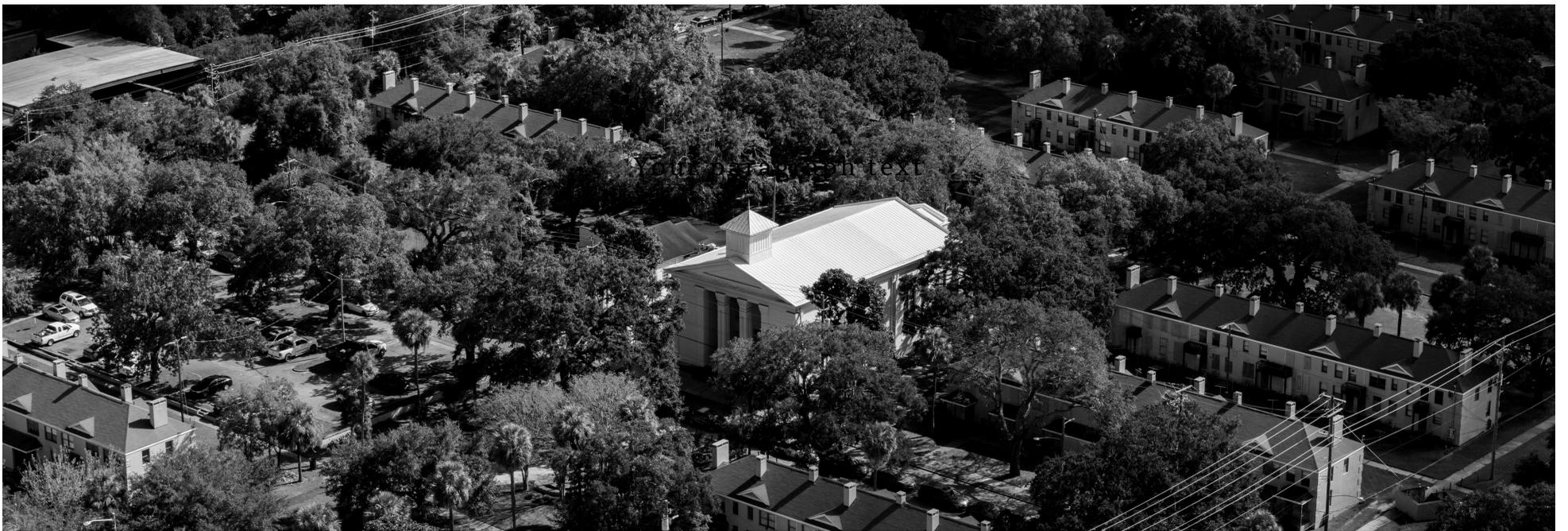


AMIRA BALALA • ELISE COOK • ELLA BLUE MOYER • LAUREN ROCKWELL • BILL ZHUANG

Yamacraw Village Demolition



A walk through the historic and beautiful downtown river district of Savannah, Georgia, past the bars and further into the heart of the residential neighborhoods, you will stumble upon the dilapidated rows of neglected houses. They stand in stark contrast to the shiny new apartment buildings and businesses lining the opposite street.

The area's rich history began as an African American living community that was commonly referred to as "Old Yamacraw". The village had hosted a thriving community of around 3,000 residents made up of African Americans, German, and Irish immigrants. By the 1930s, however, the Housing Authority of Savannah (HAS) Chairman Wessels declared Yamacraw unfit for living and stated that the only solution was demolition, making way for a new government funded Yamacraw Village Public Housing Project.

The construction was completed in 1941, and laid the foundation of modern version of the public housing project. Research shows that the foundations of this community stretch before Georgia's statehood, when the Native tribe of Yamacraw, founded and led by their chief, Tomochichi, asked the government of South Carolina for permission to settle on the embankment in 1732 because of his desire to be buried with his ancestors.

Every day, the number of windows boarded up at Yamacraw Village goes up. A question emerges then: what exactly is happening to Yamacraw Village? Both Fellwood Homes and Yamacraw Village were meant to house residents displaced by the demolition of Old Yamacraw. This raises concerns for those still living in Yamacraw Village as it faces dismantlement. If this complex was built to house the overflow from the demolition, where will the residents currently living in Yamacraw go?



A Neighborhood Covered

Most of these houses are covered up by planks, but some still sport the tell-tale signs of ordinary life. Laundry is strewn over clotheslines, children's toys sit on porches, a garden thrives under the care of an unseen homemaker. All of this has been squeezed between abandonment and decay.



A Little Slice of History

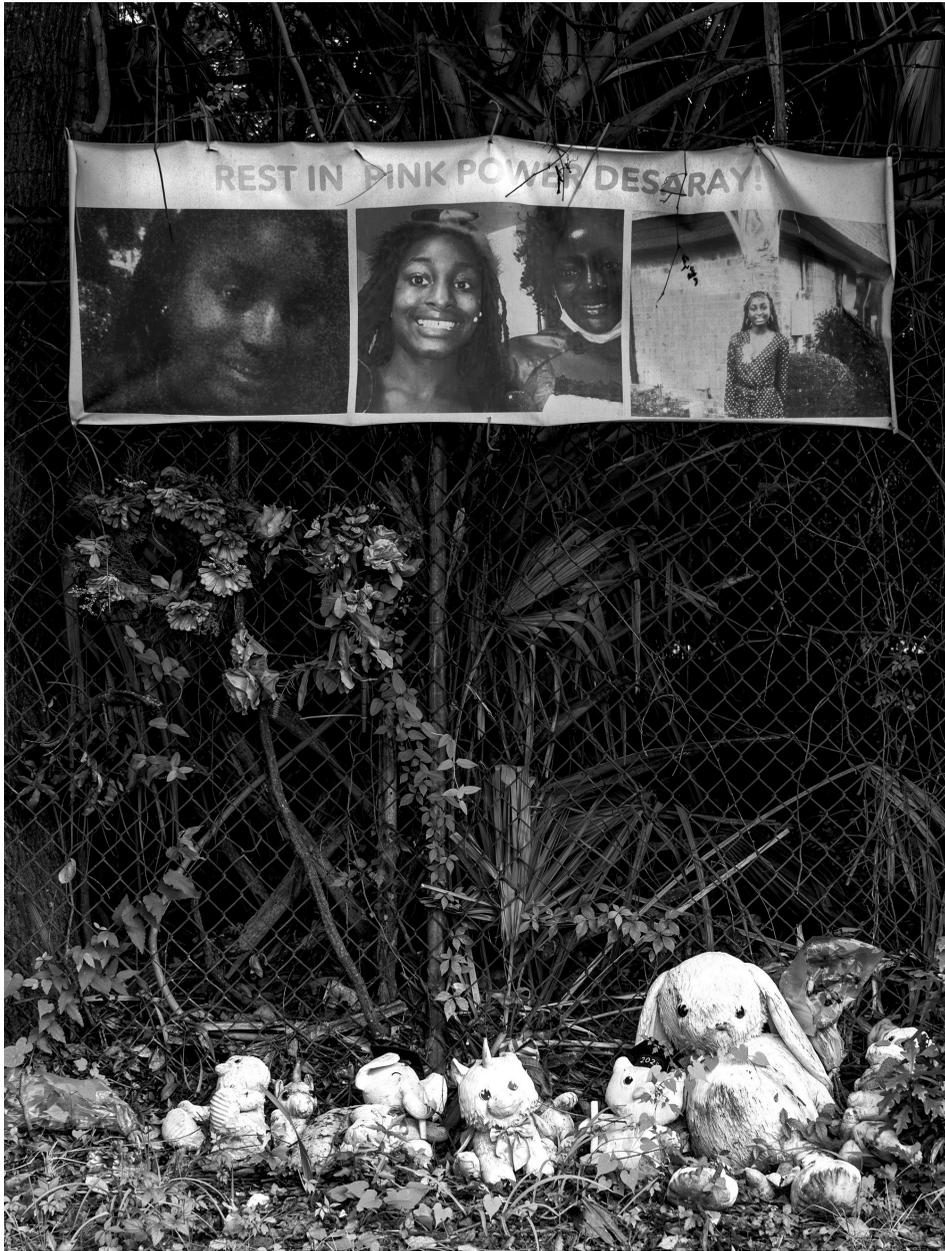
In 1938, the Housing Authority of Savannah received grants from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal for the construction of three public housing projects. Two houses were allotted to African American residents- Fellwood Homes and Yamacraw Village- and one house for white residents- Garden Homes Estate (MPC).

LETHAL DEFECTS
28 SEVERE FAULTS
LEADING TO ILLNESS

RARE REPAIRS
WINDOWS COVERED
LACK OF PROPER
MAINTENANCE

RENT GOES UP
OUTRAGE ON
LACK OF SUPPORT
PREDATORY CHARGES

MOLD ISSUES
MILDEW FOUND
DEEP INFESTATIONS
FROM PLUMBING



IN MEMORY OF DESARAY

According to WTOC, “It’s been 3 years since a Savannah mother last held her daughter... 15-year-old Desaray Gilliard was shot and killed at Yamacraw Village on May 6th, 2022. Her case is still unsolved. The person behind the gun is still unknown. Tuesday night, members of the community showed up in support. “Nobody out there is on the front lines. Like I am keeping her memory alive, keeping her story going,” said Detraya Gilliard. She says as well as losing her best friend, she also lost a piece of herself. A mother who continues to fight for answers regarding her daughter’s death, Detraya Gilliard, found her 15-year-old daughter shot right outside of their home in Yamacraw Village.

“To know that a girl this young was murdered here and no one has found the coward that did that, and that coward hasn’t come forward yet. The problem that we have in this city is that we have too much gun violence,” said Andre Pretorius. The fight against the violence continues- other parents of gun violence victims, share stories of their loved one’s final moments. Candles lit in her honor, alongside other children who still live in that community... Followed by a balloon release, all to honor young Desaray’s life and legacy. Her mother hopes that her story can help at least one person.”

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Conversation with Mayor Van Johnson

In conversation with Mayor Van R. Johnson II, the issue of Yamacraw Village is not one of historic preservation or a conversation about the long history of structural racism, but of the simple fact that the Yamacraw is slated as an unfit place for a person to live. He explains in all communication with the public that once demolition and rebuilding is complete, current residents will be given priority in the new mixed-use development. Aside from this statement and further assurance of the Section 8 vouchers, the public is left with no more information.

Residents have stated that they are unsure of what will happen when they are eventually forced out, but they await further news from the HAS which has declined to comment. In the wake of the current presidential administration, it will become increasingly difficult for low-income households to make any moves within affordable public housing. According to Human Rights Watch, over 10,000 public housing apartments every year become unlivable as public housing cuts continue to jeopardize low-income individuals.





BOARDING UP WINDOWS!

The number of board-up houses increases every day in this neighborhood. A very important question emerges: what is happening to Yamacraw Village? Repairs are now a rarity, officials instead chose to board-up and tear down housing, displacing residents with no other means of housing while rent prices soar everywhere in the city.

While the HAS continues to board up Yamacraw Village amidst lawsuits and profound non disclosure on information, the city of Savannah is under much greater threat of gentrification under managements that prove to be unreliable at best and avaricious at worst.



NEGLECTED BY HOUSING

Standing in the middle of this scene is a bright white vehicle with "HAS" emblazoned on the side. The letters HAS stands for the Housing Authority of Savannah, the organization charged with taking care of this residency.

Perhaps they had been called about something wrong with a complex- a leaky faucet that needs plugging, or a door hanging by its hinges precariously needing mending- but when the vehicle unloads one heap after another of plywood, the same ones seen plastered over other windows in the complex, it becomes clear that is not the case.



SALVATION FOR ALL

RESIDENTS DISPLEASED

The “Rental Assistance Demonstration” is a program pushed forward by Shaun Donovan promised to fund rehabilitation for public housing in Georgia, but it did not provide the money, it instead loosened rules around local officials working with private lenders and developers to pay for upkeep (Clasen-Kelly and Rayasam).

Reports out of Yamacraw Village, from both residents and inspectors, reveal issues of mold and mildew, electrical issues, pest infestations, plumbing issues, and routine predatory charges and lease violations by the housing authority for small, inoffensive acts.

Yamacraw did undergo some renovation in 2019 in the form of new roofs. Reverend Christopher J Pittman, the current pastor for the First Bryan Baptist Church, explained that the HAS was given grant money to make essential repairs to the compound. They chose to re-roof all the buildings instead, letting the homes sit in an oxymoronic display, a new roof atop a boarded-up building.



WHO IS HIRED TO DEMOLISH THESE HOUSES?



These are the men hired to empty, board up, and demolish the homes in Yamacraw Village. Talking with them about their day, led to a place of deeper conversation about the changes taking places within the neighborhood. Their grief became apparent as they opened up about the peculiarity and impact of this job. Just like almost every Yamacraw resident, they speculated and disagreed about who was trying to buy the land they stood on. Just like almost every Yamacraw resident, they touched on how sad it was to see families moving out and the inevitable destruction to community that is tied to their departure.

A MOMENT OF CLARITY

Came and quietly presented another tragic level to this investigation: these men were tearing down the neighborhood they had grown up in. The heartache that these men must experience, moving the couch out of their childhood best friend’s home or exchanging the front door of their grandmother’s house for a wooden plank, is unimaginable. This job must be an internal battle to for them, as they need the work but have to so intimately interact with the impending erasure of Yamacraw Village.

