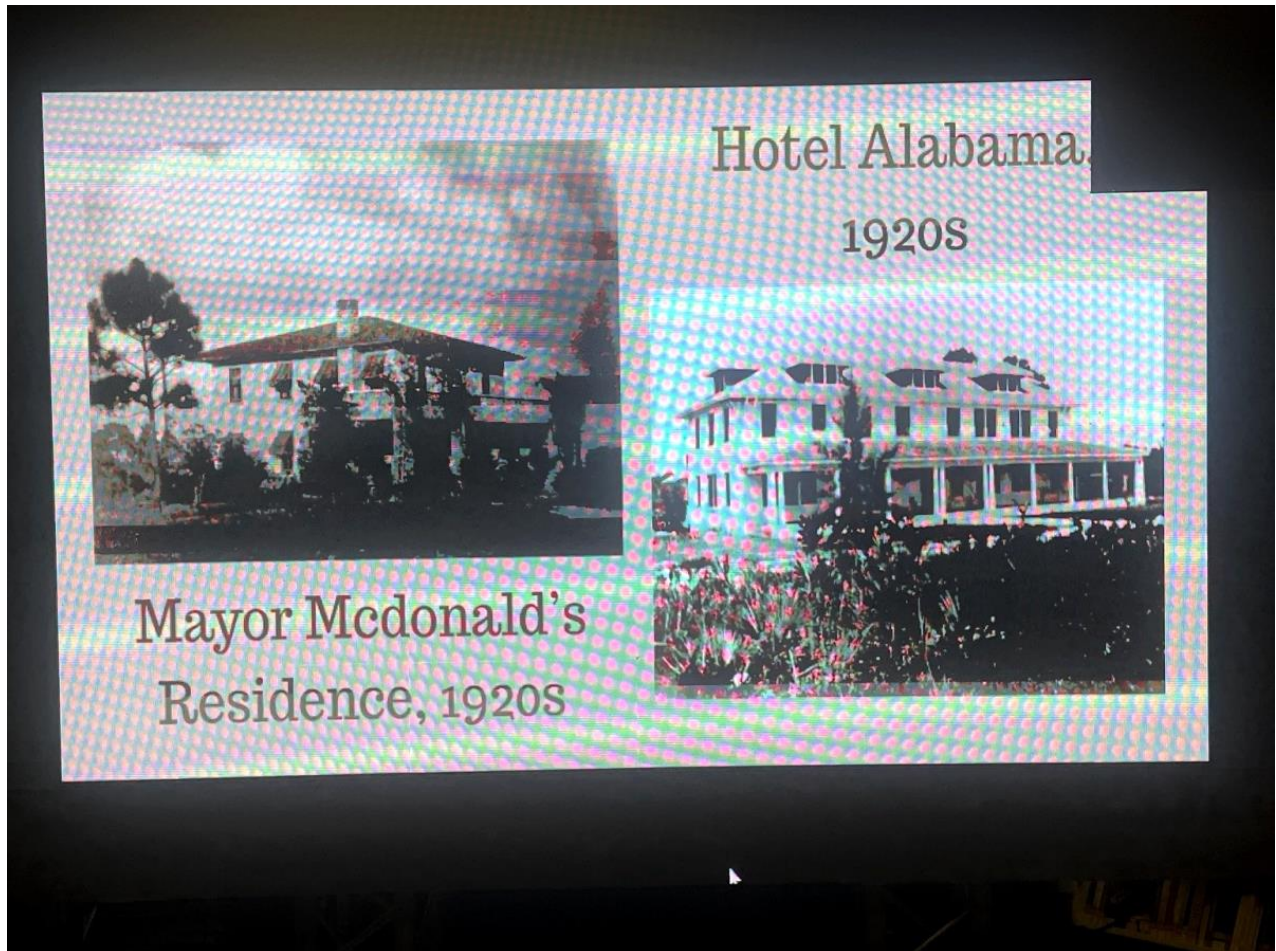


1998

All About Washington Park

The History, Resilience, and Future of a Historic Black Community in North Miami Beach



A local history presentation links the Washington Park story to the early development of North Miami Beach. Photograph supplied by Linda Joseph.

Prepared by Linda Joseph
1998

Purpose and Main Finding

Washington Park is more than a park and more than a collection of streets. It is a historic Black neighborhood whose residents built community under the limits of segregation, protected that community through decades of change, and continue to demand equal public investment. Developed in the 1950s near the southern edge of North Miami Beach, the neighborhood became a place where Black families could establish homes, churches, social ties, and civic leadership at a time when discrimination restricted where they could live and gather. The park at its center became the community's shared front porch.

The main finding of this report is that Washington Park's future should be built around its history, not separated from it. As the city looks toward the year 2000, any new investment in the park and community center should do more than add buildings. It should preserve neighborhood memory, serve current residents, support children and seniors, create pathways to opportunity, and keep Washington Park's founding families visible in the story of North Miami Beach.

A Community Shaped by Segregation

Washington Park developed during the Jim Crow era, when racial segregation shaped housing, education, employment, recreation, and public life throughout South Florida. Black residents were kept out of white neighborhoods by law, custom, lending discrimination, and restrictive real-estate practices. In that setting, a Black neighborhood was not simply a residential subdivision. It was also a place of safety, identity, mutual aid, and possibility.

The neighborhood covers roughly forty acres of homes built in the 1950s. Its traditional boundaries are Northeast 155th Street on the north, Northeast 151st Street on the south, Northeast 14th Avenue on the west, and Northeast 16th Avenue on the east. Its character comes from small lots, neighborhood churches, and the central green space that gives the community its name.

The phrase "once segregated" must be used carefully. It does not mean the community itself was the problem. Segregation was the injustice. Washington Park was the community's response: families created belonging and stability within a system that denied them equal choices. The neighborhood's history therefore includes both exclusion and achievement. It tells how Black residents turned restricted space into a foundation for family life, faith, recreation, leadership, and political participation.



An archival newspaper display recalls the long struggle over school desegregation in Dade County. Photograph supplied by Linda Joseph.

The Park as the Heart of the Neighborhood

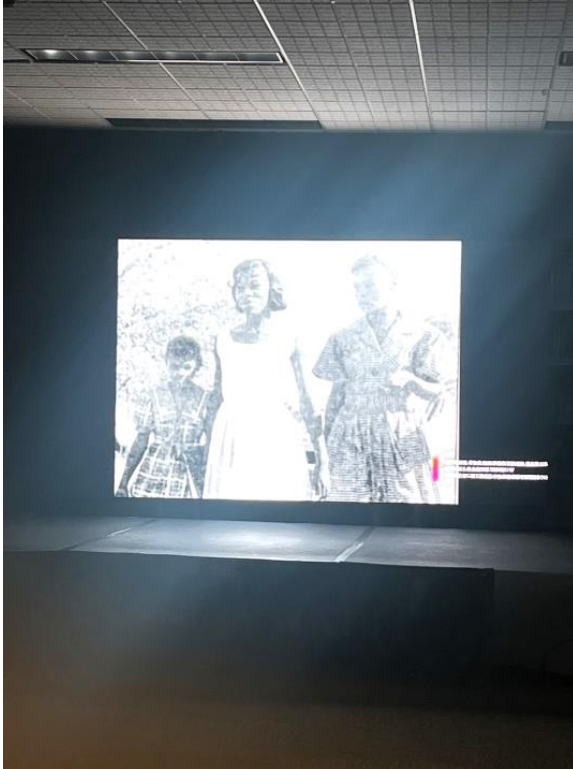
The neighborhood shares its name with Washington Park, a central meeting place that has served generations of residents. The park and community center provide recreation, youth activities, a pool, basketball, a playground, athletic space, and rooms for community meetings and celebrations.

These facilities matter because a neighborhood needs a gathering place beyond home, school, or work, somewhere people can build relationships, share news, and feel that they belong. For Washington Park, recreation and public space have never been luxuries. They helped children find mentors, gave families a place to celebrate, and allowed residents to organize around neighborhood concerns.

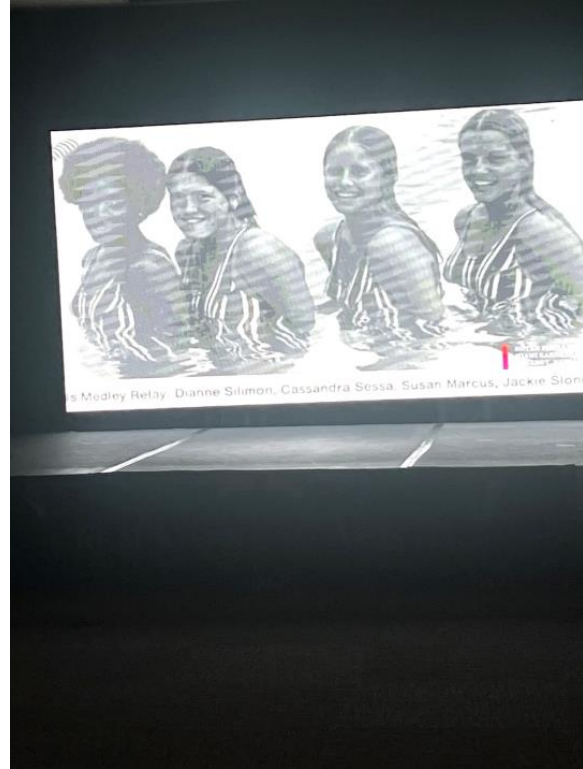
Churches have also anchored the community, among them North Miami Beach Faith Seventh-day Adventist Church and Saint Mary Missionary Baptist Church. Alongside families, civic leaders, and the Voter's Council, these institutions have sustained the traditions of service and collective action that give Washington Park residents a strong public voice.

Families, Youth, and Community Pride

The photographs accompanying this report show why Washington Park history should be told through people as well as plans. Family portraits, athletes, school memories, neighborhood homes, and community groups reveal a living history. Records can describe acreage and boundaries, but they cannot capture the pride of residents who raised children, cared for neighbors, organized teams, worshiped together, and fought for improvements.



Historic family image featured in a local presentation.



Young athletes reflect Washington Park's tradition of recreation and teamwork.

Washington Park's story also reflects a changing South Florida. In recent decades the neighborhood has welcomed families from the Caribbean, including a growing number of Haitian American households. A historically African American neighborhood has become a bridge for newer Black immigrant families without losing the significance of its original history.

That connection matters to North Miami Beach. Washington Park shows that Black history is not frozen in one era. It includes African American pioneers, Bahamian and Caribbean migration, Haitian American families, longtime homeowners, renters, faith communities, civic organizations, and young people writing the next chapter. Preserving history should bring these stories together while still naming the segregation that shaped the neighborhood's beginning.

Unequal Investment and Persistent Advocacy

Residents' pride has existed alongside serious challenges: aging homes, poor street lighting, concerns about crime, limited commercial activity, and a long wait for public services that other parts of the city received sooner. Streets, sidewalks, drainage, and the community center have all needed attention. Residents have not waited quietly. They have returned to City Hall year after year, insisting that Washington Park deserves safe, high-quality public space. That persistence is a central part of this history.



A modest neighborhood home shown in the historical presentation. Images of everyday places help preserve the community's lived history.

The Community Center We Deserve

The next step for Washington Park is a modern community center worthy of the families it serves. Residents have described what it should hold: updated meeting and banquet space, a library and study area for students, room for after-school programs and child care, an improved pool and playground, better courts and fields, safe parking, and good lighting. It should be built with the neighborhood, not simply for it.

Any such project should come with clear public information. Residents should be told the full cost, where the money is coming from, who holds the contracts, and when each stage will be finished. If a schedule slips or a feature is cut, the City should explain why right away. Washington Park has waited too long to accept promises without a timeline.

What Preservation Should Look Like

Preserving Washington Park requires more than putting historic names on a wall. A real preservation effort should record the memories of elders, copy family photographs, identify founding families and civic leaders, document churches and neighborhood organizations, and create permanent displays inside the community center. Residents should help decide which stories are told and how.

History can also live through programs: annual heritage days, young people interviewing elders, local-history workshops, school partnerships, and a small reading room where residents can see photographs, newspaper clippings, maps, and recorded testimony. Public art should be created with community input and should recognize both the injustice of segregation and the achievements of the people who built Washington Park.

Finally, preservation means protecting the people who carry the history. Public improvements can raise property values, but they can also put pressure on longtime homeowners and renters. The City should pair any investment with home-repair help, property-tax and homestead education, help with wills and estate planning, code-compliance assistance, and local hiring. The goal is improvement without erasure.

Priorities for the Next Chapter

- **Build with transparency.** Publish a public schedule, budget, and regular progress reports for any work in the park.
- **Put residents at the center.** Form a standing resident advisory group that includes elders, parents, young people, nearby churches, and the Voter's Council.
- **Protect the historical record.** Collect oral histories, preserve photographs, and create permanent exhibits and public art before memories and materials are lost.
- **Build strong programs, not just buildings.** Plan staff and operating funds for tutoring, recreation, arts, job training, senior activities, health programs, and community events.
- **Prevent displacement.** Connect residents with home-repair help, tax-relief information, legal assistance, and programs that help families keep property across generations.
- **Create pathways for youth and local workers.** Partner with schools, hospitals, unions, colleges, sports organizations, and employers on mentoring, internships, apprenticeships, and jobs.

Conclusion

Washington Park is one of North Miami Beach's most important historic communities. It was shaped by segregation, but it should never be defined only by what was denied. Its residents built families, institutions, civic power, and traditions of care. The park became the place where those relationships grew. Decades of advocacy have brought the community to a turning point.

A new Washington Park Community Center can honor that legacy if it is more than a modern building. It should be a home for history, learning, recreation, culture, and opportunity. It should welcome the entire city while keeping the neighborhood's original community visible. Most of all, it should stand as proof that residents who organize, remember, and persist can turn long-delayed promises into public progress.



A multigenerational community photograph underscores that Washington Park's history lives through its people.

Notes

Photographs supplied by Linda Joseph from a local historical presentation. Individual people are not identified in this report unless their identity has been confirmed by family or the community.