The History and Politics behind Pontchartrain Park

Pontchartrain Park, built between 1955 and 1965, was one of the first suburban city subdivisions developed for African Americans in the segregated South. Located in the Gentilly neighborhood, where many affluent white residents were leaving the city for the suburbs, Pontchartrain Park was a place where African American residents could become a vitalized that the Saints are Drews could be a reality for all citizens.

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Pontchartrain Park in the 1950s for sale. Photo from Pontchartrain Park Collection, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University

"ONCE-DIVERSE CITY IS NOW SEGREGATED"

– The Times-Picayune

Although Pontchartrain Park opened in 1955, two years after the Brown v. Board of Education case had the groundwork to desegregate the city's public schools, it was not the first or even second housing development for African Americans. Housing policy was and least one decision plotted a substantial role in enforcing segregation or the norm throughout the city. The public pools at the heart of the neighborhood were developed to serve African American residents citywide. This was a chief motivator for Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison, who faced criticism that New Orleans failed to provide separate but equal recreations facilities for people of color.

L. Chandler Grant, Richard Dwight Wallace, and Jeanne Gaudin Fontenot at the opening of the Pontchartrain Park Golf Course, circa 1955. Photo courtesy of Pontchartrain Park, image courtesy of Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library

"My parents' generation took something ugly like segregation and turned it into … one of the most stable American neighborhoods, not only in this city, but around the country." – Wendell Pierce, speaking on CNN, "New Orleans Suburb Blazes Some Racial Trails", Aug. 21, 2010

Beginning with the creation of the Federal Housing Administration in 1934, federally backed mortgage credit was subject to discriminatory policy deterring African Americans evaluation access to homeownership opportunities in both historic neighborhoods and in the emerging suburban communities. Although the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968 (in 1968, commonly referred to as "Indianapolis Jones"), Jones were denied, as yet neighborhood where African Americans lived. In spite of this — and over the objections of the NAACP — in 1954, Attorney deLesseps "Chep" Morrison "pleaded with the FHA to reconsider its inflexible, class-block preferences in Pontchartrain Park, a development that it would not be segregated."

*– The Times-Picayune, "Signing the Deed Under Federal Segregation, Inequality and Disorder Red", 10/2/10. Note: Jim Crow laws, Dalton Lee Gilbert, Robert L. Collins, Gilbert Pierce, Calhoun Hill, Gertrude Fox, Gertrude Fox, Gertrude Fox