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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School

Other names/site number: Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy Public Charter School

Name of related multiple property listing:

20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in Washington, D.C., 1912-1974

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 3115 14th Street NE

City or town: Washington State: DC County: _____

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____ Title :</p>	<p>_____ Date</p> <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☒
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE, GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School is located at the intersection of Jackson and 14th streets NE in Washington, D.C. The building is bounded by Jackson Street NE to the north, 14th Street NE to the east, a play area to the south, and single family residences to the west.

The building was designed in 1945 by Municipal Architect, Nathan Wyeth, and was completed in 1948. (The interior of the second floor was not completed until 1951.) It is located closest to the intersection of Jackson Street and 14th Street. It is a rectangular, two-story upon a raised foundation, flat-roofed, reinforced concrete structure with brick curtain walls and horizontal bands of windows openings. Pink-tinted pre-cast concrete paneling is used as a decorative feature at the foundation, building corners, beltcourses, and around doors and windows. Glass block fills the upper stories of the buildings at its northeast and southeast corners. The building retains its historic integrity and continues to operate as a school.

A 1967 addition to the Slowe School is connected to the original building by a hyphen. The addition is a larger rectangular building that is the same depth as the original building but more than twice the width. Like the original building, it is a flat-roofed, concrete frame structure with brick curtain walls and horizontal bands of window openings on the first and second stories. The addition is sympathetic to the original block in terms of building massing and materials, but it lacks the design features, including pink-tinted concrete and glass block corner treatments, that give the original building its International Style

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character. Although the addition is not architecturally notable, it is compatible to the original building and was constructed within the Period of Significance under Criterion A. (Under Criterion C for this nomination, with Architecture as the Area of Significance, the Period of Significance for this nominaton is 1948-1951, based on the period of construction for the original building.)

Narrative Description

The building was designed by Municipal Architect, Nathan Wyeth, in 1945. When it opened on January 8, 1948, the interior of the second floor remained unfinished and unusable; until 1951, only the first floor was available for use. Upon first opening, Slowe Elementary School had five completed classrooms, and a capacity of 180 pupils. The original portion of the building is located closest to the intersection of Jackson and 14th streets NE. The main entrance to the original building is located on the first floor of the northern façade (short side) of the building, along Jackson Street. The main entry doors are flush with the façade of the building and there are concrete porch entry elements that protrude from the face of the building. This entrance is articulated with a deep, one-story tall concrete pilaster on either side of the double door. The double door has a narrow transom and is topped with a concrete roof. Two glass block panels are located on the second and third floors above the main entry.

The original building is a concrete structure of precast concrete with red brick curtain walls. There is a narrow precast panel located at the sill of the windows and a wide precast panel located at the top of the windows, both of which extend the width of the building. The top of the building is a precast band that is capped with a metal coping. A brick chimney is prominently located on the southwest corner of the original building.

The windows are not original to the building but are typically grouped together in the façade, and fill the original rough masonry openings. Windows along the first floor of the north façade are comprised of pairs or groups of four, 2-over-2, double hung windows. Windows on the second floor of the north façade are located towards the west side of the façade and are 2-over-2 double hung windows with a transom above.

Glass block is a prominent design feature on the original building and is used as a corner detail on the southeast and northeast corners as well as above the main entrance of the building. On the corners, the glass block spans from the top half of the first floor to the top of the second floor and extends 6 blocks wide (on each façade) and 23 blocks tall. The glass block corners are surrounded by precast panels along the side, top and bottom of the glass. The precast panels below the glass blocks on the corner are unadorned, except for the bottom corner which terminates in a full circle and a small diagonal precast panel.

On the north façade, the glass block is centrally located above the main entrance and framed by precast panels on the first and second floors. Each glass block section in this location is 10 blocks wide by 14 blocks tall.

The east façade is two stories on a raised basement. The raised basement cladding is precast panels to above the windows, followed by 10 courses of red brick, a narrow precast panel band under the windows, topped with approximately 40 courses of brick equal to the height of the windows, and followed by the thick precast panel band above the windows. This pattern is then repeated on the floor

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above. The top of the façade terminates with the wide precast panel band that is capped with a metal coping. Windows along the east façade are grouped together into three groups of six, 2-over-2 double hung windows with transom. The windows on the first floor align with the middle and northern most grouping of windows along this façade; however, the windows on the first floor are grouped in double and triple arrangements instead of six windows all together. There is one, 4-over-4 double hung window located in between the two groups of windows closer to the southern side of the building. In each grouping of six windows on the second and third floors, there is a window air-conditioning unit inserted in the top or bottom sash. The windows on the first and second floor of the east façade align with each other. On the first floor there are 'bilco' type storage doors under the southern most windows and metal louvers. Windows on the first floor on the east façade are covered with decorative metal bars that radiate from the center of each sash, dividing each sash into eight triangles.

The south façade contains two stories above grade and is accessed via stair from 14th Street. This secondary entry mimics the north façade but contains a panel of bricks instead of glass block directly above the entry.

[The interior of the building has not yet been reviewed or evaluated, but it is understood that this is required for submission to the National Register.]

In 1967, Slowe was enlarged by a two-story brick addition, designed by Anthony N. Musolina. The addition is included in this nomination as eligible under Criterion A, for its association with the events described herein. It is a rectangular building that is the same depth as the original building but more than twice as wide. It is located to the west of the original building at a rise in topography, but is designed so that the roof height is at the same level as the original building. The addition connects to the original building via a hyphen on the west elevation of the original building; stairs lead from Jackson Street up to the hyphen to provide direct access from the exterior. The addition is set back from the sidewalk behind a high wall with a black, chain-link fence atop it.

Constructed on a slightly different structural grid, instead of a grouping of six windows together, windows in the addition are grouped together in two groups of three and separated via a thick mullion. The addition features a wide precast concrete panel band above the windows that extends the width of the building. The sills of the windows are unadorned and appear to be brick. Each of the groupings of windows are framed with a protruding, one header wide, brick articulation that extends vertically from the from the top of the building to the ground and is only interrupted by the precast band above the windows. Along the north (Jackson Street) side of the addition there are a total of four groupings of these windows, two on the western portion of the façade and two on the eastern portion. Centrally located in this façade are two single, 2-over-2 double hung windows that are similarly framed by the vertical brick articulation.

The west façade of the addition has an unadorned setback on northern portion that contains a side exit onto the loading dock. The southern portion of the west façade contains similar windows as the north façade.

Integrity

The Lucy Diggs Slowe School retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The two buildings that comprise the school remain sited in the same location

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across the street from the extant and largely intact former home of John P. Davis, whose lawsuit precipitated the school's construction. The buildings remain surrounded by single family residential residences. The massing of the original building remains unaltered. The subsequent addition that was added to the west of the building was compatible with the historic building and does not detract from the integrity of the original structure. The exterior cladding materials retain their integrity and although the windows have been replaced with vinyl windows, these replacements occurred in the same masonry openings and retain the same fenestration count and lite division. The original building displays the workmanship of the panels and joints detailing between the concrete and brick. The buildings continue to function as a school. Their physical character and use convey the feeling of the period of significance for this nomination, and they retain a strong association with the key events described herein.

The play area within the school's property line, between the building and Irving Street, is excluded from the boundaries of this nomination. Historically, a small play area was located to the west of building, in the location where the addition was built in 1967, and there was nothing south of the building that is significant to the nomination. The development of the area south of the building into a functional play space may have been part of the "ground improvements" cited as an element of the 1967 addition, since the play area west of the building was eliminated by the addition.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Ethnic Heritage-Black

Ethnic Heritage-European

Law

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1948-1967 (Criterion A)

1948-1951 (Criterion C)

Significant Dates

1948

1951

1954

1967

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Nathan Wyeth

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Lucy Diggs Slowe School initially opened as the Crummell School Annex in 1945, in a bungalow at 1325 Jackson Street NE and two temporary buildings. It was built for Black children in response to a lawsuit against D.C.'s segregated school system, *John P. Davis v. Board of Education*.¹ The lawsuit was the first among a series of challenges waged during the 1940s and 1950s which argued that requiring African Americans in Washington, D.C to attend separate, substandard schools that were frequently located outside of the neighborhoods where they lived, violated the Constitution.² The school was located directly across the street from the Davis family's home until they moved in 1946, two years before the permanent school building opened.

The permanent Slowe School building was constructed two phases; it opened in 1948 and its second floor was completed in 1951. However overcrowding was not resolved (and then only temporarily) until 1954 when the legal desegregation of schools finally gained African American families access to another school nearby.³ Throughout the 1950s and 60s, local citizens continued to demand facilities that would adequately meet the needs of Brookland's expanding population of black children. In 1967, the same year that a former Slowe parent won a major lawsuit against the D.C. Public Schools for continuing to operate segregated, unequal schools, a large addition to the Slowe School was completed.

The Lucy Diggs Slowe School meets National Register Criterion A under the Multiple Property Document *20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in Washington, D.C., 1912-1974*, as a site of conflict over education associated with the campaigns to equalize and to desegregate public schools. While schools that fall into this category are more typically those that barred black students, and were the object of protests to demand black access, the Slowe School was a site of conflict for representing the outcome of such a battle. The Slowe School's construction directly across the street from the home of John P. Davis, who brought the lawsuit precipitating the school's establishment, makes this an especially pointed example of conflicts over segregated schools. In addition, because the school was overcrowded from the time it opened and lacked adequate amenities such as an outdoor play area, it remained a site of conflict over unequal schools for black and white children throughout the 1950s and 60s.

¹ The case's formal name is *Michael Davis, infant by his next friend John P. Davis vs. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*. Tikia Hamilton, "Making a 'Model' System: Race, Education, and Politics in the Nation's Capital before *Brown*, 1930-1950," (Ph.D diss., Princeton Univ., 2015), 189-92.

² Subsequent cases against the DC schools included *Carr v. Corning*, *Moses v. Corning*, *Miller v. Board*, *Williams v. Gannon*, *Cogdell v. Sharpe*, *Bolling v. Sharpe*, and *Hobson v. Hansen*. See <https://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/112-brown-board-educ/prior-judicial-records.html> and *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*, Section E, pp. 25-32. Also see National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms for John Philip Sousa Junior High School and Young, Browne, Phelps and Spingarn Educational Campus Historic District. The former, which was the subject of *Bolling v. Sharpe*, is designated as a National Historic Landmark.

³ By 1956, more than half the students at formerly whites-only Brookland Elementary School were African American (Slowe Elementary School vertical file, Table 1, Sumner School Museum and Archives).

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The Slowe School meets Criteria A and C of the Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*, under Property Sub-type VI, "The Office of the Municipal Architect, Nathan C. Wyeth, 1934-46." Under Criterion A, this MPD states that properties may be eligible if they represent the "evolution of public education for African Americans," the "participation of parents in the educational process," or "segregation, desegregation, and integration," among other historical trends.⁴ The Slowe School was built expressly to serve black students as the outcome of a lawsuit brought by a parent, during a period in which the DC Public Schools remained racially segregated. It was constructed as an alternative to allowing black students to attend white schools. Under Criterion C, the Slowe School is representative of Wyeth's stylistic transition from Colonial Revival to modern.⁵ It is one of the early examples of the Office of the Municipal Architect's usage of the International Style within the District of Columbia, and was the last building designed by Wyeth, who is primarily associated with the school system's Colonial Revival phase in the 1920s to the mid-1940s. The building was completed under architect Merrell Coe. As stated in the MPD, most schools built under Coe were constructed "in an attempt to relieve overcrowding in Division 2 schools as Washington became a majority African American city and [faced] lawsuits leading to the Supreme Court decision desegregating public schools."

The Slowe School also meets Criterion A for its association with Education and Law, for the reasons cited above, and for its association with Politics/Government and Ethnic Heritage (both Black and European/White). In an era when the District of Columbia lacked a locally elected school board, council, or mayor, black citizens skillfully utilized the courts, testified before the school board, and engaged in direct action such as walkouts, boycotts, and picketing as tactics for influencing the governance of the city and its schools. The deployment of such tactics by John P. Davis, Slowe School families, and by black Washingtonians generally, were influential in getting the school constructed and in its 1967 expansion to accommodate more students. The Slowe School is significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage for being built to maintain racial segregation in the face of demands to equalize education. As such, the school represents a victory for black citizens, on the one hand, and a successful effort by the city's white power structure to defend the existence of exclusively white schools. This is especially notable given white Brookland citizens' historical role in erasing the black community that had lived there in the 1900s, as described in the narrative herein. While typically sites related to civil rights for African Americans are not considered notable for their association with European heritage, efforts to maintain white supremacy via racially separate schools and via inferior facilities for nonwhite schools make such sites as relevant to whiteness as they are to blackness.

⁴ The Public Schools MPD, cited above, provides an excellent discussion on the process of desegregation and its impacts, in Section E, pp. 25-32.

⁵ This multiproperty listing notes that during the period in which Wyeth served as Municipal Architect, "the movement for Civil Rights, home rule, and desegregation of the public schools gained momentum."

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Under Criterion A, the period of significance extends from 1948, with the completion of the school building's initial phase of construction, to 1967, when a major addition to the school was completed in response to continued demands by parents to relieve overcrowding. The end of this period also coincides with the 1967 ruling against the D.C. Public Schools in *Hobson v. Hansen*, brought by a former Slowe parent. This decision required the superintendent and Board of Education to take active steps toward desegregating and equalizing the city's schools, which had not been achieved by the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Bolling v. Sharpe*, D.C.'s companion to *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the 1954 decision led to the official desegregation of the Slowe School, the student population remained almost 100 percent black.

Under Criterion C, the period of significance extends from 1948, with the completion of the school's first phase of construction, to 1951, when the school's second floor was completed. Based on the reasoning described in the Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*, most D.C. schools and additions built after 1958—when the Office of Municipal Architect was abolished and the design of public schools was placed under the Department of Buildings and Grounds—are not considered eligible for designation.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Lucy Diggs Slowe School opened in January 1945 in response to a lawsuit against D.C.'s segregated school system. Washington had educated its African American and white children in separate public schools since the 1860s, and the city's black school system—which operated under the leadership of its own African American Superintendent—became a model for the nation over the course of the next 80 years.⁶ However, by the 1940s, the buildings in which black schools were housed were often inadequate—many were passed on from the "white" to the "colored" division as they aged. They were also frequently overcrowded, or required students to travel well beyond their own neighborhoods to access them.

Davis v. D.C. Board of Education, 1944

The plan to build the Lucy Diggs Slowe School resulted directly from Brookland resident John Preston Davis's attempt to enroll his youngest child, five-year-old Michael D. Davis, in kindergarten at Noyes Elementary School, in January 1944. Noyes was located a few blocks away from the Davis home at 3105 Fourteenth Street NE, yet Michael Davis was turned away because Noyes accepted white children only, and Michael Davis was African American.⁷

John P. Davis had the training to pursue a legal battle on behalf of his son. A 1933 graduate of Harvard Law School and co-founder in 1935 of the National Negro Congress, Davis was now

⁶ Chris Myers Asch with G. Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 2017), 214-216.

⁷ "Dad of Brookland Pupil Attacks School Jim Crow: Says Failure to Provide Facilities in Area Violates Constitution," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 22, 1944; "Colored Pupil Barred from White School," *Evening Star*, Feb. 3, 1944.

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employed as the legislative secretary to U.S. Representative Vito Marcantonio (American Labor Party-NY). By 1935, Davis and his wife had moved to Brookland, a neighborhood becoming increasingly popular among middle-class African American families.⁸

⁸ The U.S. Census for 1940 lists 35-year-old John, 32-year-old Margarite, and 1-yr-old Michael as living in a house they rented at 1334 Hamlin Street NE, and says the family had lived at the same address in 1935. Robert Malesky, "Black and White in Brookland: Irish and African-American perceptions of life here in the 1930s," at <http://bygonebrookland.com/black-and-white-in-brooklan.html>.

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After Noyes rejected his son's enrollment, Davis began demanding an explanation from Dr. Garnet C. Wilkinson. In his role as the African American first assistant superintendent for the D.C. Public Schools, "Colored Division" since 1921, Wilkinson was a respected advocate for equal facilities to serve black students, but he did not support desegregation.⁹ Wilkinson responded to Davis's complaint by telling him that the only schools open to Michael were Langston Elementary at First and P streets NW, Mott Elementary at Fourth and W streets NW, and Crummell Elementary, between Providence and Kendall streets, NE. None of these schools was in Brookland; each was miles away from the Davis home and would require Michael to cross multiple major roads to reach it.¹⁰ In a petition to the school board describing his complaint, Davis also noted that in December 1943, the Board of Education had formally approved Wilkinson's recommendations that children should attend school within one-half mile of their home and should not have to cross an arterial highway to get there.¹¹

In Brookland, white children were served by four schools: Noyes Elementary, at Tenth and Franklin streets; Brookland Elementary at Tenth and Monroe streets; Burroughs Elementary at Eighteenth and Monroe; and Bunker Hill Elementary at Fourteenth Street and Michigan Avenue NE. Notably, Bunker Hill had served African American students from 1891 until 1926, when the local white citizens association successfully advocated for its transfer to the white division. As a result, no white child in the neighborhood had to walk more than one-half mile, or cross a major road, to get to school. However, by the 1940s, these schools were declining in enrollment as white residents moved away and were replaced by black homeowners. In fact, the square block where Noyes was located went from exclusively white in 1940 to nearly 67 percent African American over the course of a decade.¹²

In a February 2, 1944 statement to the D.C. Board of Education, Davis noted that his son would be required to travel more than 17 blocks to the nearest school that would accept him. His statement charged that the Board's failure to provide an elementary school for African American children in Brookland violated the Constitution. Davis' statement continued, "It is [the petitioner's] further contention that the failure of the Board of Education to provide such facilities entitles him to demand and compels the Board of Education to grant his son admission to the Noyes School or to some other school within one half mile of his home, existing statutes

⁹ Tikia K Hamilton, "The Cost of Integration: The Contentious Career of Garnet C. Wilkinson," *Washington History* 30 (1), Spring 2018.

¹⁰ "Dad of Brookland Pupil Attacks School Jim Crow: Says Failure to Provide Facilities in Area Violates Constitution," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 22, 1944.

¹¹ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes, Feb. 2, 1944, 5, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives.

¹² Hayden M. Wetzel, Bunker Hill Elementary School, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Jan. 2014; D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes, Sep. 21, 1949, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, 7. Noyes Elementary School was and remains located at 2725 Tenth Street NE. For the racial makeup of this area in 1940 and 1950, see Prologue DC, Mapping Segregation in Washington DC, at <http://mappingsegregationdc.org>.

and regulations notwithstanding.”¹³ In addition, Davis argued, the “statutes and regulations providing separate schools based on the race of the student are themselves violative of the Constitution of the United States insofar that they refer to a federal district such as the District of Columbia and violative of the Civil Rights statute adopted by the Congress of the United States and still in full legal effect insofar as a federal district is concerned.”¹⁴

Davis’s statement continued,

It is the contention of the petitioner that the right of his son to be provided by the Board of Education with elementary school facilities does not depend upon the discretion or the caprice of the board as to whether there may or may not be a sufficient number of colored children to justify the erection of a school or provision of school facilities in the vicinity. The right referred to is a personal right of the child and would be his right even were he the only Negro child in the neighborhood. The fact is, however, that the denial referred to in this petition is one now applied to a large number of colored children in the Brookland area for a long period of time without remedy. Moreover, the Board of Education has itself recognized its failure to live up to its responsibility...as evidenced by its recurring recommendation over several years...that funds be appropriated for the erection of a colored elementary school in this area...”¹⁵

In fact, the need for an African American school in Brookland had been recognized as early as 1901, but the white Brookland Citizens' Association expressed concern that "the location of the building in the heart of Brookland would seriously affect the value of property there and be detrimental to the interests of the suburb."¹⁶ The need arose, because by 1900, there were 15 black families living in the vicinity of 14th and Monroe streets NE, an area that in the 1930s, would become blanketed with restrictive agreements barring black residency.¹⁷ (While most of

¹³ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes, Feb. 2, 1944, 6. Davis's complaint that segregation of D.C. schools violated the Constitution was based, in part, on the same argument that would be made in *Bolling v. Sharpe* (1954), which said that the 5th Amendment's due process clause prohibited the federal government from segregating public education. It was the *Bolling* case that would establish, for the first time, that the federal government was also required to abide by the 14th Amendment, which had technically applied only to states (https://www.D.C.policycenter.org/publications/barry-farm-anacostia-history/#_ftn25).

¹⁴ The Civil Rights Act of 1866 said that all citizens must be treated equally by the federal government.

¹⁵ Davis continued, "the states are denied the right to offer whites one kind of school facility and deny it to Negroes, and the remedy offered to a Negro complainant in such a situation is to place him in the school facility afforded whites, segregation laws to the contrary notwithstanding..." (Ibid.)

¹⁶ "Brookland Colored School: Citizens Urge that Town Site Will Depreciate Property Valuations," *Washington Post*, April 6, 1901. The Multiproperty Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960* notes that the effort to get schools built in emerging neighborhoods "frequently was a protracted one, especially for new black schools. Whereas the presence of a new white school was viewed as an enhancement to the real estate values in a community, the possible construction of a colored school in the same area was viewed as a threat to those values" (Section E, Page 2).

¹⁷ Wendell E. Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City: The Life and Times of an Urban Reformer* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), 14-16. The implementation of racially restrictive agreements coincided

Brookland had initially been developed for white residents, Howard University trustee Benjamin Leighton, who subdivided Colonel Jehiel Brooks' former estate in the 1880s, had sold some of it to African Americans. Future Secretary of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development Robert C. Weaver grew up at 3519 Fourteenth Street NE during this period, and rather than attending the Brookland School three blocks from his house, because it served whites only, had to travel all the way to Mott Elementary School, near Howard University in Northwest D.C.¹⁸ Black Brookland residents were eventually granted use of the Bunker Hill School on Michigan Avenue after the new white Brookland School opened in 1891, but Bunker Hill was retaken for white residents in 1926.)¹⁹

In a statement by the Superintendent that follows the transcript of Davis's complaint, the D.C. Board of Education put some of the blame for the problem on the city's lack of home rule, noting that the Board did "not have any power to appropriate money, buy lands for school sites, or erect buildings for school purposes," because "these functions [were] reserved to the commissioners of the District of Columbia and Congress." The statement goes on to claim that it had long been the Board's policy to provide equal facilities, but that this had been increasingly difficult due to "the shifting of the population" and "the sudden development of new residential areas especially during this wartime period. There have been many occasions when families moving into new neighborhoods have for extended time been without adequate school facilities..." The Board noted that it had been requesting funds for an African American school in Brookland since 1938, and it renewed this request when it rejected Davis from enrolling his son at Noyes or any other nearby white school in March 1944.²⁰

On March 23, Davis's attorney, Austin L. Fickling, filed a lawsuit in District Court to have the Board's decision overturned; *Michael Davis, infant by his next friend John P. Davis vs. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* was entered into the docket that day.²¹ The Board responded by petitioning the court to drop the case because separate schools were in keeping with D.C. law. In fact, it was in a 1910 case concerning an African American child in Brookland that the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia had provided legal sanction for the District's racially separate schools.²² In *Wall v. Oyster*, the court upheld the expulsion of first grader

with a resurgence of black settlement in Brookland and created barriers around the blocks where African Americans lived. Notably, the two blocks bounded by Monroe, Otis, 13th and 14th streets NE, where black families had settled in the 1900s, remained covenant-free in 1940, but the Census showed just one black family still living there (Mapping Segregation in Washington DC, at <http://mappingsegregationdc.org>).

¹⁸ Pritchett, *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Wetzel, Bunker Hill Elementary School, National Register (*ibid.*), Presumably Weaver could have attended the two-room Bunker Hill School, built in 1911 to replace a one-room school house dating to 1883, but black parents' advocacy for a new school indicate that Bunker Hill was inadequate ("Mixed School Suggested: Colored Man's Plan for Brookland Disapproved by Macfarland," *Washington Post*, July 26, 1907; "Don't Want Colored School: Residents Protect Against Its Location in University Heights," *Washington Post*, March 5, 1908).

²⁰ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes, Feb. 2, 1944, 11; *Davis v. Board of Education*, District Court of the United States for the District of Columbia, "Civil Docket Books, 1938-1986," A1 Entry 34, RG 21, National Archives.

²¹ *Davis v. Board of Education*, Civil Docket Books.

²² D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes, Feb. 2, 1944, 10.

Isabel Wall of 1019 Kearney Street NE from Brookland Elementary School when it was discovered that she had African American ancestry. Isabel's mother testified that excluding her on the basis of race was unconstitutional, but the court addressed only the question of whether Isabel was white.²³

On May 16, 1944, District Court Judge Morris dismissed Davis's suit, holding that because segregated schools were legal in D.C., the complaint "did not show discrimination but merely alleged an inconvenience," reported the *Washington Post*.²⁴ However, the judge invited Davis to amend the lawsuit, and ten days later, Davis submitted a revised complaint. Davis's amended filing specified that more than 500 black families and at least 100 black children of elementary school age lived in a section of Brookland that was not served by a single African American school, while no white residential area in DC with more than 30 elementary school-aged children was without "suitable and convenient school facilities within a reasonable distance." In addition, he charged that the residential area in question had been largely African American "for the last five years and the Board of Education has had notice during the whole of such period of the lack of suitable and convenient facilities for colored children."²⁵ This time the judge let the suit stand. A month later, Dean William H. Hastie of Howard University School of Law joined Davis's legal team.²⁶

Among points of defense that the Board listed in an answer to the amended complaint was that Davis knew there was no school to serve his child when he moved to Brookland.²⁷ However, the Brookland Civic Association, an African American homeowners association, had been advocating for a school long before Davis brought his suit. In the mid-1930s the group had asked for a bus to transport neighborhood youngsters to one of the two schools open to them at the time: Monroe Elementary School on Columbia Road between Georgia and Sherman avenues NW; and Mott Elementary School at Fourth and W streets NW. For parents without cars, traveling to school required taking two or three city buses and consumed much of their

²³ While the meaning of "colored" had not been defined in the establishment of segregated schools, the court stated that "it is to be concluded that the child is of negro blood of 1/8 to 1/16," and that she was "therefore 'colored' according to the common meaning of the term" (*Wall v. Oyster, et al.*, Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia, October Term, 1910, No. 2203, at

https://archive.org/details/dc_circ_1910_2203_wall_v_oyster/mode/2up). Isabel Wall was a descendent of the prominent D.C. couple O.S.B. and Amanda Wall (see Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 168-69, 240). For the 1869 admission of the daughter of African American minister Sella Martin's daughter to DC's segregated Franklin School based on her apparent whiteness, see Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle for Equality in Washington, D.C.*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 168-170.

²⁴ "Court Backs White School Ban on Negro," *Washington Post*, May 17, 1944; "School Jim Crow Suit Dismissed," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 20, 1944.

²⁵ *Davis v. Board of Education*, Amended Complaint for Declaratory Judgement and Injunction, May 26, 1944, Civil Action No. 23591, District Court of the United States for the District of Columbia, National Archives, Kansas City; "D.C. School Jim Crow Suit Revised," *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 3, 1944.

²⁶ *Davis v. Board of Education*, Civil Docket Books.

²⁷ *Davis v. Board of Education*, Answer to Amended Complaint, July 21, 1944, 5; "School Board, in Answer to Suit, Denies Responsibility," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 29, 1944.

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day. Howard University political scientist Ralph Bunche had hired a chauffeur to drive his children to school after moving to Brookland with his family in 1941.²⁸

With the Davis case scheduled for trial in early fall of 1944, the *Afro* reported rumors that the Board might resolve the issue by opening one of the white schools to African American children. This “would be a face-saving measure by the board to prevent the question of unequal educational opportunities for colored children in the District from becoming a matter of public record.”²⁹

Instead, on June 28, 1944, the U.S. Congress allocated \$44,000 to construct a “colored” school in Brookland, and by September, a site directly across the street from the Davis’s home had been selected. A temporary school opened on the site on January 8, 1945, and Davis’s lawsuit was dismissed the following month.³⁰

Acquiring land for the school, 1944-1945

In September 1944, the city began acquiring land, eventually amounting to half of Square 3960, for a school building across the street from the Davis home.³¹ All but one of the nine households required to sell their property for the school were African American. In an interview 40 years later, black homeowner Gladys Scott Roberts observed that “the school should have been put at Thirteenth and Rhode Island Avenue. There was a lot of ground out there....But the people in that area were good fighters. They were the white group, and it seems as if they banded together better than we, and the next thing we heard, in the vicinity of Thirteenth and Jackson Street, they were going to take homes and build a school.”³²

Three property owners apparently sold to the city willingly. The largest, James B. and Eleanor A. Childs, a white couple who had owned and lived at 1325 Jackson since 1930, sold their house (on lot 21) and three undeveloped lots (22-24) at the corner of Fourteenth and Jackson to the District on September 9, 1944, for \$18,200.³³ The owners of 1321 Jackson (lot 19), Mrs. Jennie Lucas and her daughter, Ruth M. Fitzgerald, sold their property on October 24, 1944, to an

²⁸ Frank M. Snowden, Jr., “The History of the Lucy Diggs Slowe School and Its Present Educational Problems,” address to the Board of Education, recorded in the minutes of Sept. 21, 1949, 5, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives.

²⁹ “School Board, in Answer to Suit, Denies Responsibility,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 29, 1944.

³⁰ *Davis v. Board of Education*, Supplemental Answer to Amended Complaint, Nov. 20, 1944; Louis Lautier, “Capital Spotlight,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 13, 1945; “Three Women and Seven Men Named to Afro’s Washington Honor Roll,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 27, 1945.

³¹ Lautier, “Capital Spotlight”; District Court Docket 7 re: Square 3960, National Archives, RG 21, “District Court Docket Books for Admiralty and Condemnation Case Files,” Entry number A1 31.

³² Mara Cherkasky interview with Gladys Scott Roberts (Dupont Circle oral histories), 1984, DC Public Library. Black residents had been advocating as early as 1901 for a school near Rhode Island Avenue and 13th Street (“Colored School Site: Views of Brookland Citizens in Direct Conflict,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 1901).

³³ D.C. Recorder of Deeds database, Document no. 1944027310. Given the neighborhood’s changing demographics, and the increasing institutionalization of the theory that black settlement would cause property values to decline, the Childs may have welcomed this sale.

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undisclosed buyer (the grantee space on the deed was left blank) for \$10,000.³⁴ In addition, George A. and Margaret L. Washington, sold lots 25 and 26 to the city on March 16, 1945, for \$5,365,³⁵ having purchased the house less than four years earlier.³⁶ The other owners refused to sell. After the city initiated condemnation proceedings in September 1944, the owners hired lawyers and took the city to court.

Records of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia³⁷ show that the following individuals participated in the lawsuit:

- Gladys Scott Roberts and Dr. James E. Roberts, owners of 1323 Jackson Street (lot 20). The couple had purchased the house only a few months earlier, were in the process of remodeling it, and not yet moved in. Coincidentally, John P. Davis and Gladys Scott Roberts had been classmates at Dunbar High School, graduating together in 1922.
- Esther V. Dillard, who lived with her mother, Annie Dillard, along with her 10-year-old son and her sister at 3102 Fourteenth Street (Lot 801).
- Percy White, who owned 3100 Fourteenth Street (Lot 800), and lived there with his wife, two children, and brother-in-law.
- Ruth E. Weatherless Sample and Ellis Weatherless, owners of 1346 Irving Street (Lot 2).
- Clarence E. Williams, owner of 1340 Irving Street (Lot 27).
- Marie G. McIlvane, white, who lived with her husband and her brother and his wife and son, at 1322 Irving Street NE (Lot 803).

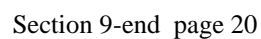
Maps produced by the D.C. Surveyor's Office show the lots that the city wanted to condemn for the new school and school yard.

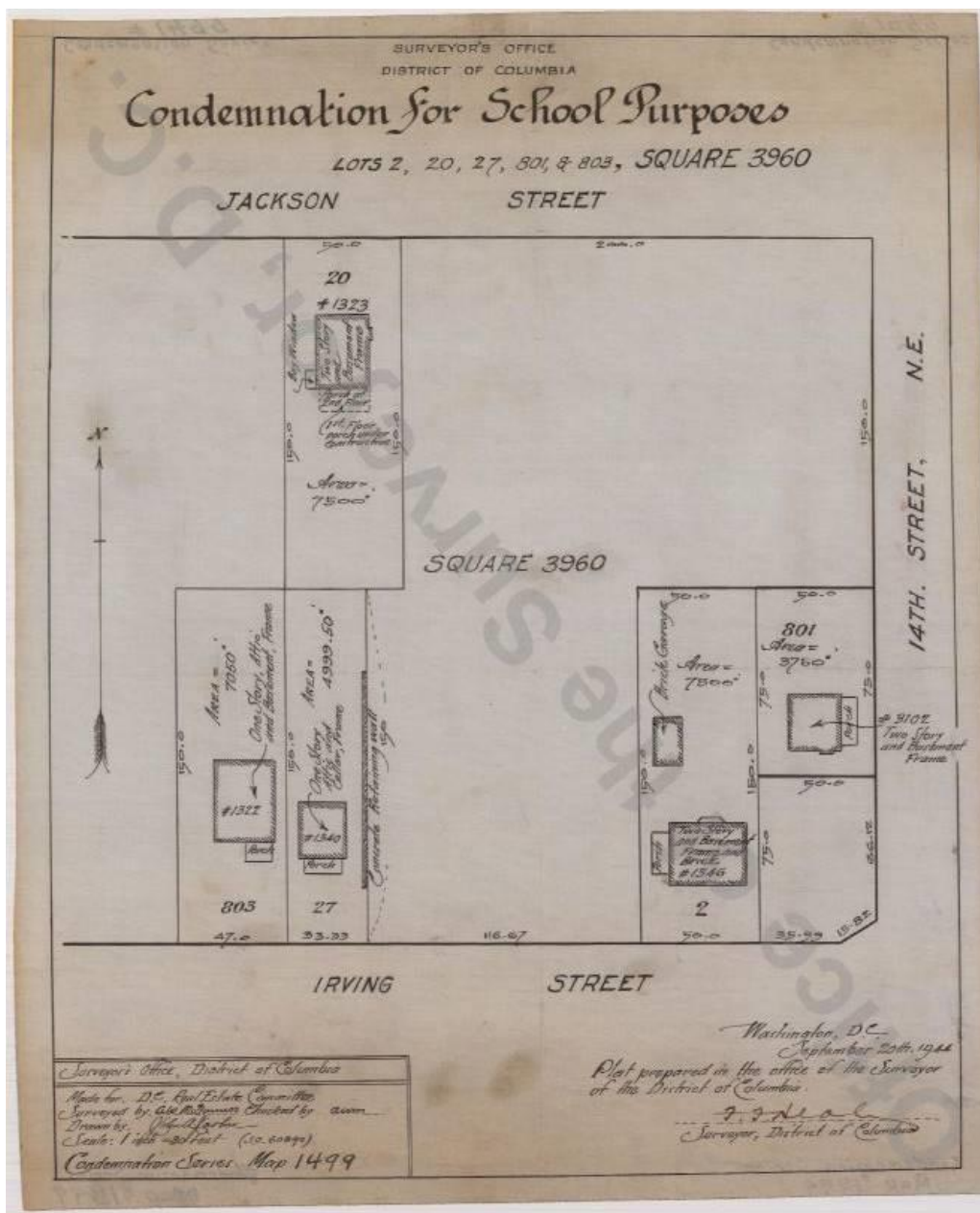
³⁴ D.C. Recorder of Deeds database, Document no. 1944033586. The records appear to be incomplete for this lot; the deed for the Lucas/Fitzgerald purchase is missing.

³⁵ D.C. Recorder of Deeds database, Document no. 1945015455.

³⁶ D.C. Recorder of Deeds database, Document no. 1941025081.

³⁷ District Court Docket 7 re: Square 3960. Additional information on these individuals comes from the U.S. Census, the D.C. Recorder of Deeds, and D.C. city directories.





A jury trial took place February 5-9, 1945, resulting in approval for the condemnations. The city paid Esther V. Dillard \$6,706 for her property on March 27, 1945. The Roberts' request for a new trial was dismissed, and they were paid \$9,679 in May 1945.³⁸ The other payouts were not recorded in the docket.

The original school building would cover only the previously undeveloped land at the corner of 14th and Jackson streets, lots 23 and 24, and the condemned houses remained in place until

³⁸ Gladys Scott Roberts interview. The Roberts subsequently purchased another lot in Brookland and built a house. In the city directory for 1954, Dr. James E. Roberts was listed at 1233 Kearney St NE.

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1950. It was not until February of that year that the residents were ultimately evicted so that the houses could be demolished.³⁹ (See ca. 1948 photo below showing houses that remained next to the school.)

School construction, 1945-1948

Meanwhile, on January 8, 1945, the city opened a two-room school, called Crummell School Annex, in two temporary structures connected to the house at 1325 Jackson Street, the largest of the houses taken by the school board.⁴⁰ One classroom accommodated first- and second-graders; the other, third- and fourth-graders. Lucille Banks, a teacher at Crummell Elementary School in Ivy City, was tapped to become the principal. Two teachers, Genevieve and Laura Nelson, were transferred from Bell Elementary in Southwest. A custodian was assigned to the school as well.⁴¹ Attendance by neighborhood children was not compulsory; they were free to attend one of the other area "colored" schools instead, the Board said.⁴² Seventy-five children matriculated.⁴³

By this time, Congress had appropriated funds for "construction of an eight-room, extensible school building, with four rooms completed and four uncompleted."⁴⁴

Immediately after the temporary school opened, Dr. Martin D. Jenkins, chairman of the Education Committee of the Brookland Civic Association, presented the Board of Education with a petition outlining grievances concerning the lack of a kindergarten or fifth or sixth grades; the multi-grade classes; and the small size of the planned permanent school building.⁴⁵

Assistant Superintendent A. Kiger Savoy and First Assistant Superintendent Wilkinson addressed the grievances in a statement presented at the February 7, 1945, Board meeting. A kindergarten would be opened in the bungalow. Fifth- and sixth-grade classes would be added as soon as more space was available. Likewise, multi-grade classes would be eliminated with the availability of more classroom space and as enrollment warranted. Finally, Savoy and Wilkinson said, Congress had determined the size of the new school, and the Board would ask for permission to increase that size as enrollment increased.⁴⁶

³⁹ Baist real estate map, 1950; "11 Evictions Approved by court to Make Way for Two Playgrounds," clipping from unnamed newspaper, Sumner School Museum and Archives, Feb. 16, 1950.

⁴⁰ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes Jan. 3, 1945 and Feb. 7, 1945; Baist real estate map, 1950; "Steps Taken for Peace in School Strike," *Washington Post*, Jan. 7, 1945.

⁴¹ Board of Education minutes Jan. 3, 1945; Lautier, "Capital Spotlight."

⁴² D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes Feb. 7, 1945, 20.

⁴³ "Three Women and Seven Men Named to Afro's Washington Honor Roll," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 27, 1945.

⁴⁴ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes Feb. 7, 1945, 20.

⁴⁵ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes Feb. 7, 1945, 20.

⁴⁶ D.C. Board of Education meeting minutes Feb. 7, 1945, 20.

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At its February 7, 1945, meeting the Board of Education approved the name Lucy Diggs Slowe for the new school. Slowe (1885-1937) was a long-time D.C. educator who had graduated from Howard University and earned a master's degree from Columbia University before returning to teach in the D.C. Public Schools. When the first junior high for African Americans was established in 1919, she became its principal. In 1922 Slowe was appointed Dean of Women at Howard University, where she also taught English and Education. As it happens, that same year, she and her partner Mary Burrill purchased a house in Brookland at 1256 Kearny Street NE, where they lived together until Slowe's death in 1937.⁴⁷

In the last year before his death, Municipal Architect Nathan Wyeth designed the new Slowe School in 1945, marking the beginning of the school system's transition from the Colonial Revival-style buildings for which Wyeth is known to the International style that characterizes school buildings constructed in the late 1940s and 50s. By 1945, when he completed drawings for the Slowe School, Wyeth had begun incorporating Moderne style elements such as flat roofs, glass block, and windows that extended around building corners. His design for Slowe and other schools completed in 1946-48 represented a further break from the pre-war Colonial Revival period. For example, Slowe is sited parallel rather than perpendicular to the street, with just a narrow planting strip separating the building from the street. Also, the building is three stories high as opposed to the typical two story-height that had been the standard for Colonial Revival-style elementary schools.⁴⁸

Wyeth's successor, Merrell Coe, would oversee the completion of the Slowe School, which ultimately cost \$214,248 to build. When the new school building opened on January 8, 1948, it had five completed classrooms, a capacity of 180 pupils, and an enrollment of 143. The Board of Education designated it as School no. 246 in Division 11. (Divisions 10-13 served African Americans).⁴⁹

Slowe School overcrowded as Brookland's black population grows, 1944-1954

The Slowe School quickly became overcrowded, as Brookland's black population continued to grow and demand increased. In 1940, most of Brookland's African American population had been confined to 12 square blocks extending from Brentwood Road north to Kearney Street between 13th to 15th streets. In the late 1930s, in an effort to prevent black settlement beyond this area, white residents of surrounding blocks had signed agreements barring each other from

⁴⁷ E.H.T. Traceries, Inc., Slowe-Burrill House, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Sept. 2019, at https://dcpreservation-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/D.C.-Inventory-Nomination-Slowe-Burrill-House_Final.pdf.

⁴⁸ Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, Public School Buildings of Washington, D. C., 1862-1960, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Sept. 2001.

⁴⁹ Elsie Carper, "Steps Taken for Peace in School Strike," *Washington Post*, Jan. 7, 1945. DC Public Schools' divisions were numbered first in accordance with their racial designation and secondly, according to their location. The number of divisions grew along with the city's population, e.g. the former Bunker Hill School was within Division 6 in 1904, during the period when it served African Americans ("Grouped about Flag," *Evening Star*, June 14, 1904, 18-19).

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conveying their houses to African Americans, but these agreements expired around the same time that the Supreme Court ruled such covenants unenforceable in 1948. By 1950, with restrictions no longer enforceable, Brookland's African American population increased dramatically; the population of black children between the ages of 3 and 18 years old grew from 3 percent to more than 25 percent of all children in Brookland.⁵⁰ In fact, Noyes Elementary, where Davis had tried to enroll his son, was by 1949 "surrounded on all four sides by Negro homes," according to the Slowe PTA.⁵¹

On September 21, 1949, Frank M. Snowden, chairman of the PTA Education and Recreation Committee, attended the Board's regular meeting and read a statement titled "The History of the Lucy Diggs Slowe School and Its Present Educational Problems." It started by noting that Dr. Ralph Bunche had recently declined to take a position as Assistant Secretary of State, in part, because of the urgent need to address the inadequacy of schools serving African American children in Brookland and in D.C. writ large.⁵²

Snowden's statement noted that the school's location was too close to the street and lacked space for recreation, either outdoors or inside the building. In addition, a two-shift system had been implemented in 1947 to alleviate crowding in the temporary buildings. With some attending in the morning and others at 1:00 to 4:30 pm, "not only did the children fail to receive as much education as other children in Washington, but it was also necessary for those who attended school in the afternoon to go at a time when they were fatigued and to return in the winter months at dark." While parents had been told that the two-shift system would last just a few weeks at the beginning of the school year, the delayed completion of the new school building limited students to half day shifts until January 1948.⁵³

⁵⁰ Mapping Segregation in Washington DC, at <http://mappingsegregationdc.org>; Slowe Elementary School vertical file, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

⁵¹ Snowden, History of the Lucy Diggs Slowe School, 7.

⁵² "As one of his reasons for declining an offer as Assistant Secretary of State, Dr. Ralph Bunche, former United States mediator in Palestine, stated that the educational facilities for Negroes in Washington were inadequate. Dr. Bunche's comment, although referring to the educational system as a whole, made specific reference to the educational situation in the Lucy Diggs Slowe area which is a present source of grave concern to us" (Snowden, History of the Lucy Diggs Slowe School, 5).

⁵³ Snowden, Ibid., 6.

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Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School, ca. 1948. The bungalow that was originally used for the school remained along Jackson Street NE, immediately west (to the right) of the building.⁵⁴



Snowden noted that up to 46 students and four grade levels had occupied a single room during the previous semester, and that "changing population trends indicated even at that time that the situation would be aggravated during the current year." Slowe also had too few teachers.

⁵⁴ This photo was likely taken on January 7, 1948, the date on an accompanying photo that appears to show the same group in front of the building. The houses next to and behind the school were demolished in 1950 for the creation of a playground west of the building, replacing the house to the right of the school in this photo. The school's 1967 addition would replace this playground, and as of 2020 there was a larger playground south of building. (Star Collection, DC Public Library [Washington Post photo], Baist's Real Estate Survey of Washington, D.C., 1950; "11 Evictions Approved by Court to Make Way for Two Playgrounds," clipping from unnamed newspaper, Sumner School Museum and Archives, Feb. 16, 1950).

Although the Slowe School was newer than three of the four nearby white schools, a recent report for Congress had assigned it the lowest grade among them for "educational adequacy."⁵⁵

On September 26, a group of parents distributed circulars addressing fire hazards at Slowe because of the overcrowding, which had led teachers to stuff too many desks into the classrooms. That afternoon, most of the school's 228 pupils protested by failing to return from lunch. The next day, Superintendent Hobart M. Corning agreed to meet with representatives of the Slowe PTA, provided children returned to class. While PTA representatives reportedly were pleased by the "interest and spirit of cooperation shown by the [school] officials," Snowden wrote to the editor of the *Evening Star* a week later that the school remained "educationally unsound."⁵⁶

In the fall of 1950, with enrollment at 244, the Board of Education again tried to limit some students to part-time instruction until a second floor could be completed.⁵⁷ Parents immediately called a one-day strike, keeping their children out of class on October 20.⁵⁸ On November 4, a letter to the editor of the *Evening Star* complained that "Slowe Elementary School has been in a state of incompleteness ever since it was built," and that "the site for the proposed playground has been cleared for many months, but no effort has been made to prepare the ground for use. Children attending Slowe are compelled to play in a blocked-off street at recess." The writer concluded: "Must we allow this nonsensical custom of segregation to deny our children adequate educational facilities while enrollment for schools of the other race is hardly sufficient for maintenance?"⁵⁹

The second floor finally opened in April 1951, adding five classrooms plus a multi-purpose room to the school and doubling capacity to 360.⁶⁰ However the playground was still not ready. That summer, black Brookland residents accused the D.C. Recreation Board of neglect for not providing playgrounds for their children. By this time more than 2,000 African American families were living in the neighborhood, yet all three Brookland playgrounds were open to white children only. Snowden, now the leader for six neighborhood groups that had united to approach the Recreation Board, called the Slowe playground "an uncultivated goat hill." The

⁵⁵ Known as the Strayer report, this was a 980-page study authored by a Columbia University Teachers College professor emeritus with the help of 22 researchers. The report was highly critical of D.C.'s public schools, and especially the lack of resources provided to the city's black schools (George D. Strayer, *Report of a Survey of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia*, Subcommittees on the District of Columbia Appropriations, Senate and House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, 1949).

⁵⁶ "Slowe School Pupils Stay at Home After Fire Hazard Charge," *Evening Star*, Sept. 24, 1949; "Slowe School Parents Get Report Tonight on Parley for Changes," *Evening Star*, Sept. 27, 1949; Frank M. Snowden, "A Good School Is More than a Fine Interior," letter to editor, *Evening Star*, Oct. 5, 1949.

⁵⁷ "Part-time Class Is Approved for Crowded Slowe School," *Evening Star*, Oct. 19, 1950.

⁵⁸ "Adjustment of Hours Brings First-Graders Back to Slowe School," *Evening Star*, Oct. 24, 1950; "Slowe School Strike Called Off Except for Part-time First Grade," *Evening Star*, Oct. 23, 1950; Board of Education minutes, Nov. 1, 1950, 14-15.

⁵⁹ O.V. Maedel, "Slowe School Overcrowding," letter to the editor, *Evening Star*, Nov. 4, 1950.

⁶⁰ Slowe Elementary School vertical file, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

Board of Education was preparing to let a \$40,000 contract to have a half-acre area west of Slowe developed as a playground, but it would be suitable for small children only.⁶¹

In March 1952, Slowe School appeared in the news again, after the Reverend Smallwood Williams agreed to end his one-man strike against the dual school system – he had attempted to enroll his son in the school closest to his home, whites-only Wheatley Elementary – but finally enrolled him at Slowe, more than two miles from their home in Trinidad.⁶² Williams subsequently sued the school system.⁶³

By the fall of 1952, African Americans made up more than 52 percent of D.C. public school students, and overcrowding at Slowe remained an issue. That October, a multipurpose room was converted to a classroom.⁶⁴

In June 1953, despite opposition from white residents, the school system moved Noyes Elementary to the colored division to avert part-time classes at Slowe.⁶⁵ Overcrowding continued nonetheless, and that December, Slowe parent Julius Hobson addressed the Board of Education on overcrowding at both Slowe and Noyes schools.⁶⁶ The following year, overcrowding at Slowe was finally resolved, for the time being, by the legal desegregation of public schools. In May 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Bolling v. Sharpe*, D.C.'s companion to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that the operation of racially segregated public schools was unconstitutional. Black students were now admitted to Brookland Elementary School at 10th and Monroe streets NE, just six blocks from Slowe. In the fall of 1954, 42 black children attended Brookland, joining 180 white students.⁶⁷

Aftermath of legal desegregation, 1954-1967

The Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Bolling v. Sharpe* was issued in the same decade that D.C. became a majority black city, and contributed to white abandonment of the public schools, which had begun two decades earlier but now accelerated.⁶⁸ As described in the Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*, the process of integration was also undermined by the city's status as a federal district controlled by Congress,

⁶¹ "Negro Residents in Brookland Ask Playground," *Evening Star*, June 25, 1951.

⁶² The Williams family lived at 1328 Montello Road NE. "Strike Against School Ended by Pastor Who Accepts New Transfer," *Evening Star*, March 9, 1952.

⁶³ "Colored Pastor Sues School Officials to Enroll Son in Wheatley," *Evening Star*, June 14, 1952.

⁶⁴ "Maury Elementary Sets Up Two More Part-time Classes," *Evening Star*, Oct. 8, 1952.

⁶⁵ "Washington DC's Segregated Public School System," Prologue DC, at <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=b7003c00646d49f581a39cadd17e5d99>.

⁶⁶ Slowe Elementary School, card file, Sumner Museum and Archives.

⁶⁷ Slowe Elementary School vertical file, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

⁶⁸ In 1954-57, when approximately 104,000 students were enrolled in the DC Public Schools, the system lost about 4,000 white students and gained about 4,000 black students per year (Gary Orfield & Jongyeon Ee, "Our Segregated Capital: An Increasingly Diverse City with Racially Polarized Schools," The Civil Rights Project, UCLA, Feb. 2017, 23, at https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/our-segregated-capital-an-increasingly-diverse-city-with-racially-polarized-schools/POSTVERSION_DC_020117.pdf).

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where southern segregationists on the House District Committee held hearings in 1956 that highlighted black criminality and blamed integration for declining test scores. Funding for the schools was also inadequate, many schools remained overcrowded, and residential segregation largely determined schools' racial makeup.⁶⁹ As Brookland's black population increased and its white population declined in the 1950s, the Slowe student body remained almost entirely black, with white enrollment ranging between zero and 11 students over the next decade.

In 1958, Carl Hansen became Superintendent of the D.C. schools, and initiated a track system that separated students based on their perceived ability to learn, with identification of slow learners beginning in the first grade. Proposed as a remedy for problems that were said to be associated with integration, the track system perpetuated the separation of students based on factors that had little to do with ability and more do to with their racial identity and socioeconomic background. The impact of the track system on black students, combined with continued racial and funding disparities between schools that served white and black students, led former Slowe parent Julius Hobson to win a lawsuit against the school system in 1967. The *Hobson v. Hansen* decision ended the track system and mandated that DCPS take active steps toward equalizing education.⁷⁰ It was in this same year that a major addition to the Slowe School was completed, boosting the school's capacity and adding a library, special classrooms for individualized instruction, a teachers' room, and a room for textbook storage, among other things.⁷¹

1967 - present

The city's rising black population continued to outpace the construction of new schools in the late 1960s. In addition, a massive urban renewal project in Southwest D.C. displaced 23,000 people and had ripple effects in neighborhoods throughout the city, as residents scrambled to find new homes and new schools for their children. In 1967, the Slowe School's enrollment increased to almost 200 students beyond its capacity, and it remained overcrowded in the ensuing years. White enrollment never rose above 15.⁷²

The city's black population peaked in the early 1970s at around 71%, but fell as D.C.'s overall population declined significantly between 1970 and 2000. After charter schools began to proliferate in the late 1990s, Slowe eventually closed in 2009. The building has since housed Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy Public Charter School.⁷³

Conclusion

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23-34.

⁷⁰ Asch and Musgrove, 333-34, 339-41.

⁷¹ Slowe School vertical file, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

⁷² Slowe School vertical file, Sumner School Museum and Archives.

⁷³ Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy began sharing space at Slowe in 2007 ("Schools Moving to New Locations This Fall," *Washington Post*, Aug. 23, 2007).

Lucy Diggs Slowe School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

The unique history of the Lucy Diggs Slowe School, built in response to a lawsuit against the D.C. Public Schools across the street from the plaintiff's house, make it a strong example of properties that may be eligible for historic designation under the registration requirements outlined in the Multiple Property Document *20th Century African American Civil Rights Movement in Washington, D.C., 1912-1974*. The building represents the outcome of a legal suit over racially segregated and unequal schools, and the continued demand by black citizens for high-quality schools long after the school first opened in 1948. When the legal desegregation of public schools in 1954 failed to significantly improve black education in D.C., a lawsuit brought by a former Slowe parent led to the 1967 *Hobson v. Hansen* ruling, which required the school system to take more active steps toward equalizing and desegregating D.C. schools.

While many sites significant to the history of civil rights organizing in D.C. are likely to lack the physical integrity that may be required for designation, the Slowe School remains in fine and relatively intact condition, and stands in a residential neighborhood that looks much the same as it did during the period of significance for this nomination. As such, it also qualifies for designation under the Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*.

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Lucy Diggs Slowe School

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

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Lucy Diggs Slowe School

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
 - ☐ Other State agency
 - ☐ Federal agency
 - ☐ Local government
 - ☐ University
 - ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.05

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.929440 | Longitude: -76.986847 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary includes the northern half of Lot number 0806 in the square numbered three thousand nine hundred and sixty (3960). The lot is bounded to the north by Jackson Street NE, 14th Street NE to the east, a school playground to the south and residential homes to the west.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Lot 0806 represents the property's known historic and current legal description as delineated in the land records of the District of Columbia. The school yard south of the building is excluded. During the period of significance, the school's play area was located north of the building where the addition was built in 1967.

11. Form Prepared By

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date: December 18, 2020

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telephone: (443) 708-9473
date: December 18, 2020

Additional Documentation

Boundary map - [see Slowe Boundary Map.pdf]

USGS map - [see Slowe USGS.pdf]

Photo Log

Name of Property: Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School
City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.
County: n/a State: District of Columbia
Photographer: Nakita Reed, Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 14, 2020

Photo 1 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0001
View of the East facade looking northwest.

Photo 2 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0002
View of the East facade looking west.

Photo 3 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0003
View of the North facade (Main entry) looking south.

Photo 4 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0004
View of the North facade looking southeast.

Photo 5 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0005
View of the North facade looking west.

Photo 6 of 6: DC_Lucy Slowe Elementary School_0006
View of the South facade looking north.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT SITE**

LUCY DIGGS SLOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Photo 1: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0001.tif
View of the East facade looking northwest
February 14, 2020

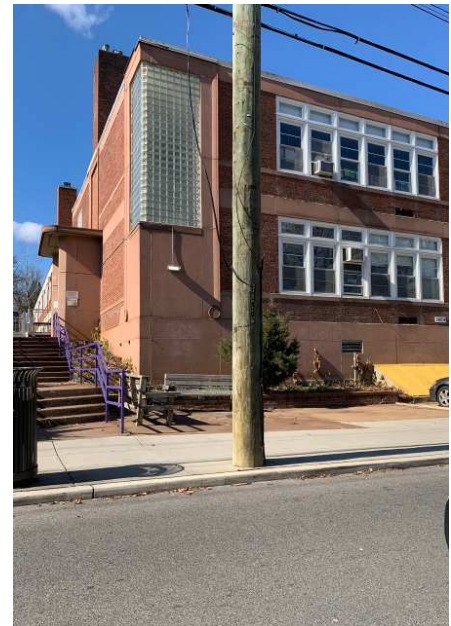


Photo 2: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0002.tif
View of the East facade looking west
February 14, 2020



Photo 3: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0003.tif
View of the North facade (Main entry) looking south
February 14, 2020

**20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT SITE**

LUCY DIGGS SLOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Photo 4: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0004.tif
View of the North facade looking southeast
February 14, 2020



Photo 5: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0005.tif
View of the northeast corner of the building looking west
June 29, 2020

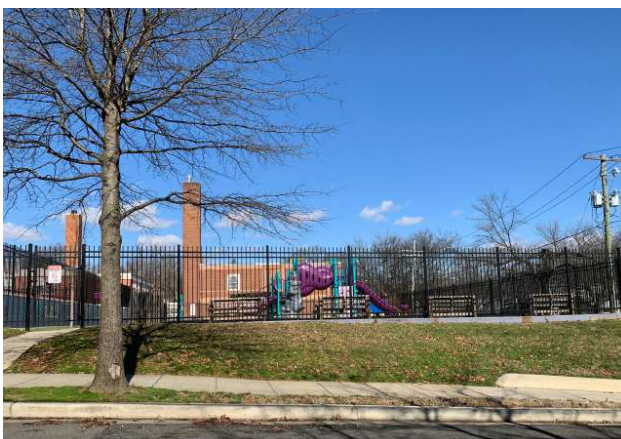


Photo 6: DC_Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School_0006.tif
View of the South facade looking north
February 14, 2020

USGS MAPPING OF
20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT SITE

LUCY DIGGS SLOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



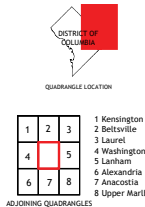
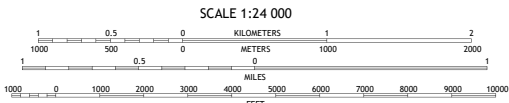
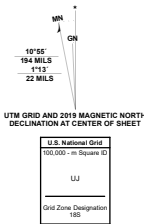
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



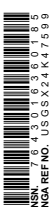
WASHINGTON EAST QUADRANGLE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA - MARYLAND
7.5-MINUTE SERIES



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS84), Projection and
1 000-meter grid/Universal Transverse Mercator, Zone 18S
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Names.....U.S. Census Bureau, 2016
Hydrography.....National Hydrography Dataset, 2001
Contours.....National Elevation Dataset, 2013 - 2015
Boundaries.....Multiple sources; see metadata file 2017 - 2018
Wetlands.....FWS National Wetlands Inventory 1981 - 2013

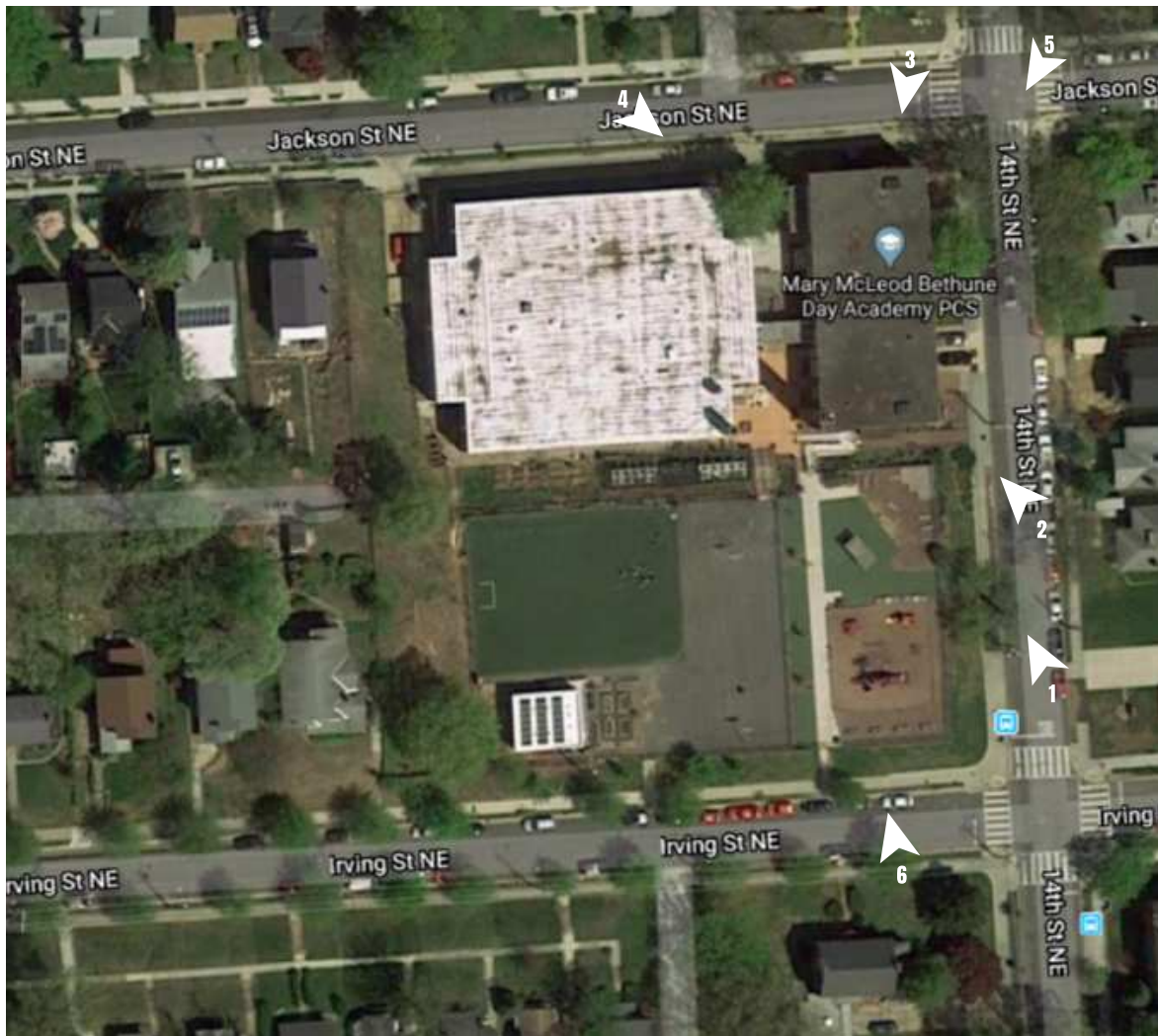


WASHINGTON EAST, DC, MD
2019



**20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT SITE**

LUCY DIGGS SLOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Photograph Key Map (Outside Photos Only)

**20TH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT SITE**

LUCY DIGGS SLOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
BOUNDARY MAP

