Land Economics* 27, no. 4 (1951): 324-31.

¹⁷ Amy E. Hillier, “Who Received Loans?,” *Journal of Planning History* 2, no. 1 (Feb. 2003): 6.

¹⁸ “HOLC’s Legal Bureau Free,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 4, 1934.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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Yet, by January 1935, some fifty percent of homeowners who had refinanced through the Detroit HOLC office had become delinquent in their loans.²⁰ This may have been what led to the discharge of “virtually all” of the HOLC employees in the Detroit office in the spring of 1934.²¹ A situation that led to nearly ninety thousand applications left simply as pending action.²²

By the autumn of 1934, HOLC had approved nearly half a million applications across the country.²³ A regional HOLC office, which included Michigan and Indiana, was opened in September 1934, and operated from the First National Bank Building in downtown Detroit.²⁴

Between June 1933 and June 1935, Michigan was one of three states (following Ohio and New York, respectively) that collectively accounted for nearly thirty percent of the total number of HOLC applications made during that period. In Michigan this was particularly attributable to “the total collapse of the Detroit real estate market.”²⁵ This total collapse may be attributed, in part, to the “easy terms” with which many people across the United States acquired homes throughout the 1920s.²⁶ Indeed, of the more than seventy-six thousand HOLC loans were provided to Michiganders by January 1936.²⁷ More than fifty thousand (nearly sixty-seven percent) of these were made in the Detroit area.²⁸ These fifty thousand loans accounted for more than seventy-four percent of the total dollars loaned in Michigan to this point.²⁹

Michigan homeowners submitted more than 145,500 applications for mortgage aid during the aforementioned period, with an average mortgage amount of slightly more than 3,700 dollars.³⁰ The state was second, behind Ohio, in number of loans closed, with 81,126.³¹ Through August 1934, Michigan homeowners received nearly 115 million dollars in refinanced loans through HOLC, nearly nine percent of the national total.³² By 1936, HOLC received more than two million applications from homeowners across the country, and approved a little more than one million.

In October 1934 the FHLBB began publication of the *Federal Home Loan Bank Review*, a monthly journal that the FHLBB used to disseminate policy information to its member

²⁰ “HOLC Seizure of Homes Seen,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 1, 1935.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ John H. Fahey, “The Government’s Program for the Organization of the Nation’s Home-Financing System,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1934): 2.

²⁴ “HOLC Opens Branch Here,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 18, 1934.

²⁵ C. Lowell Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation* (New York, NY: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1951), 20.

²⁶ Henry E. Hoagland, “The Relation of the Work of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board to Home Security and Betterment.” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (1935): 317.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “HOLC Lends \$221,214,637,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 2, 1936.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ C. Lowell Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners Loan Corporation* (New York, NY: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1951), 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² “HOLC Aid is Put at \$115,000,000,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 28, 1934.

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institutions and discuss issues that affected mortgage lending. In its inaugural issue, John H. Fahey, chairman of the FHLBB, wrote a lengthy article in which he identified a number of “defects” in the country’s home financing system. Among the things identified by Fahey were “faulty appraisals” and “the lack of uniformity in practices and standards” among lending institutions.³³ These two defects were later remedied in ways that ultimately led to ethnic and racial housing discrimination.

In the mid-1930s, the FHLBB, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), and other organizations and agencies identified neighborhoods as being of particular importance to both the health of communities and successful lending. The 1934 HOLC *Manual of Instruction for Appraisers* addressed the evaluation of the “district” in which a house was located. The manual instructed appraisers to consider the trends of the neighborhood, the rate of change of the neighborhood, whether it was congested or not, and “a percentage estimate of the various races comprising the surrounding population.”³⁴

Beginning in July 1935 the *Review* carried a series of articles that addresses the aforementioned defects. The August 1935 issue of the *Review* discussed “the neighborhood standards essential to safety of investment,”³⁵ which was meant to “provide lending institutions with a means for passing intelligent and constructive judgement on neighborhoods.”³⁶ The “means” included a ten-point outline with which to analyze neighborhoods. Point eight addressed “legal protections of the neighborhood’s present and future,” including deed restrictions and “racial trends.”³⁷ Point nine is much more explicit. It sought to address “racial and behaviour [sic] characteristics of the residents and racial trends of the neighborhood.”³⁸

In Michigan, the historical record appears to show uneven progress. It was reported in November 1936 that Michigan was, at that time, currently “one of the worst states in the country from the standpoint of delinquencies and contemplated foreclosures.”³⁹ As the program went on, however, things had improved. By February 1940 more than sixty thousand Michigan homeowners had either kept up their payments or were less than three months in arrears. In addition to those homeowners, nearly nine thousand others were making adjusted payments to remain in good standing.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the HOLC made 81,124 loans for a total of 258,759,224 dollars in mortgages in Michigan. Of these, 7,147 were foreclosed upon. This resulted in a success rate of more than ninety-one percent – a better than that both Ohio and New York.⁴¹

³³ John H. Fahey, “The Government’s Program for the Organization of the Nation’s Home-Financing System,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1934): 6.

³⁴ Manual of Instruction for Appraisers, Home Owners’ Loan Corporation

³⁵ “Neighborhood Standards as They Affect Investment Risk,” *Federal Home Loan Bank Review* 1, no. 11 (Aug. 1935): 404.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 405.

³⁸ Ibid., 405.

³⁹ Clifford A. Prevost, “Facts Help Up Till After Vote,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 1, 1936.

⁴⁰ “4,182 Pay Debt to State HOLC,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 18, 1940.

⁴¹ Rosalind Tough, “The Life Cycle of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Land Economics* 27, no. 4 (1951): 328.

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While the HOLC provided a lifeline for many Americans it was not uniformly successful. As early as 1935, some fifty percent of those who refinanced through the HOLC had become delinquent. By the end of 1937 the HOLC had acquired some 200,000 houses through foreclosure or voluntary transfer.⁴² The properties were eventually resold. After the HOLC lending period ended in 1936, the agency continued to service the loans it had made, acquired property through foreclosure proceedings, managed a real estate portfolio, and made payments on the bonds it had issued.⁴³ The agency was fully dissolved in 1951.⁴⁴

Although HOLC may not have directly engaged in redlining, the agency may have discriminated against Black Detroiters in a more direct way. As HOLC acquired properties through foreclosure or voluntary transfer, the agency sought to sell those homes to buyers who met certain requirements. The color of one's skin appears to have played a role in at least some decisions. The agency abided by restrictive covenants and appears to have favored White real estate agents over Black agents.

In June 1939 the Citizens' Joint Committee wrote to United States Senator Prentiss M. Brown seeking a meeting with the senator and President Roosevelt to discuss their concerns. The telegram stated that, "it seems impossible for Negro institutions to be approved as agents of the Federal Housing Administration or Home Owners Loan corporation."⁴⁵ The result being that both the HOLC and FHA had "condoned discrimination against Negro applicants [indecipherable text] purchase of property held by the Home-Owners Loan corporation in the Detroit area."⁴⁶ It was estimated that the discriminatory actions by HOLC deprived Black real estate agents of nearly one million dollars per year.⁴⁷

Discriminatory actions by HOLC and FHA are illustrated by the attempted purchase of a house at 268 East Euclid Street (appears to be extent) by Snow F. Grigsby in 1939. The house was covered by a restrictive covenant that sought to exclude Blacks. Grigsby, an employee of the United States Postal Service, attempted to purchase the property through a real estate agency, but his money was eventually returned because the purchase did "not meet the corporation requirement."⁴⁸ The record is not clear as to the outcome of the potential lawsuit,⁴⁹ nor is it clear how the allegations of discrimination were resolved.

⁴² C. Lowell Harriss, *History and Policies of the Home Owners Loan Corporation* (New York, NY: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1951): 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴⁴ "Business Briefs," *Detroit Free Press*, May 30, 1951.

⁴⁵ "HOLC Hit by Committee," *Detroit Tribune*, June 17, 1939.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "Charge Race Discrimination by Agency," *Detroit Tribune*, December 2, 1939.

⁴⁸ "May Start Mandamus Proceedings to Compel Sale of Euclid Property," *Detroit Tribune*, December 9, 1939.

⁴⁹ "Appeal to Congressman to Assist 2 Postal Workers," *Detroit Tribune*, October 14, 1939.

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The City Survey Program and HOLC Residential Security Maps

Although HOLC, through its now-notorious Residential Security Maps, is associated with the practice of redlining, HOLC did not, through its early lending programs, directly engage in the practice.⁵⁰ The maps for Detroit were published in 1939, three years after HOLC made its last loan. Recent research suggests that many HOLC loans were made in neighborhoods later categorized as “definitely declining” or “hazardous” through the maps.⁵¹

The HOLC was not the only agency or organization that conducted research and created maps. Throughout the mid twentieth century, myriad universities, organizations, commissions and committees, lending and real estate organizations, state and federal agencies, and municipal governments all studied the nation’s communities, its populations, and so forth. Analyses of all kinds resulted in innumerable reports, data sets, charts, graphs, and maps - all trying to make sense of the era. This wealth information was often intended by governmental agencies and private organizations to make informed decisions and solve societies problems. While perhaps well-intentioned these activities sometimes created new problems or exacerbated existing ones. The racial and economic disparities and institutionalizing discriminatory policies and its nefarious effects.

It is perhaps not surprising that the real estate agents engaged by the HOLC coded African American neighborhoods as undesirable. It was not the first organization to develop guidelines that purposefully discriminated along ethnic or racial lines. Since 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards had included an article in its “Code of Ethics” that explicitly stated:

A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to the property values in that neighborhood.⁵²

This provision remained in the Code of Ethics until 1950, but it did not stop mortgage brokers from practicing “block busting”: engaging in tactics to deceive White residents into believing that Blacks were moving into their neighborhoods, inducing them to panic-sell their houses at lower prices. Real estate speculators would then buy up the houses and sell them on contract to African Americans, who could not get bank mortgages and were thus vulnerable to predatory lending practices.⁵³

⁵⁰ Amy E. Hillier, “Redlining and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 4 (2003): 397.

⁵¹ James Greer, “The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and the Development of the Residential Security Maps,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 2 (2012): 276.

⁵² National Association of Real Estate Boards, “Code of Ethics,” adopted June 6, 1924, <http://archive.realtor.org/sites/default/files/1924Ethics.pdf>.

⁵³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

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It was not only existing African American homeowners that were shut out of mortgage assistance. Another Roosevelt administration agency, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), insured bank-provided mortgages for first-time buyers, and the FHA's underwriting manuals enshrined segregation. The language of the April 1936 underwriting manual was clear in favoring racially restrictive covenants in property deeds, writing in one section that "(d)eed restrictions are apt to prove more effective than a zoning ordinance in providing protection from adverse influences. Where the same deed restrictions apply over a broad area and where these restrictions relate to types of structures, use to which improvements may be put, **and racial occupancy**, a favorable condition is apt to exist" (emphasis added). Among the measures suggested by the FHA was the use of "...natural or artificially established barriers" to protect a neighborhood from adverse influences, among which were "infiltration of...inharmonious racial groups." In the case of undeveloped or partially developed subdivisions, the FHA actually recommended the implementation of deed restrictions such as "...prohibition of occupancy of the properties except by the race for which they were intended..." to supplement zoning ordinances.⁵⁴ As a result of these policies, the FHA would not ensure mortgages in racially mixed neighborhoods, or even in White neighborhoods that were too close to Black neighborhoods, in case integration took place in the future. In the view of the FHA and the HOLC, stability was explicitly equated to segregation, and most private banks and insurers followed their lead.

A 1938 real property survey of the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood documented that over ninety percent of residents lived in single-family detached homes, and two-thirds of them were owner-occupied—higher than the overall city average. Almost half owned their land free of mortgage or land contract. At the same time, the residents were among the city's poorest, and their housing among the worst, with less than half including a toilet and a bath and over two-thirds in poor condition.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ Federal Housing Administration, *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act With Revisions to April 1, 1936* (Washington, D.C.), Part II, Section 2, Rating of Location, sections 228-229 and 284.

⁵⁵ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.

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The Redlining of the Eight Mile-Wyoming Neighborhood



20175 Birwood Avenue (non-extant). This house was likely within the current Alfonso Wells Memorial Playground and would have been situated on the west side of the street. John Vachon, photograph, August 1941. Courtesy of the Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Farm Security Administration, Library of Congress. www.loc.gov/item/2017813253/.

It is unsurprising, given the conditions in Eight Mile-Wyoming and the fact that it had been nearly surrounded by White neighborhoods by this time, that, as Avery put it “the real estate interests awoke one bright morning to the realization that Detroit was growing in the North Western direction, and that out west of Palmer Woods was a beautiful site far away from the smoke of factories, unmarred by rail roads, high and dry with no hint of flooded basements, a wonderful place—the fly in the ointment—Negroes had control of it.”⁵⁶

In fact, it was a city entity, the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council, that sent sociologist Marvel Daines, a White woman, to survey the neighborhood. Daines’ report, titled *Be It Ever So Tumbled*, was published in 1940. In it, she alternated between admiration for the courage and persistence of the residents, shock at the dilapidated conditions she found, and outright racism and patronization.

⁵⁶ Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 5-6.

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The initial development of Eight Mile-Wyoming came during the middle 1920s, when, in Daines' words, "hundreds of new subdivisions were created primarily to take advantage of the speculative fever."⁵⁷ Most of these subdivisions were intended for Whites, but the Eight-Mile Wyoming area was made available to Blacks, though on arguably usurious terms. Daines quoted one resident who stated they paid 1,500 for the lot on which they built their house, which took them four years to do.⁵⁸ Lots were sold on land contract, and the value of original property was based on little more than myth.⁵⁹ For their money and trouble, the residents who first built homes here had none of the conveniences of other developments, such as paved streets, sewers. These and other amenities came later, however. Some property owners were unable to pay taxes or meet the payments of their contracts, in which case the hopeful owners lost their property, which "reverted back to the unknown owners."⁶⁰

In addition to the mythical land values and predatory lending practices noted by Daines, early homeowners in Eight-Mile Wyoming faced another difficulty in building homes. After acquiring the land, these property owners found "that no one was interested in financing them."⁶¹

In the conclusion to her report, Daines briefly questioned whether:

any group, economically more secure and higher up in the social scale, (has) the moral right to go into an area such as this...and take away something they have struggled to keep at real deprivation...Would we force them back into the already congested downtown slums from which they came twenty years ago in quest of air and sunshine and a garden spot?⁶²

Her proposal, however, was not, as would seem logical, to assist the Black residents to build new dwellings in their current location. Instead, she recommended that it be "converted to a white area" by the formation of a non-profit corporation to purchase the land and build a "comparable area...close to the industrial center of employment [i.e. closer to existing African American neighborhoods]" where "small cottages" could be built for the displaced Eight Mile-Wyoming residents, who would be "given the privilege of buying one of these modern, sanitary convenient houses." A credit on the appraised value of the resident's existing property would go toward the purchase of a lot and house in the new neighborhood.⁶³ Given that nearly half of the residents owned their property outright, and that Daines' report on slum conditions in the neighborhood had just given appraisers ammunition to undervalue the property, it seems unlikely that Eight Mile-Wyoming residents would find a great deal of benefit from the plan.

⁵⁷ Marvel Daines, "Be It Ever So Tumbled: The Story of a Suburban Slum," Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of Detroit, March 1940, 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Note: this process would be repeated in Detroit some eighty years later. For more on this topic, see Jodie Adams Kirshner, *Broke* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 2019.

⁶¹ James M. Haswell, "Builder of Negro Homes Product of War Times," *Detroit Free Press*, March 20, 1945.

⁶² Ibid., 48-49.

⁶³ Marvel Daines, "Be It Ever So Tumbled: The Story of a Suburban Slum," Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of Detroit, March 1940, 49-50.

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The HOLC's 1939 residential security map for Eight Mile-Wyoming classified it in the "D-Hazardous" category and colored it red. The area description for the map noted its "Negro concentration" and described the characteristics of the area as "35% improved. Unpaved and poorly graded streets. Gas, light, water, sewers. Stores on 8 Mile Road." An adjoining neighborhood to the east had a similar description, with a note that there was "considerable foreclosure." However, this area was colored yellow ("Definitely Declining"), not red. An additional note in its description may explain its classification: "adjoins negro area." Indeed, across the city, African American neighborhoods, even middle-class ones like Conant Gardens and the West Side, were colored red, and yellow-rated areas often noted "infiltration" by African American and Jewish people. For example, the Boston-Edison neighborhood, one of the city's most desirable neighborhoods in the 1920s, was classified yellow. Despite a population of executives, business people, professionals, and teachers with relatively high salaries, a ninety-five percent occupancy rate, and buildings rated as in good repair, the area's description noted the "better element moving out...Restrictions expiring," and recorded a mixture of African Americans and Jewish people moving in. The assessment was that the "conversion rates this area 3rd grade." The assessment for the area north of Tireman Avenue, the traditional northern boundary of the Black West Side neighborhood, was even more explicit, recording the "danger of negro infiltration which gives the area a "C rating" despite the neighborhood being otherwise comparable to more highly rated areas across the city.⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ "Mapping Inequality," (Online collection of HOLC Residential Security Maps, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>).

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Building the Birwood Wall



Children standing in front the Birwood Wall in August 1941. John Vachon, photographer. Courtesy of the Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Farm Security Administration, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017813184/>. Accessed June 10, 2020.

It was against this backdrop of a struggling African American community surrounded by an expanding White city that the Birwood Wall was constructed. The land west of Eight Mile-Wyoming was not covered by the 1939 HOLC maps, because it was still largely farm and woodland. The area had been platted in 1925 as Blackstone Park Subdivision No. 6 by the Nottingham Land Company. Blackstone No. 6, as it was termed in a 1925 advertisement, extended from Monnier Road on the west to Mendota Street to the east and from Eight Mile Road at the north to State Fair Road to the South. It appears no construction took place before the Depression.

Interestingly, there was a conflict between the subdivision plats for Blackstone Park No. 6 and Grand Park to the east. Grand Park, which was within the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood, was platted earlier, in 1920, and its western border was along the alley between Mendota Street and the next street west, what is now Pinehurst Street. Blackstone Park's plat map, however, put the border of the subdivision between Mendota Street and Birwood Avenue, the next street east.

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It is unclear how this discrepancy occurred, but it seems that it was ultimately resolved in favor of the later Blackstone Park No. 6 plat.

By 1940 it appears the subdivision may have changed hands. However, reports are not entirely clear as to who or what company was involved in particular aspects of the development of Blackstone Park No. 6. What is known is that the *Detroit Free Press* reported on August 24, 1941, that the Knight-Menard Company had constructed some two hundred houses in the subdivision between June 1940 and August 1941.⁶⁵ The *Michigan Chronicle* had reported a year earlier that “the wall on Eight Mile Road at Birwood avenue belongs to James T. McMillan, who owned the Blackstone Park subdivision.”⁶⁶

By that time, the construction industry had begun to recover from the effects of the Depression, due in part to the availability of FHA-backed loans for White developments. The newspaper real estate sections during this period carried articles on how to secure FHA loans, and new (White) developments often advertised that their houses were available for FHA funding. In March 1940 the Builders’ Association of Detroit opened thirty-two model homes on Littlefield Street, between Pembroke and Chippewa Streets at the western end of the Blackstone Park No. 6 subdivision, as the location of their 1940 Home Demonstration Show. These “Homes on Parade” embodied “the latest developments in design, equipment and utility, and provide prospective home builders and buyers an opportunity to see in one concentrated area a wide range of architectural styles, plans, and use of materials...”⁶⁷ In conjunction with the Homes on Parade, the Kern’s Department Store in downtown Detroit, a prominent retailer at that time, held a display of all thirty-two homes in miniature. A preview of the exhibit was attended by FHA officers from Washington, D.C., Illinois, and Michigan.⁶⁸

Construction of additional homes in the Blackstone Park No. 6 subdivision began that same year, but obtaining FHA-backed mortgages for homes close to the eastern end of the subdivision near the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood ran into the FHA’s ban on funding developments in close proximity to a Black neighborhood. The FHA would, however, support such developments if there was a barrier of some sort between the Black and White areas to “protect” the neighborhood from integration. Usually, this took the form of a virtual separation such as wide streets, parks, or even disconnections in the street grid that discouraged interaction between neighborhoods. But the border of the Blackstone Park subdivision with the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood was merely an alley. To provide the necessary degree of separation, the developer erected a physical barrier: a wall six feet high, one foot thick, and half a mile long between the two neighborhoods.

⁶⁵ “It’s Open House in These New Homes in Blackstone Park No. 6,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1941.

⁶⁶ “Oppose Plan to Establish Negro Ghetto,” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 5, 1941. No further information was found on McMillan or his ownership of the property. The James T. McMillan cited in that article may have been the McMillan who was the president of the Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company during the same period.

⁶⁷ “32 Residences Await Visitors,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 31, 1940.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

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The historical record is unclear as to how the developer of Blackstone Park conceived of the idea to build the wall. No sources were found that document or described communication between the developer and the FHA, nor were City of Detroit records discovered that illuminate the decision-making process. Construction of the wall may not have resulted from formal communication or approval at all. In fact, there may have been no need for discussion with the FHA at all; it would have been clear that a barrier of some sort would improve the chances of securing FHA-backed mortgages. The proximity of Blackstone Park No. 6 to an African American neighborhood was sufficient to downgrade the rating of a White neighborhood under the HOLC's residential security maps and the FHA underwriting manual.

The 1938 FHA underwriting manual stated in paragraph 937 that, "if a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes."⁶⁹ The manual advised that areas surrounding a new development be "investigated to determine whether incompatible racial and social groups are present."⁷⁰ The text concluded that changes in social and racial classes result in instability and a loss of value.⁷¹ Interestingly, racial and social class were treated akin to "freakish architectural designs."⁷² All of which were to be avoided.

In addition to preferring homogeneous racial groups, the 1938 manual advised in paragraph 935, the use of physical or natural barriers in protecting neighborhoods from the infiltration of "adverse influences," including commercial and industrial uses, as well as lower social classes and "inharmonious racial groups."⁷³

Construction of the wall was underway in the summer of 1941, but its construction did not pass unnoticed, either in Eight Mile-Wyoming or among the city's African American population. The *Michigan Chronicle*, one of Detroit's Black newspapers, carried it as a front-page item in July 1941, along with a photograph of the wall. Reverend Horace A. White, pastor of Plymouth United Church of Christ and the only Black member of the Detroit Housing Commission at that time, denounced the construction of the wall at a commission meeting, charging that it was designed only to separate Black and White residents, and that, "even in the South they wouldn't do anything like that."⁷⁴ A representative of the Blackstone Park subdivision owner denied that the wall was a tool to enforce segregation, claiming that the wall "is being put up simply to improve our subdivision by giving it a fixed border and trim." The writers of the *Chronicle's* opinion page, however, were not deceived:

Indeed, the invisible walls of racial prejudice confront us daily in this democracy and the appearance of an actual wall of concrete represents the measure of this

⁶⁹ United States Federal Housing Administration. *Underwriting manual: underwriting analysis under title II, section 203 of the National housing act*. Washington, DC, 1938, §937.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., §935.

⁷⁴ "Negroes Score 8-Foot Fence for Community," *Detroit Free Press*, June 27, 1941.

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racial bigotry. It may represent too the mad folly of the dominant group who, like the ostrich, dare not face reality and stick their heads in the sand. The whole housing problem in Detroit, for whites as well as Negroes, has been handled with the same blind stupidity.⁷⁵

Burniece Avery of the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood put it more bluntly: “another type of pressure took the form of a 6ft concrete wall at the alley behind Birwood, separating the neighborhood from Blackstone Park. Unlike Pembroke, this was a visible line over which ‘thou shalt not pass.’”⁷⁶

The wall was completed in 1941, and the FHA backed mortgages for properties west of the wall, but FHA funding was not made available for Black residents on the other side of the barrier. As Richard Rothstein observed, the Birwood Wall demonstrated that the FHA did not attempt to mask the racial basis of its decision making, even when it resulted in an absurd interpretation of their standards.⁷⁷

Defense Housing, Legal Victories, and the Futility of the Wall

The construction of the wall did not end the development pressure on Eight Mile-Wyoming. Much of the land still remained vacant, in the hands of either black families who hoped to someday build permanent homes, or banks that had repossessed the lots after their owners defaulted during the Depression. Between that, and the substandard condition of the housing, it was seen by many in the city as a blank slate. The Detroit city government considered putting an airport there in 1941 and again in 1945, but both times turned elsewhere. Although Daines had rejected public housing in her 1940 report, the United States Housing Authority at least briefly considered it for the Eight Mile-Wyoming area. Matters came to a head following the United States’ entry into World War II, when housing for workers flocking to the city to work in the defense industry made an already difficult housing situation critical. The City Plan Commission, as part of its master planning process and designation of Eight Mile-Wyoming as “blighted,” proposed building one thousand five hundred units of temporary war worker housing at Eight Mile-Wyoming, in the form of barracks and Quonset huts, to be designated for Black workers (it was thought that building such housing in an established African American neighborhood would avoid the protest inevitable if it was built in a White area).⁷⁸

In the view of Eight Mile-Wyoming residents, this plan was merely another tactic to clear them off their land. Avery observed that:

⁷⁵ “Oppose Plan to Establish Negro Ghetto,” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 5, 1941.

⁷⁶ Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 6.

⁷⁷ June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 85-86; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 64; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), 65, 74.

⁷⁸ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 64, 68-70.

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(t)he thought behind this action...was ‘When the war is over, we will declare the whole area a slum, and move in with a Master Plan under the authority of the Urban Redevelopment Plan; clear the land, and resubdivide the lots, making them 50 ft instead of the present 40 ft.’ There was something familiar about that re-subdividing angle that made us remember Shacktown [Daines’ report], and we renewed our fight against it.⁷⁹

Indeed, Avery and her neighbors used the federal government’s own stated goals—to encourage single-family homeownership—to argue for providing FHA-backed loans to the African Americans of Eight Mile-Wyoming. The neighbors took collective action, forming two community groups, the Carver Progressive Association and the Eight Mile Road Civic Improvement Association, to lobby the government. They managed to interest Raymond Foley, the director of the FHA in Michigan, in their efforts, and the whole neighborhood turned out to polish up the area the night before Foley visited.⁸⁰

In the end, the city, the FHA, and the neighborhood reached a compromise. In return for FHA subsidies for the construction of single-family housing for African Americans, the community supported the siting of six hundred units of temporary war housing. As Sugrue put it, “it was a partial victory for Black community groups, a showpiece for the FHA, which could claim that it worked for the benefit of Black Detroiters, and an acceptable result for public housing officials, who hastily constructed temporary structures in the Eight Mile Road area.” As a result, “the neighborhood became a bastion of Black homeownership, ‘one of the very few areas in Detroit where Negroes can buy land, build, and own their own home.’” Over the next ten years, over one thousand five hundred single-family homes were built in the neighborhood.⁸¹

Much of the temporary war worker housing was built immediately adjacent to the Birwood Wall. A 1949 aerial photograph depicts hundreds of barracks and smaller temporary buildings in the six blocks east of the wall between Eight Mile Road and Pembroke. The White neighborhood west of the wall was divided from the Black neighborhood not only by the wall itself, but by a kind of “no-man’s land” along Mendota Street. Another stretch of barren land south of Pembroke Avenue separated the Black neighborhood from the White areas to the south. However, in the early 1950s the first Black families began to move beyond the wall. The family pf Katherine Brown moved two blocks west to Pinehurst in 1950, and joined the Foremans, another Black family who had previously moved west of the wall.⁸²

⁷⁹ Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 7.

⁸⁰ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 66-67; Burniece Avery, “The Eight Mile Road...Its Growth from 1920...1952,” Burniece Avery Papers, Box 1, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 10.

⁸¹ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 71.

⁸² Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit* (New York: Harper Collins Press, 2017), 160.

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The reaction of the Blackstone Park neighborhood to what the HOLC had earlier called “infiltration” was not recorded. The neighborhood did have a homeowners association that in the past had attempted to enforce the racially restrictive covenants on their subdivision. In 1944 members of a family of Chinese ancestry moved to Littlefield Street on the west side of the subdivision after being repatriated from a Japanese concentration camp. The Blackstone Park homeowner’s association attempted to exercise the subdivision clause, which read that, “no part of said property shall be used or occupied in whole or in part by an persons not of pure, unmixed, white Caucasian race.” The association further argued that if they failed to enforce the provision, it would endanger its legality in the future. However, churches, civic organization, and many of the family’s neighbors opposed the ouster and some members of the association resigned in protest. The family was eventually allowed to stay.⁸³

That same year, Orsel and Minnie McGhee, an African-American couple, bought a house at 4626 Seebaldt Street, about eight miles south of the Eight Mile-Wyoming neighborhood. The house was located in a White neighborhood. An association agreement for the neighborhood contained restrictive covenant clause that limited occupancy to Whites. When threats and abuse did not work, the association sued the McGhees and sought their removal through Michigan courts. In 1947 the Michigan Supreme Court ruled for the association. The case then went to the United States Supreme Court, which reversed the decision of the Michigan Supreme Court and ruled for the McGhees. The McGhee’s – represented by Thurgood Marshall, who would be appointed to the Supreme Court in 1967 – “had secured not only their home, but the rights of all to buy homes free of restrictive racial covenants.”⁸⁴

After the McGhee decision, Black Detroiters were ostensibly free to live wherever they chose. Black families first moved past the wall in 1950, laying bear the ultimate futility of its purpose and the idea the led to it. Yet, even though laws had changed, the hearts of many had not. Neighborhood “improvement associations” remained, as did the sentiments that led to restrictive covenants in the first place. The “Blackstone Park No. 6 Improvement Association” was still in existence in 1953, but no information was found on its activities or its response to African American families moving beyond the wall.⁸⁵ Other, nearby neighborhoods often maintained their own associations. Some members of the Blenheim Forest District Improvement Association, so named for the Blenheim Forest development, to the south of the Birwood Wall neighborhood, sought to “purchase homes on the market, to prevent blacks from moving in.”⁸⁶ Other such associations in the city used informal agreements in lieu of formal covenants to prevent Blacks from moving into their neighborhood. Some associations adopted the language

⁸³ “Move to Evict Refugees Hit by Neighbors,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 7, 1944, 13; “Plans to Oust Refugees from Asia Dropped,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 12, 1944.

⁸⁴ “Michigan Legal Milestones 25. Striking Racial Covenants,” State Bar of Michigan website, https://www.michbar.org/programs/milestone/milestones_strikingracialcovenants. Accessed December 10, 2020.

⁸⁵ “Improvement Association General List, 1953,” in folder “Neighborhood Improvement Associations,” Box 40, United Community Services Central Files, Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

⁸⁶ Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 109.

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of equality, but in practice “they simply did not believe that black families had to pursue their equality in white neighborhoods.”⁸⁷

Urban Renewal and Eight Mile-Wyoming

Although the federal government approved Title 1 funds for a new type of urban renewal program, neighborhood conservation, for Eight Mile-Wyoming in 1954, it did not result in the degree of controversy that had occurred in between 1940 and 1943. Indeed, while the conservation program in Detroit was generally considered a failure, its rehabilitation activities were judged a success in Eight Mile-Wyoming perhaps, as June Manning Thomas has suggested, because the neighborhood was already fairly stable.⁸⁸ Between 1952 and 1956, the temporary war housing in Eight Mile-Wyoming was removed and single-family homes began to be constructed in their place. The city also implemented a “scattered site” public housing plan in the late 1960s, with single-family homes built on already vacant lots. The *Detroit Free Press* later observed, in commenting on a similar plan, that the program at Eight Mile-Wyoming had yielded results that were “greater than expected,” perhaps because “it uses vacant lots (that) eliminate a painful clearance and relocation problem,” and was a “workable alternative to large-scale public housing projects, which have been little more than concentration camps for the poor.”⁸⁹ The urban renewal program also avoided the large-scale clearance that had occurred in other areas of Detroit. While about twenty-five percent of the homes in the area were demolished, the program also invested in the rehabilitation of another twenty-five percent through low-interest loans to homeowners. Rather than displacing the Black residents, many were accommodated in homes rebuilt on the cleared lots, or in older homes that the Detroit Housing Commission purchased and remodeled.⁹⁰

While most of the neighborhood filled in with single-family homes, the conservation/urban renewal project also created a small urban park, constructed in the late 1960s. Birwood Avenue between Norfolk Street and Chippewa Street was closed, with internal cul-de-sacs created. Between them, a playground was installed backing up to the wall on the west. It was laid out with winding concrete paths, open lawns, shade trees, and a basketball court. The park was later named for Alfonso Wells, an African American man who had lived for a time in the war worker housing on Birwood before moving elsewhere in the neighborhood. Wells was a political and social activist in the neighborhood who also helped to expand the facilities at the park. Ironically, the creation of this playground has kept the wall highly visible. As the houses filled in and trees and domestic plantings grew to maturity, the wall was hidden along much of its length. At the park, however, it is open and visible. In 2006 the three-hundred-foot portion adjacent to the park was painted with a mural depicting scenes African American history, local, state and national, as

⁸⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁸ June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 91-92, 98.

⁸⁹ “Scatter the Public Housing,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 5, 1970.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Weddell, “Happy Ending to Urban Renewal,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1970.

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well as a portrait of Alfonso Wells. The mural was the work of Motor City Blight Busters and a cadre of residents and volunteers.⁹¹

Segregation Walls in the United States

The Birwood Wall is one of an undocumented number of physical barriers that were constructed in the mid twentieth century across the United States to separate Blacks and Whites. A systematic examination of segregation walls has not taken place and some communities may not be aware of them. While this nomination does not assert national significance for the Birwood Wall a discussion of known segregation walls is due. Some of these barriers, like the Birwood Wall, were given vertical form and constructed of concrete, brick, or steel. More often, however, barriers took the form of highways and roadways. In those cases, entire communities were torn apart, homes and buildings were demolished, and lives and families were destroyed. In their place formidable horizontal “walls” were constructed with the intention of providing high-speed access into and out of the city for those living beyond its borders, and as a barrier that slowed or prevented particular races and classes of people from traversing its bounds. These horizontal walls were meant to keep certain people confined to particular sections of the city. An analysis of roadways as barriers is beyond the scope of this nomination, however.

Incredibly, the Birwood Wall was not the only actual wall that was constructed in Detroit with the intention of keeping races and classes separate. Burniece Avery, in a 1977 memoir, identified a second, wooden wall just a few blocks to the southeast of the Birwood Wall.⁹² Aerial photographs taken in 1956 appear to confirm the presence of this wall, and contemporary Google mapping imagery suggests it is still present and mostly intact. This simple, stockade-like wall, remains an unnamed, lesser cousin to the Birwood Wall, though born of the same fear and intent. In fact, it was meant to be a concrete extension of the Birwood Wall, and would have been, had not the City of Detroit Building Department deny a permit for the wall in 1953.⁹³

In Arlington, Virginia, a “patchwork barrier of fencing and brick or cinder-block segments” was constructed in the 1930s just north of 17th Street between North Edison Street and North Culpepper Street to separate Black and White homeowners.⁹⁴ The wall appears to have been built not by a single developer but by individual property owners.⁹⁵ Sections of the wall have been removed over time and for various reasons, and in 2019 “a torrent of floodwater” removed

⁹¹ “Wall that Once Divided Black, White Detroit Gets Mural Makeover,” *Lansing State Journal*, May 18, 2006.

⁹² Burniece Avery, *Walk Quietly Through the Night and Cry Softly* (Detroit: Balamp Publishing, 1977), 169.

⁹³ Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 106; Gerald Van Dusen, *Detroit’s Birwood Wall* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2019), 40 & 59.

⁹⁴ Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development. *A Guide to the African American Heritage of Arlington County, Virginia*, 2016.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

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additional portions of the wall.⁹⁶ Arlington County recognized the history of Hall's Hill Wall in 2017 with a county historical marker.⁹⁷

Three walls have been identified in Florida. In the city of Melbourne, Florida, a wall that appears to be approximately seven feet in height and constructed of concrete block stretches for some 1,800 feet from McClendon Street at its southern end almost to Coleman Street at its northern end. Based on aerial imagery,⁹⁸ sections of the wall appear to have been removed and replaced with a standard wood stockade fence. Other portions have been removed, and other sections appear to be in disrepair. The date of construction of this wall is not clear.

The Liberty City Wall, built in Miami, Florida, in 1939, was constructed to separate a new African American public housing development from a White neighborhood to the east. This wall, which was reported to be either seven or eight feet high, ran for a half mile along Northwest 12th Avenue from Northwest 62nd Street to Northwest 71st Street. Like the Birwood Wall, no official records were kept of its construction or the decision-making process that went into it. However, unlike the Birwood Wall, the Liberty City Wall has been largely demolished, with only a few segments measuring less than one-foot-high remaining along a major street which has been widened and altered extensively over the decades.⁹⁹

Another wall divides portions of the White Kendall Green neighborhood in Pompano Beach, Florida, from several Black neighborhoods to the west. The history of this wall is less clear, although it appears it is similar to the Birwood Wall in that it ran along the alleyway between two residential streets. It too, has been largely demolished, with only a short, diminished segment remaining.

Other walls are sure to exist, in whole or in part. Some of these walls were not permanent and were removed. The so-called "Berlin Wall" in Atlanta, Georgia, wood and steel roadblocks were erected across Peyton and Harlan Roads in December 1962 in an attempt to prevent African Americans from entering White neighborhoods.¹⁰⁰ The barriers stood for only a few months and was removed by court order in March 1963.¹⁰¹

Anecdotal research suggests the Birwood Wall may be the most well-known of the mid-twentieth-century segregation walls. At the same time, it seems likely that walls beyond those described here may exist. As more becomes known about these walls and what remains of them,

⁹⁶ Ryan Prior, "A storm destroyed part of the 'segregation wall' in Arlington, Virginia," CNN.com, July 10, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/10/us/virginia-storm-destroys-segregation-wall-trnd/index.html>. Accessed June 10, 2020.

⁹⁷ John Henry, "Arlington community remembers segregation wall," WUSA.com, March 2, 2017. <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/arlington/arlington-community-remembers-segregation-wall/417413594>. Accessed June 10, 2020.

⁹⁸ Google Street View imagery is dated April 2011. No later imagery was available at the time of this writing.

⁹⁹ Theresa Joseph, "The Untold History of Liberty's Segregation Walls," NBC Miami, May 4, 2018, <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/The-Untold-History-of-Liberty-Citys-Segregation-Walls-481781631.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Marion Gaines, "City Panel Okays Barrier to Negroes," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 14, 1962.

¹⁰¹ "Court Orders Dismantling of Atlanta Wall," *Bee* (Danville, Virginia), March 2, 1963.

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it may indeed be that the Birwood Wall stands as a remarkably intact example of mid twentieth century attempts to separate races.

Conclusion

The Birwood Wall stands as a powerful reminder of the institutional discrimination in housing African Americans endured well into the latter part of the twentieth century. It is, quite literally, concrete evidence of what Richard Rothstein has called a “consistent government policy that was employed in the mid twentieth century to enforce residential racial segregation,” in which “scores of racially explicit laws, regulations, and government practices combined to create a nationwide system of urban ghettos surrounded by White suburbs.”¹⁰² Practices across the housing spectrum, ranging from government-sanctioned discrimination such as redlining and racially restrictive covenants to more informal tools like block busting, homeowners’ associations, and the threat of violence, conspired to confine African Americans into racially segregated neighborhoods whatever their economic means. Although racial covenants were overturned by the United States Supreme Court in 1948 and redlining was outlawed with the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, this by no means outlawed informal, social enforcement of segregation. Furthermore, the economic, social, and legal impacts of redlining continue to affect African Americans today. As author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates has argued, housing segregation practices created two housing markets, one for Whites, “legitimate and backed by the government” and one lawless and predatory for Blacks.¹⁰³ Economists have demonstrated that children of homeowners are statistically likelier to become homeowners themselves in comparison to the children of renters, and homeownership builds wealth from generation to generation. Furthermore, a recent study found that redlined neighborhoods had nearly five percent lower home prices as late as 1990, a disparity that was not present prior to the institution of the maps, and which suggests that the assessments of the HOLC’s appraisers were prescriptive, not descriptive.¹⁰⁴ The Birwood Wall is the physical embodiment of the discriminatory housing practices across the United States that conspired to keep African Americans from participating in an equal housing market, a legacy that continues to be felt today.

¹⁰² Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), x, xii.

¹⁰³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

¹⁰⁴ Ian Appel and Jordan Nickerson, “Pockets of Poverty: The Long-Term Effects of Redlining,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, October 15, 2016.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

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North End Point

1. Latitude: 42.445034 Longitude: -83.166398

South End Point

2. Latitude: 42.438928 Longitude: -83.166155

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary consists of the alley line between Mendota Street and Birwood Avenue from Pembroke Avenue on the south to Eight Mile Road on the north.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the footprint of the wall.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Saundra Little, Architect, and Ruth Mills, Senior Historian; Todd Walsh, National Register Coordinator

organization: Quinn Evans Architects; SHPO

street & number: 4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301; 300 North Washington Square

city or town: Detroit; Lansing state: Michigan zip code: 48201; 48913

e-mail: rmills@quinnevans.com; preservation@michigan.gov

telephone: (313) 462-2550; (517) 335-9840

date: December 2020

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Birwood Wall Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: North end of wall south of Eight Mile Road, looking southwest
0001 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Central area of wall, looking east
0002 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Painted area of wall at the Alfonso Wells Playground, overall view looking northwest
0003 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Painted area of wall, closeup looking north
0004 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Painted area of wall, showing concrete block bumpout, looking north
0005 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Painted area of wall, from concrete block bumpout north, looking north
0006 of 0008

Birwood Wall

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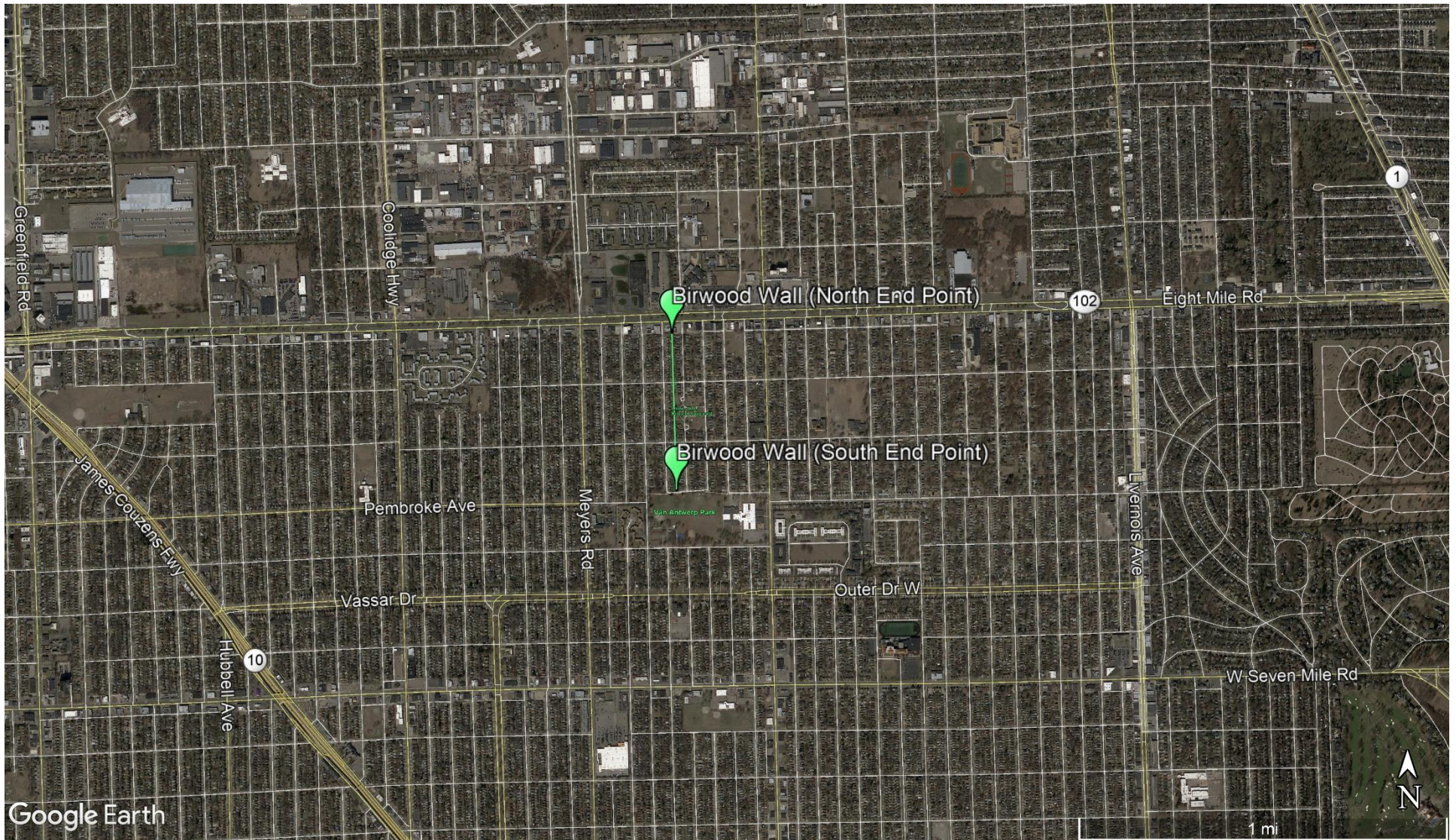
County and State

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: Closeup of wall construction
0007 of 0008

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: May 2019
Description: South end of wall at Pembroke Street, looking northwest
0008 of 0008

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

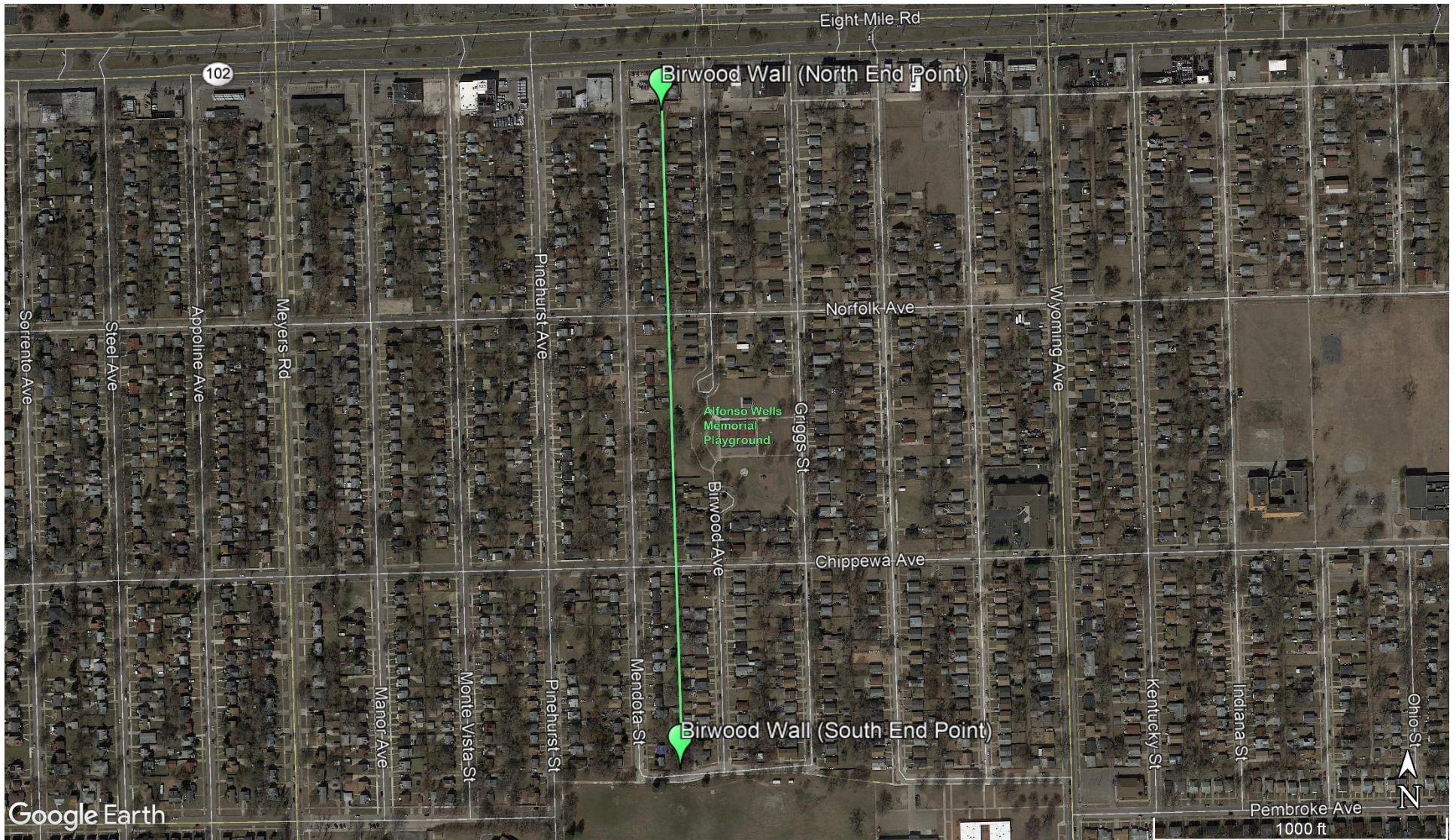


Birwood Wall

Alleyway between Mendota Street (west) and Birwood Avenue (east), from Pembroke Avenue (south) to alleyway south of 8 Mile Road (north)

Lat./Long. (north end point): 42.445034/-83.166398

Lat./Long. (south end point): 42.438928/-83.166155



Birwood Wall

Alleyway between Mendota Street (west) and Birwood Avenue (east), from
Pembroke Avenue (south) to alleyway south of 8 Mile Road (north)

Lat./Long. (north end point): 42.445034/-83.166398

Lat./Long. (south end point): 42.438928/-83.166155





Security
Cameras

MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0001



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0002



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0003



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0004



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0005



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0006



MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0007



0000000000

SMILE
NEW

MI_Wayne County_Birwood Wall_0008

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/22/2020 Date of Pending List: 1/11/2021 Date of 16th Day: 1/26/2021 Date of 45th Day: 2/5/2021 Date of Weekly List: 1/29/2021

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 1/27/2021 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN STRATEGIC FUND
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

MARK A. BURTON
PRESIDENT

Monday, December 21, 2020

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed files contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Birwood Wall, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan**. This property is being submitted for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination is a X New Submission ____ Resubmission ____ Additional Documentation ____ Removal.

- 1 Signed National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- 2 Locational maps (incl. with nomination file)
- 0 Sketch map(s) / figures(s) / exhibits(s) (incl. with nomination file)
- 1 Pieces of correspondence (incl. with nomination file)
- 8 Digital photographs (incl. with nomination file)
- ____ Other:

COMMENTS:

- ____ Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed.
- ____ This property has been approved under 36 CFR 67.
- ____ The enclosed owner objections constitute a majority of property owners.
- ____ Other: This property is nominated under the *Civil Rights Movement in Detroit, Michigan, 1900-1976*, Multiple Property Documentation Form submitted concurrently with this X nomination.

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator, at (517) 335-9854 or walsht@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Martha MacFarlane-Faes
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

