Abstract

The residential area now known as Washington Addition was once a small community that rose up around the railroad; this community was known as Gowdy, Mississippi. As the city of Jackson expanded throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Gowdy became enveloped by the city. By the time Jackson State moved to its current home in West Jackson, Gowdy was known as Washington Addition and functioned as a neighborhood for, primarily, people associated with the University. A number of professors, administrators, and other university workers called Washington Addition home and now a number of the streets are named after famous Jackson State professors. Currently, Washington Addition is in the midst of redevelopment projects that aim to remedy the effects of white flight and the crack epidemic that decimated the inner-city areas of Jackson in the late 1970s and 1980s. Pointing to the neighborhood’s history with Jackson State, the university is a main player in these development efforts. This paper examines the history of the neighborhood as it is intertwined with Jackson State. Further, it will look at the area’s progression from its beginnings as Gowdy to the problems it faced in the latter part of the 20th century by examining census reports and newspaper articles to trace a historical path that looks forward to Washington Addition’s future. Finally, this project will examine and analyze the redevelopment efforts taking place in the area under the guidance of Jackson State University to determine the applicability and effectiveness of development efforts in the neighborhood. Ultimately, this paper will hope to determine if the efforts at redevelopment will take the best interests of the neighborhood’s history and residents into account.
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“From Gowdy to Washington Addition and Beyond: History and the JSU led Redevelopment Efforts”

Introduction

Washington Addition is the area of land just south of the Jackson State University campus (formerly Jackson College). The area, which is zoned in some parts for residential and some parts for industrial, is bordered by Lynch Street to the North, Terry Road to the East, US Highway 80 to the South, and Valley Street to the West.\(^1\) The area was once home to Richard Wright; the author based his classic book *Native Son* on his experiences growing up in the area during the 1920s.\(^\text{ii}\) Now, Washington Addition is home to arguably the best hamburger in the city. Algernon Stamps, Sr., opened Al’s Deli Mart in 1970; in 1986 he changed the name of the business to Stamp’s Super Burger, because of the popularity of the burgers he produced. Stamp’s is a landmark in the area that celebrated forty years of business this past year.\(^\text{iii}\)

The history of Washington Addition, however, is about more than just famous African American authors and good hamburgers. The area’s proximity to Jackson State informs Washington Addition’s past, present, and future. When Jackson State moved its campus to the area in West Jackson, Washington Addition was established as a residential area for students, faculty, staff, and families of the college. By the 1980s and 1990s, white flight and the crack epidemic decimated the area, as Washington Addition “lost half of its population between 1980 and 1990.”\(^\text{iv}\) Yet, by the late 1990s, a series of federal grants and intervention from the university aided in the revitalization projects in the area. This action has extended into the present as Jackson State spearheads new rounds of development that hope to aid both the Washington Addition community and the university. Washington Addition is steeped in rich history and tradition that is tied closely to Jackson State. As Jackson State University looks toward the
future, the vitality of Washington Addition is an important component of the university’s effort. To fully understand how this future will take shape, an understanding of Washington Addition’s history is important.

**Gowdy, Mississippi**

Before the arrival of Jackson State in the early 20th century, the area now known as Washington Addition was a self-sustained African American community known as Gowdy, Mississippi. The area, located on the “outskirts of town” and made up mainly of “farms and pastures,” essentially arose around the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad (YMV) line that ran through the rural area. For many years, Gowdy was not much more than a “whistle stop” for the railroad line. Eventually though, a settlement arose around the train stop and Gowdy became an incorporated town complete with a post office and a mayor. Other than farming, the residents of Gowdy primarily worked at the Delta cottonseed oil plant that was owned by Mr. W.B. Gowdy, the town’s namesake.

Gowdy is a central fixture in the history of African Americans in Jackson. One of the city’s oldest black churches, College Hill Baptist Church, is located in the area. And, according to Washington Addition Neighborhood Association President Blonda Mack, “It’s a very important area, because out of Gowdy came most of our black leaders in this city…Look at the makeup of the Legislature and elected officials in the city and county. People like Senator Alice Harden and Hinds County Circuit Judge Tommie Green were all reared here.” Because of this history, Gowdy was awarded a historical marker this year, based on documentation provided by Ms. Willie Mae Shirley, who has lived in the area for over eighty years. Gowdy will now be a state landmark community identified by a marker placed at the corner of Valley and Lynch Street by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). Gowdy moved ahead as an
independent city until Jackson State was forced to move its location to West Jackson in the early 1900s. After this, the community changed for good and became the community it is known as now, Washington Addition.

**Jackson College Moves to West Jackson**

The year 1903 marked “difficult times for Jackson College.” Not only was enrollment down, but the campus community was being forced of its home in North Jackson where Millsaps College stands now. This move was necessary because “The dictum that ‘Negroes are outsiders’ prevailed among whites. Blacks felt that racial prejudice had forced them to be removed from a prime living area of the city in North Jackson. To many black people, the removal spelled Exodus.”

Forced to look for another site, Jackson College’s second president, Luther G. Barrett, stumbled across the land west of Jackson that was occupied by the residents of the Gowdy community. Barrett bought the land from Anetta Drake on February 23, 1903 for $7800. There were 150 acres of land involved in the transaction: 50 acres were set aside for the college; 50 acres were sold by the American Baptist Home Mission Society (an organization that supported and helped to maintain the college) for a profit; the final 50 acres were purchased by Barrett, who parcelled the land and sold it as house lots to “Negroes only.” This residential area eventually would become known as Washington Addition.

Barrett immediately saw the value in having a residential area in close proximity to the college’s new home because he “was of the opinion that if the parents of the students lived in close proximity to the school they would send their children to Jackson College. Working under this assumption, Barrett sent out letters to all the patrons informing them of the sale of the property near the college. Living in the rural areas of Mississippi, many of the parents were skeptical about buying property in town.” Soon, despite initial reluctance, blacks began moving
into the area, as a mix of sharecroppers and, eventually, World War I veterans “acquired funds and bought land to relocate.” Many of the women took domestic jobs in the surrounding areas and the majority of the men worked at the cottonseed oil plants or as railroad workers in some capacity.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Barrett’s plan was successful: “The new location of the school brought new interest and generated an increased enrollment-from 107 to 442 students over a four year period.”\textsuperscript{xvii} Of equal importance was the fact that by the early 1900s, “the campus was surrounded and protected by black neighbors.”\textsuperscript{xviii} This is significant, given the fact that Jackson College was essentially forced off its land in North Jackson by hostile white neighbors that were not too kind to the black students and faculty; Jackson College and Washington Addition became an enclave for African Americans, providing distance and a bit of protection from the segregated Jim Crow reality of Jackson. Development in Washington Addition proceeded quickly because of the “need for housing for the labor pool” that was taking the mill and railroad jobs in the area.\textsuperscript{xix} Shortly after Jackson College settled into its new home, Washington Addition was established as one of the most important African American communities in the city of Jackson. Thus, the history of Jackson College and Washington Addition are intertwined; by the 1990s, this history would come full circle in the form of redevelopment efforts led by Jackson State.

\textbf{Washington Addition}

In the decades after Jackson State’s relocation to West Jackson, Washington Addition remained an important residential and industrial area for African Americans in Jackson. From its inception, Washington Addition has been an area whose population is made up of primarily working class African Americans, as few professional blacks lived in the neighborhoods; the majority of professional African Americans resided in the “Sugar Hill” area in North Jackson.\textsuperscript{xx}
In short, Washington Addition was never an affluent part of the city, but important nonetheless, as it provided a home for low and lower middle-class families that work in the service industries in the city. Nevertheless, the neighborhoods in Washington Addition, for many years, were considered “safe neighborhoods with single-family residences, and very pleasant places to raise a family.” Yet, similar to many other residential neighborhoods in Jackson and across the country, Washington Addition was not immune to the problems surrounding the crack epidemic from urban areas.

By the 1980s and 1990s the effects of crack were more than evident in Washington Addition. The crack epidemic, which swept the nation in the early 1980s, took its toll on urban areas as more and more people were put in jail; this, coupled with the effects of addiction, led to a breakdown in communities across the country of lower economic classes and people of color. Those that could get out did; as mentioned earlier, the population of Washington Addition decreased by half between 1980-1990. Those that could not get out had no choice but to stay in the neighborhoods.

As a result of this breakdown in community and the decimation of civil and social services, crime and blight took hold in these urban areas; Washington Addition was no exception. Like much of West Jackson, Washington Addition became, by the 1990s, an almost forgotten area. But, due to community outcries about rampant drug dealing, prostitution, and violent crime, a series of initiatives were carried out by the city of Jackson in an attempt to curb crime and clean up the neighborhoods. In 1998, the city of Jackson accepted a $200,000 grant to begin a program called Weed and Seed, which was “designed to ‘weed’ the neighborhoods of crime and ‘seed’ them with revitalization programs.” The Weed and Seed program included projects such as the ten most wanted houses program, where drug houses were demolished;
having police officers move into refurbished former drug houses; building playgrounds where drug houses once stood; and summer youth programs. According to the city council, “About a third of the grant money will go for law enforcement with the remainder for neighborhood projects” such as the ones mentioned above.xxiv

Two other revitalization programs targeted Washington Addition in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Partnership ’98, a non-profit organization set up by residents of Washington Addition, was “a grassroots organization that hopes to return the Jackson community to its owners.”xxv The project, “sponsored by the Foundation for the Mid-South and Lighthouse Outreach Ministries, encouraged efforts to fix and improve community institutions such as Isable Elementary, Jim Hill High, and the Johnny Champion Community Center.”xxvi In 2000, the Weed and Seed program spawned the Safe Neighborhood Initiative, which, in May 2000, led to the arrest of 32 people with warrants for dealing drugs. A police substation was subsequently established at 1525 Booker Street in the heart of Washington Addition.xxvii This era also marked the beginning of a newfound interest in Washington Addition from Jackson State.

In the late 1990s, the College of Business at Jackson State University received a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to develop housing for the Jackson State workforce, namely faculty and staff. The program was only “mildly successful,” mainly due to the negative public perceptions about the area.xxviii Not to be dismayed, the university continued its interest in Washington Addition and in 2001 the university received another grant to fund a project “to increase homeownership, reduce substandard housing, eliminate abandoned and vacant housing, and increase the supply of affordable housing in the city's Washington Addition neighborhood.”xxix The project’s aim was “to purchase and rehabilitate six vacant properties in the university's neighborhood,” which would go on to be
“sold to low- and moderate-income individuals and families who have successfully completed a JSU-sponsored homeownership education program. Proceeds from the sale of homes will be used to establish a revolving acquisition and rehabilitation fund. JSU will use this fund to rehabilitate additional housing.”

**Jackson State and a New Wave of Redevelopment**

While the revitalization efforts in the latter part of the 1990s planted seeds, they were in no way enough to eradicate the structural effects of the problems that plagued Washington Addition. By 2000, there were 368 vacant housing units in the area, which accounts for nearly one-quarter of all housing units in Washington Addition. Further, “Only 25 percent of homes in the area are owner-occupied compared to 55.4 percent citywide. Half of the area’s 2,218 housing units are classified as substandard. The average home value in Washington Addition was only $22,250 in 1990, compared to $69,758 citywide.”

Put simply, Washington Addition was in need of some kind of help to break through the years of blight and crime to once again become a sustainable community. That help would come from the Jackson State Center for University Based Development (CUBD).

Kimberly Hilliard, Ph.D., director of CUBD, says that the center has taken on the “effort of re-branding West Jackson,” which the center believes is the first among many priorities for the area. Nodding to the connected history of Jackson State and Washington Addition, the CUBD focuses a good amount of its work and effort on Washington Addition, because of its on-going importance to the university community. Dr. Hilliard sees CUBD as “advocates for neighborhoods,” instead of a group that comes into the community and forces its will on the community. CUBD holds “listening sessions” in an effort to “merge projects we want to do with what the residents want.” At these sessions, neighborhood residents choose from different house
styles, layout, materials, and concepts to create their ideal picture of new homes. CUBD takes this information into consideration when designing both new home projects as well as redevelopment projects.\textsuperscript{xxxiii}

The efforts of the CUBD are part of an on-going effort of revitalization in Washington Addition that is being spearheaded by the university. The initial phase of the effort “is to reach out to established community groups, such as churches, neighborhood associations and businesses, to seek their input into the planning process.”\textsuperscript{xxxiv} The CUBD hosted “listening sessions” are an example of this. Next, phase two involves the creation of a new entrance to Jackson State near Lincoln Street and the building of mixed-income housing options that the university hopes will initially attract university employees, city workers, and state workers.\textsuperscript{xxxv} Considering that the first streets established in Washington Addition were named after teachers and supporters of the college,\textsuperscript{xxxvi} it is fitting that the new redevelopment efforts target university employees as the initial group of new tenants.

Presently, Jackson State owns eighty vacant properties in Washington Addition; some of the properties will be developed into housing units and others will be used differently. Beginning this past summer, Jackson State teamed up with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to begin a community garden project in Washington Addition that transformed “two vacant 30-by-80-foot lots into gardens planted with okra, squash, peas, and other crops. Residents can harvest the food anytime. The only rule is that they maintain the gardens.”\textsuperscript{xxxvii} This first-of-its-kind project aims to build community involvement while helping community members learn and maintain good dietary habits. The university also hosts neighborhood cleanup days in Washington Addition, where volunteers and community members team up to clean vacant properties and help those in need maintain yard work.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}
Conclusion

Jackson State’s renewed efforts to redevelop and revitalize Washington Addition bring the history of the area full circle. Formerly an enclave neighborhood built in the shadow of Jackson College when it was forced to move in the early 20th century, Washington Addition is now the center of attention of development in West Jackson for the university. Clearly, Jackson State has not forgotten the past while attempting to re-build the historic and once-proud neighborhood. Even though the university has implemented a number of strong programs to address the problems in the area, everything is not perfect yet. Blonda Mack, president of the Washington Addition Neighborhood Association, still patrols the street of her neighborhood daily to keep an eye on crime. She says, “It’s shop as usual…and a lot of things that goes on in my neighborhood is people from other ends of town coming in my neighborhood.”xxxix No matter how hard the university works in the neighborhood, the task to break down years-old structural impediments to success and strong community remains daunting.

Programs outside of those established by Jackson State University are also aiding in the revitalization of Washington Addition. Recently, HUD resurrected an old program called the Section 203(k) program that allows homeowners to finance up to an extra $35,000 in their mortgage to pay for the refurbishment of vacated and blighted homes in West Jackson. HUD believes that the 203(k) program “is an important tool for community and neighborhood revitalization and for expanding homeownership opportunities,” which could go a long way toward breaking down the walls of denial that history has structurally placed in front of low-income communities looking to redevelop blighted areas.xi Kimberly Hilliard of CUBD says that an initial gathering of lenders, property owners, and interested homebuyers was a resounding success, as people from all walks of life and backgrounds from all over the city came together in
November 2010 to tour neighborhoods in West Jackson, including Washington Addition, to view properties that could be bought under HUD’s 203(k) program.

Of course, as with any urban revitalization project, gentrification is a major concern for the established members of the community. The fear is that as middle-class people move into redeveloped areas, property values will increase in such a way that residents of communities that have been living there for years would not be able to keep up with the taxes on rising property values, forcing them out of their homes and neighborhoods. It is a sort of urban catch-22: these areas need to be revitalized with new homes and redevelopment of devastated areas, but it cannot come at the cost of harming the established communities, no matter how fragile they might seem to the outside world. Dr. Hilliard says “gentrification promotes displacement…we are promoting development without displacement…we are trying to serve everybody.”

The CUBD recognizes the fears surrounding gentrification and strives to work directly with community members and leaders to make sure that as few people as possible are displaced from their home, many of whom have been lifelong residents of Washington Addition. It is not always perfect, but as long as the university remains vigilant, gentrification should be kept to a minimum.

In the end, Washington Addition is a neighborhood on the rise once again. It was only about 100 years ago that Washington Addition rose out of the rural farm and mill settlement of Gowdy, Mississippi to become one of the first African American communities in the city of Jackson. The one hundred years since have had their ups and downs, but the community, working closely with Jackson State, has been able to continually find ways to push forward. It is an exciting time for the members of the community, as has already been evidenced with the granting of a historical marker to the area. Hopefully, this recognition of the rich history of
Washington Addition by the MDAH will be another step toward the full redevelopment and revitalization of the area that lies in the shadows of Jackson State.
Notes


v Kimberly Hilliard, Director, Jackson State University Center for University Based Development, Interviewed by Garrad Lee, November 17, 2010.


viii Hilliard.

ix *Ibid*.

x Berry-Palmer.


xii Rhodes, 37.

xiii *Ibid*., 38.

xiv *Ibid*.


xvi *Ibid*.


xix Hilliard.

xx Rhodes, 39.


xxii *Ibid*.


xxvi *Ibid*.


xxviii Hilliard.

xxx **Ibid.**


xxxiii Hilliard.

xxxiv Berry-Palmer.

xxxv **Ibid.**

xxxvi Rhodes, 37-38.


xxxviii “JSU Center for University Based Development Organizes Washington Addition Neighborhood Cleanup,” JSU Center for University Based Development Media Release, March 5, 2008.


xli Hilliard.
Appendix A

The community garden in Washington Addition.
Appendix B

The sign outside of Stamp’s Super Burgers, a landmark in Washington Addition (and all of Jackson, for that matter).

Bibliography


Hilliard, Kimberly. Director, Jackson State University Center for University Based Development. Interviewed by Garrad Lee, November 17, 2010.

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