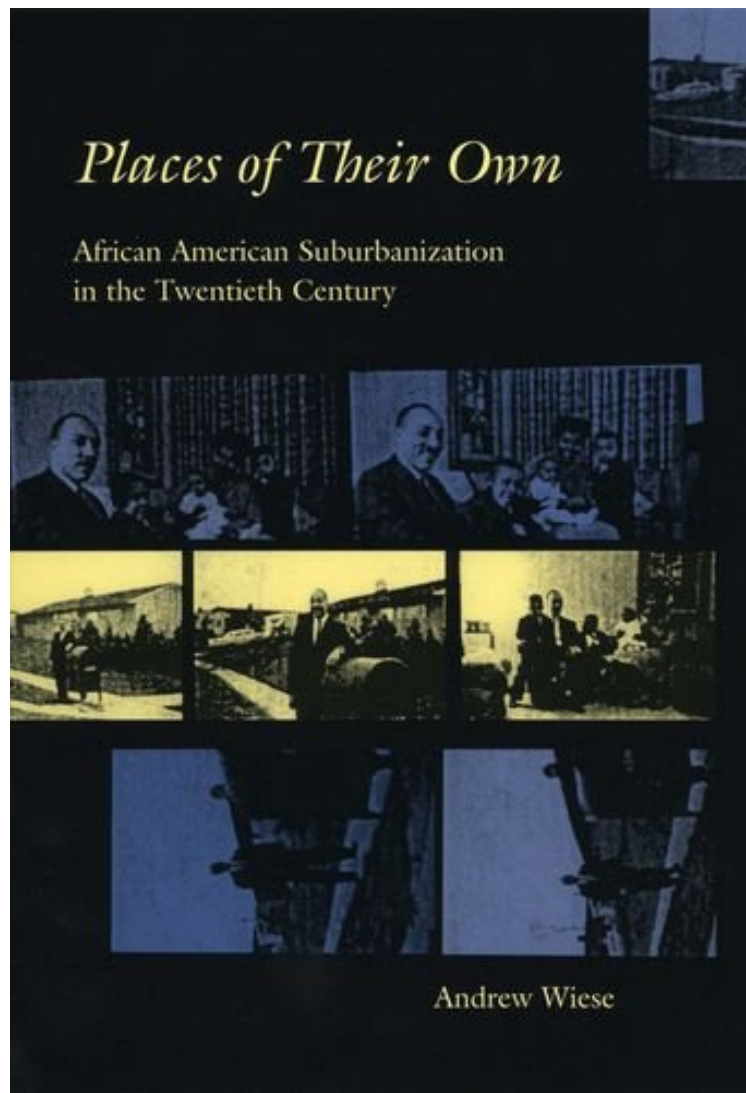


(Download) Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Historical Studies of Urban America)

Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Historical Studies of Urban America)

Andrew Wiese

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Andrew Wiese : Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Historical Studies of Urban America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Historical Studies of Urban America):

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...By Sharon Karpinski This book is the definitive history of twentieth century idiosyncratic, "accidental" African-American suburbs. It's required reading for architectural historians of that era. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. good read By Randy Holmes Nothing, good read 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A must read! By S. E. Salz Places of Their Own is certain to find Andrew Wiese a "place of his own" within the annals of American History. Wiese makes history come to life through his use of an abundance of sources combined with his command of the English language. Rarely does one find an historical text that flows so beautifully. Wiese spends over a decade immersing himself in the lives of African Americans who have carved their own place within America's suburbia. Through his in-depth research, Wiese reveals a fresh look at the Great Migration and its role within black suburbanization. Places of Their Own makes connections between the everyday and the larger social processes at work. (Charles Tilly would be proud!) He writes, "By treating suburban homes and neighborhoods as arenas of struggle, this book links African American social and political history through the everyday politics of housing." Although many historians contend that the "straight jacket of race" kept blacks in their place throughout the suburbanization process, Wiese argues that African Americans were able to create their own spaces on their own terms- in spite of the constraints of racism that infiltrated their lives. An excerpt from an interview with Jean Moore illustrates this point. "But this house was our choice. A home was our goal. We had no intention of mortgaging our soul." Throughout his book, Wiese supports his argument through a variety of angles and effectively constructs a clear picture of how black suburbanization played out both at the national and the local levels. Through the use of chronology he tells the story and divides the book into three separate sections. The first section deals with the years from 1900-1940 also known as the Great Migration. Part two looks at the 1940s and 1950s-a period of transition. And the final section, 1960s and 1970s, examines the interplay between the civil rights movement and African American suburbanization. Wiese utilizes an amazing array of sources to tease out his argument which include but are not limited to the following: government documents, public records, oral histories, photographs-many of which are taken by himself, obituaries, memoirs, scrapbooks, divorce cases, a variety of social science journals, biographies, supreme court cases, plays, song lyrics, poetry, tables, maps, city directories, pictures of newspaper and magazine advertisements, handbill advertisements, websites, dissertations, census records, phone interviews, case studies, Federal Writers Project, notes from club meetings, deed records, membership rosters, Papers of the NAACP, a letter to President Eisenhower, press releases, congressional hearing notes, Federal Housing Reports, magazines, and editorials. The geographical breadth of the sources is also impressive. His research spans North America as far north as Toronto and into the belly of the south, places like Alabama and Louisiana. Other destinations of interest include: Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Kentucky, North Carolina, Los Angeles, Dallas, Virginia, Kentucky and New York. Wiese effectively braids public policy, popular culture and individual personal experiences to create a glimpse into the African American experience. As witnessed in his example of the FHA's directive in their Underwriting Manual, "racial intermingling in housing is undesirable per se and leads to a lowering of value." The impact of this policy is seen through Jim and Ann Braithwaite's attempt to buy a home in Philadelphia as late as 1957. In their quest to do so, they were met with comments like, "You're colored aren't you? I can't do anything for you." Additionally, he draws from popular culture to reinforce his assertions.; such as the famous play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Connecting Jackie Robinson's experience to the broader picture was another way in which he was able to weave the larger social processes together with everyday life. Wiese masterfully illustrates many of his points through the use of the Black Press. He utilizes magazines like *Ebony* and *Look*, newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Baltimore Afro-African* to name just a few. He also seeks out many community newspapers in addition to mainstay sources like the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. One of the more creative pieces of research comes from the obituary section of several local newspapers. Wiese was able to determine hometowns of individuals by working backwards and using community newspapers as a source. His use of African American literature and song also serve to strengthen his assertions. Wiese breathes life into the African American experience through his careful selection of prose like, "smoke belching mills" (33), historical images like the advertisements for building lots on Long Island (148), the photograph of Ted Wheeler standing near the spot where a neighbor burned a cross in his yard, (239) and Norman Rockwell's painting, "New Kids", (210), which illuminates the uncertainty of whites and blacks sharing the same space. One of the greatest strengths of the book, in addition to the in-depth research is Wiese's close connection to the topic. Not only does he collect and sift through the necessary data, he goes out into the field and takes many of his own photographs in addition to conducting numerous oral histories. It is one thing to write about history, it is yet another to immerse oneself within a topic and get as close as one possibly can without going back in time. Wiese manages to do just that and to whittle it down to a mere 411 pages.

On Melbenan Drive just west of Atlanta, sunlight falls onto a long row of well-kept lawns. Two dozen homes line the street; behind them wooden decks and living-room windows open onto vast woodland properties. Residents returning from their jobs steer SUVs into long driveways and emerge from their automobiles. They walk to the front doors of their houses past sculptured bushes and flowers in bloom. For most people, this cozy image of suburbia does not immediately evoke images of African Americans. But as this pioneering work demonstrates, the suburbs have

provided a home to black residents in increasing numbers for the past hundred years—in the last two decades alone, the numbers have nearly doubled to just under twelve million. *Places of Their Own* begins a hundred years ago, painting an austere portrait of the conditions that early black residents found in isolated, poor suburbs. Andrew Wiese insists, however, that they moved there by choice, withstanding racism and poverty through efforts to shape the landscape to their own needs. Turning then to the 1950s, Wiese illuminates key differences between black suburbanization in the North and South. He considers how African Americans in the South bargained for separate areas where they could develop their own neighborhoods, while many of their northern counterparts transgressed racial boundaries, settling in historically white communities. Ultimately, Wiese explores how the civil rights movement emboldened black families to purchase homes in the suburbs with increased vigor, and how the passage of civil rights legislation helped pave the way for today's black middle class. Tracing the precise contours of black migration to the suburbs over the course of the whole last century and across the entire United States, *Places of Their Own* will be a foundational book for anyone interested in the African American experience or the role of race and class in the making of America's suburbs. Winner of the 2005 John G. Cawelti Book Award from the American Culture Association. Winner of the 2005 Award for Best Book in North American Urban History from the Urban History Association.

"Numerous authors have detailed the phenomenon of black suburbanization in the 20th century surrounding specific U.S. cities, but Wiese is one of the few to consider the overall trend, particularly comparing migration in the North and the South. Wiese argues that instead of being forced from the cities, blacks moved into the suburbs by choice in order to build their own communities. His discussion of Southern suburbanization is especially interesting, partly because earlier studies have focused on Northern cities and partly because Wiese sees suburbanization as an extension of the Civil Rights Movement's impetus toward black empowerment.... Wiese does a good job of covering his topic from both black and white perspectives. A useful addition to the literature of black suburbanization."