

# Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



## Residential Life and Neighborhoods: *Making a home in the city*



*Photos (clockwise from top left): Edith Lee and her daughter Mary Edith, courtesy of Hennepin County Library; construction of I-35W through the Southside, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society; real estate developer Archie Givens, Sr., courtesy of Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder; Tilsenbilt Homes, courtesy of CPED*

*The City of Minneapolis has been working since 2019 to document the history of African Americans in Minneapolis. We have published a report about this work. It's called the Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study. One section focuses on where and how African Americans made their homes in Minneapolis. This is a summary of that content.*

People of African descent have lived here since at least 1800. Those involved in the fur trade may have moved around. Enslaved African Americans lived and worked for military officials at Fort Snelling. In the 1860s, several free African Americans settled on the east bank of the Mississippi River. At that time, it was St. Anthony, which became part of Minneapolis in 1872. Then they moved across the river to be near the central business district. An early Black community also formed near Shingle Creek at the north end of the city in the late 1800s.

In the 1900s, many Black people moved to Minneapolis. This was during the Great Migration from the South. Racially restrictive practices limited where they could live. **Racial covenants** appeared in property deeds. They banned the sale of specific properties to people who were not white. The practice of **redlining** denied mortgages to specific racial groups. These racist practices were later outlawed.

In the late 1930s, the Home Owner's Loan Corporation mapped U.S. cities. They graded neighborhoods from "best" to "hazardous." Black neighborhoods tended to get lower ratings. They said the housing quality was poor. They didn't support investment here. This happened in Minneapolis and across the U.S.

As a result, African Americans lived in three main areas: the **Northside**, the **Southside**, and **Seven Corners**. These became thriving communities. As they built wealth, many wanted to own their own homes. Black families tried to move elsewhere and were often met with racial violence. White neighbors protested and threatened Black people who moved into their neighborhoods. This happened to Arthur and Edith Lee in the Field neighborhood. Some families stayed while others chose to move again. Over time, families moved farther south and were able to integrate into white neighborhoods.

Starting in the 1930s, the government began planning **highway projects** in Minneapolis. They directly impacted Black neighborhoods. Olson Memorial Highway was built through the heart of the Northside. Two decades later, I-35W fractured the thriving Southside. Urban renewal projects targeted areas on the Northside for redevelopment. They demolished existing housing and built new public housing projects. These same patterns occurred throughout the U.S.

These events from the past continue to shape where Black people live today. They impact how Black families can build generational wealth. Today, almost 20 percent of Minneapolis' population is African American.



**Scan to learn more in the  
Minneapolis African American  
Historic and Cultural Context Study**

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