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

Andrew Wiese

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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.

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