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RACE AND HOUSING



NVAHA

Northern Virginia Affordable
Housing Alliance

NVAHA-ARLINGTON

**END
APARTMENT
SEGREGATION**



RACE & HOUSING

Discover the legacy of segregation and housing inequality in Arlington and see how historical policies continue to shape today's housing landscape, even today. This resource covers key statistics, maps the decline of Black residents, and examines the impact of zoning and affordability barriers.

Arlington offers a [Race and Ethnicity Dashboard](#), which compares key demographics of the Arlington population by race and ethnicity.

WATCH
"THE HISTORY OF RACE AND HOUSING IN ARLINGTON"



Introduction

The history of segregation, discrimination, and unequal access to housing continues to plague communities across our nation, including our own.

In 1900, Arlington's population was 38 percent Black/African American and there were 12 distinct areas in which they lived. By 2010, that population had shrunk to 8.2 percent. Over the decades, the squeeze of physical walls, restrictive deed covenants, zoning, gentrification, rising housing prices, and waning options have forced many of Arlington's Black residents to leave.

In 2025, only three Arlington neighborhoods have rental units that are affordable to a median-income Black household (earning \$83,000) while all but two neighborhoods are affordable to a median-income white household (earning \$157,000).

While Arlington's population has grown to include immigrants from all over the globe, housing in our County remains segregated. In fact, in many ways zoning rules that govern Arlington's residential areas have become more restrictive over time, while only a small part of the county's land was made available to meet the growing housing needs of the area.

In 2020, a nationwide reckoning with the legacy of racism began in the wake of the deaths of Black Americans at the hands of the police and as communities of color were disproportionately ravaged by the Coronavirus pandemic.

We know that we have outdated systems in place that have benefited some while leaving others behind because of the color of their skin. As the County awaits implementation of Expanded Housing Options zoning and updates its [Affordable Housing Master Plan](#), we must ask ourselves: Are we ready to dismantle the walls of indifference once and for all, and build an Arlington where people of all walks of life are welcome and can afford to live?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACE & HOUSING IN ARLINGTON

1619

The first enslaved Africans arrive in Virginia.

1826

George Washington Parke Custis gives Maria Carter Syphax and her children their freedom and a seventeen-acre plot within the Arlington plantation. Maria was the daughter of Custis and Arianna Carter, an enslaved maid.

Pictured right: Maria Carter Syphax's husband Charles Syphax holds their grandson William.



1844

Levi and Sarah Ann Jones purchase 14 acres in Green Valley. Levi was born free to Davy and Evy, who were enslaved on George Washington's Mount Vernon plantation.

1863

Freedman's Village is established. It is Arlington's first planned community, and is on property formerly owned by Robert E. Lee.



1865

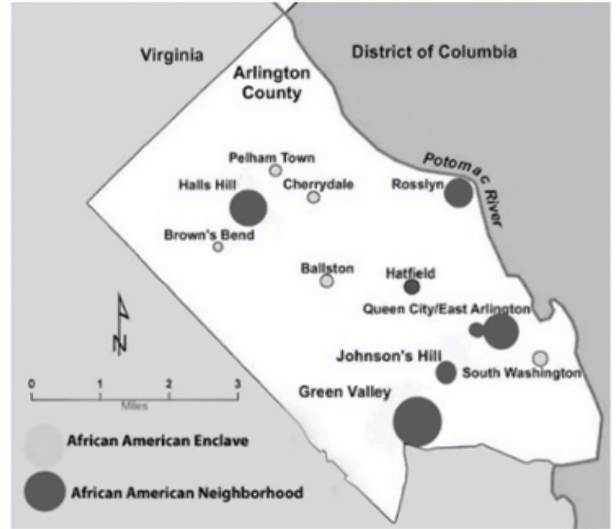
The Civil War Ends

1881

Landowner **Bazil Hall** begins to sell land to former slaves, creating the community of Halls Hill in North Arlington.

African Americans move to the **Johnson's Hill** neighborhood (now Arlington View) in the 1880s after some early attempts by the government to close the nearby Freedman's Village.

In the late 1800s **Harry Gray**, who grew up the son of slaves at Custis House, purchased a parcel in Johnson's Hill and **built one of Arlington's first Townhomes** at S. Quinn Street.



1900

38% of Arlington residents are Black and live in twelve settlements throughout the County.

1930s

Residents of the whites-only Fostoria and Waycroft neighborhoods **build a 7-foot tall cinder block wall separating themselves from Halls Hill**, cutting off most access points to the established Black community.



Freedman's Village is closed to make way for **Arlington Cemetery**.

1938

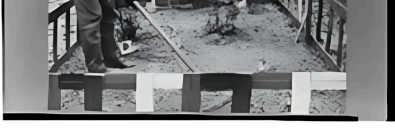
Considered distasteful by white residents, **Rowhouses are banned in Arlington**.



1941

220 families are evicted from Queen City and East Arlington to make way for construction on the Pentagon and surrounding roads. Many Black residents eventually settled in Green Valley.





1950-1962

Zoning changes make it difficult to build duplexes.

1959

School integration begins when Ronald Deskins, Michael Jones, Lance Newman, and Gloria Thompson walk into Stratford Junior High School on February 2, 1959.



1963

Dr. King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington.

1965

45,000 sign on to fair housing campaign in Arlington, the most extensive fair housing campaign the United States had seen.

1966

10 people are arrested at a sit-in at the all-white Buckingham Apartments. Demonstrations and marches continue as people fight for fair housing.



1968

Congress passes and LBJ signs the Fair Housing Act a week after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When it came to renting, buying, or financing housing, it would no longer be legal to discriminate on the basis of race.





Late 1970s-Early 1980s
Vietnamese refugees arrive after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Clarendon becomes known as **Little Saigon**.



Arlington Public Library, VA

Dave Buckbaum

May 1980

1969

Arlington's rowhouse ban is lifted.

1977

Metro comes to Arlington. Construction of new housing becomes focused along the Metro corridors.

Northern Virginia Sun

Daily Hometown Newspaper of Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, McLean and Vienna

Vol. 40 No. 141

Saturday, July 1, 1977

ISSN 0028-9152

15 Cents

Metro Arrives

After Years Of Planning, Spending, Arlington Gets Subway



A passenger boards the subway for a ride.



July 1st train rolls into Pentagon Station.

BY THE PRESS
 The first subway train arrived at the Pentagon station in Arlington, Va., Saturday, July 1, 1977, marking the beginning of a new era in the region's mass transit system. The train, which carries 100 passengers, is the first of many to be operated by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The subway system, which has been planned for over a decade, is expected to serve the region's growing population and provide a more efficient means of transportation. The first train was met by a large crowd of people at the station, and the atmosphere was one of excitement and anticipation. The subway system is expected to be a major factor in the region's economic growth and development.



Late 1980s
 Immigrants and refugees begin to arrive from **Latin America**, including many fleeing **Civil War in El Salvador** that lasts from 1979-1992.

1999

Arna Valley redevelopment of new, luxury apartments **displaces 3,000**



(mostly) Hispanic immigrants.

2000

27.8 percent of people living in Arlington **were born outside the U.S.** Half of these immigrants are from Latin America, nearly 30 percent are from Asia, and 10 percent are from Africa.

2010

8.2% of Arlington is Black/African American. Housing prices soar following the **Great Recession.**

2015

Arlington County adopts its first **Affordable Housing Master Plan.**



Photo by James Eades on Unsplash

2020

Nation-wide reckoning with racism begins in the wake of the **deaths of Black Americans** at the hands of the police and as communities of color are **disproportionately ravaged by the Coronavirus pandemic.**

Only 3 neighborhoods have rental units that are affordable to a median-income Black household (earning \$59,000), while all but two neighborhoods are affordable to a median-income white household (earning \$135,000.)

2023

Expanded Housing Options Ordinance is adopted into Arlington County, ending nearly 100 years of Exclusionary Housing in the County.