

BLACKWELL



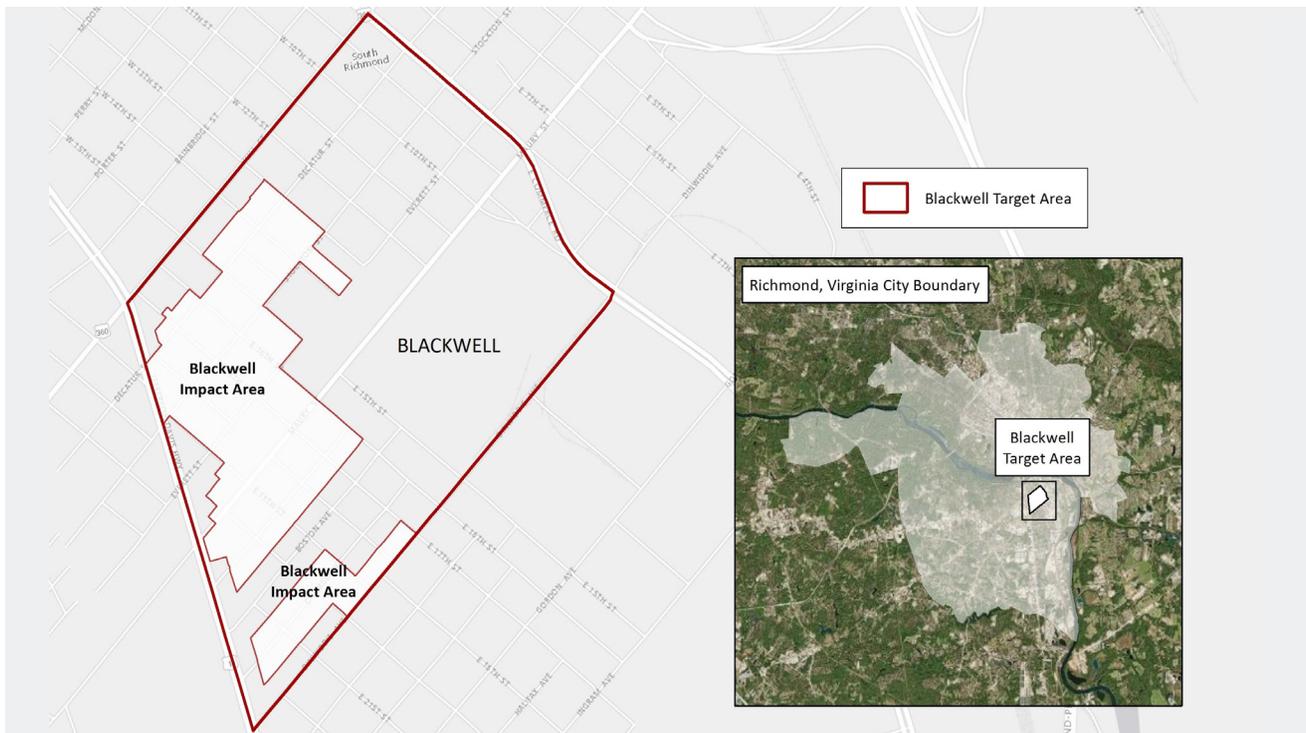
Neighborhoods in Bloom Retrospective

NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

Approximately one mile south of downtown Richmond is the Neighborhoods in Bloom (NiB) target area of Blackwell. Most of the present-day neighborhood was a part of the old Town of Manchester, established in 1769. It was not until the construction of a new school in 1952—named after African American community leader, school principal and teacher James H. Blackwell – that the surrounding neighborhood known by the same name was formally established.

The area that is now Blackwell was a community formed by Revolutionary War and Civil War manufacturing booms. Affordable housing provided factory workers with living quarters during these industrial expansions. By 1874, the area was home to many African American businesses. The workers and merchants who lived there fostered a strong sense of community. Blackwell’s assorted architecture stems from its dotted history – a varied past of housing construction, demolition and neighborhood renewal.

Map 1: Neighborhoods in Bloom Impact and Target Areas – Blackwell



By the 1960s, Blackwell was experiencing accelerated population loss, despite the growth occurring in nearby neighborhoods. As a result, Blackwell was targeted by the City for redevelopment from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. These revitalization efforts were part of a national, federally funded public housing initiative focused on rehabilitating the housing stock through strict code enforcement, demolition of dilapidated structures, and the construction of new public housing units.¹ This approach, which was experimental at the time, ultimately undermined the neighborhood's stability and intensified its deterioration.

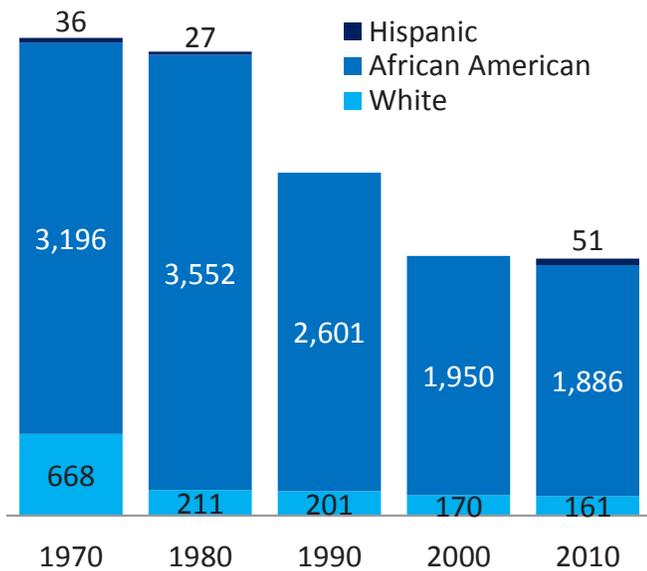
Two years before NiB began in 1999, the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) was awarded \$26.9 million from the U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to improve building integrity and physical appearance, introduce management improvements, and develop community services in Blackwell. This project was part of HUD's HOPE VI initiative to revitalize distressed public housing, which was then rolled into the NiB efforts in Blackwell.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE

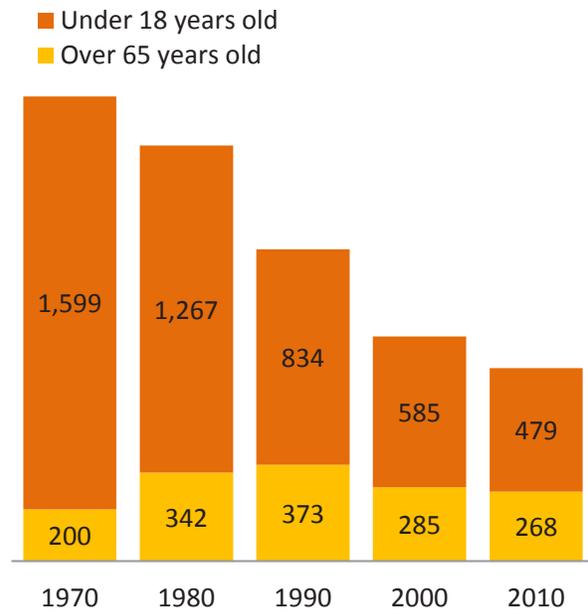
Total population in the census tract surrounding Blackwell decreased by 1,786 residents from 1970 to 2010 (3,864 residents in 1970 compared to 2,078 residents in 2010). The number of African American residents remained relatively consistent from 1970 to 1980, while the number of white residents decreased by half over that time period. As of 2010, 89.9 percent

Figure 1: Racial Composition in Blackwell's Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Note: Sample only includes individuals who self-identify as one race.
Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

Figure 2: Age Composition in Blackwell's Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

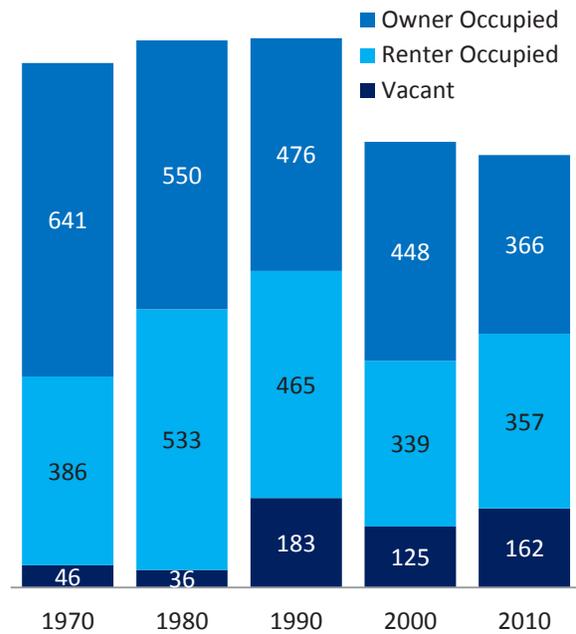
Note: When measuring the investment and impact of NiB in the early 2000s, the City and external researchers defined the Blackwell measurement area as the census tract that contained the Blackwell target area. This profile also uses that definition, and as such, the measurement area includes the following 2010 census tract: 51760060200.



of residents were African American, 7.7 percent were white and 2.4 percent were Hispanic (see Figure 1). The percentage of residents under 18 decreased from 41.4 percent in 1970 to 23.1 percent in 2010 and the percentage over 65 decreased from 13.3 percent in 1990 to 12.9 percent in 2010, (see Figure 2). From 1980 to 2010, there have been approximately equal numbers of owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing units in the census tract containing Blackwell (see Figure 3). Over this time period, the homeownership rate was highest in 1970 at 59.7 percent. Decennial census data indicate that the homeownership rate has fallen more recently, with 41.4 percent of occupants owning their homes in 2010.

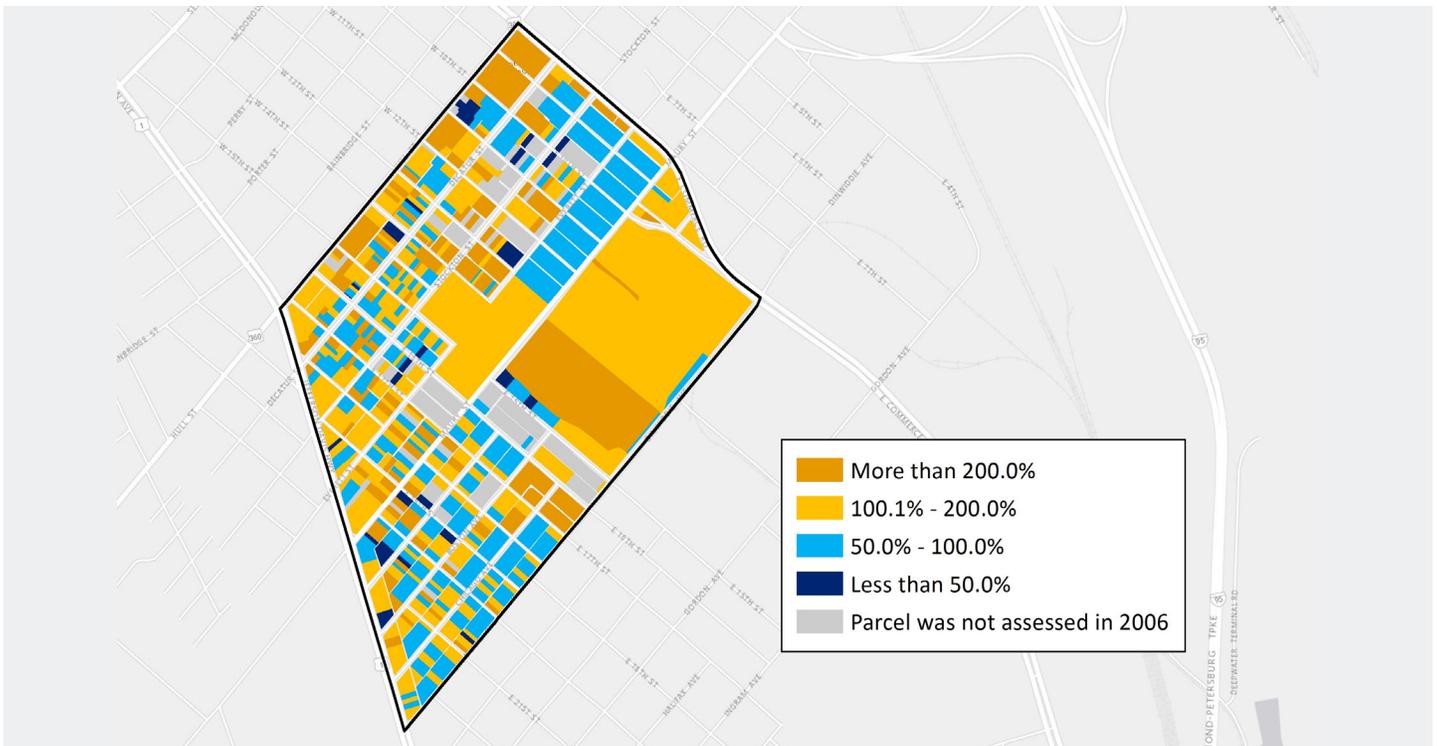
Of the 852 Blackwell residential land parcels that were assessed both in FY2006 — immediately following the official end of the NiB program — and in FY2016, 588 (69.0 percent) experienced an increase in nominal assessment value (see Map 2). Of these, 331 parcels (38.8 percent) more than doubled their 2006 assessed value by 2016. Three parcels (0.4 percent) experienced no change in nominal assessment value over the 10 year time period and 260 parcels (30.5 percent) had a lower nominal dollar value in FY2016 than in FY2006.

Figure 3: Housing Occupancy in Blackwell’s Surrounding Census Tract, 1970-2010



Source: GeoLytics, Neighborhood Change Database (1970-2010).

Map 2: 2016 Assessment Value as a Percent of 2006 Assessment Value in Blackwell



Source: City of Richmond Assessment Data, FY2006-FY2016.

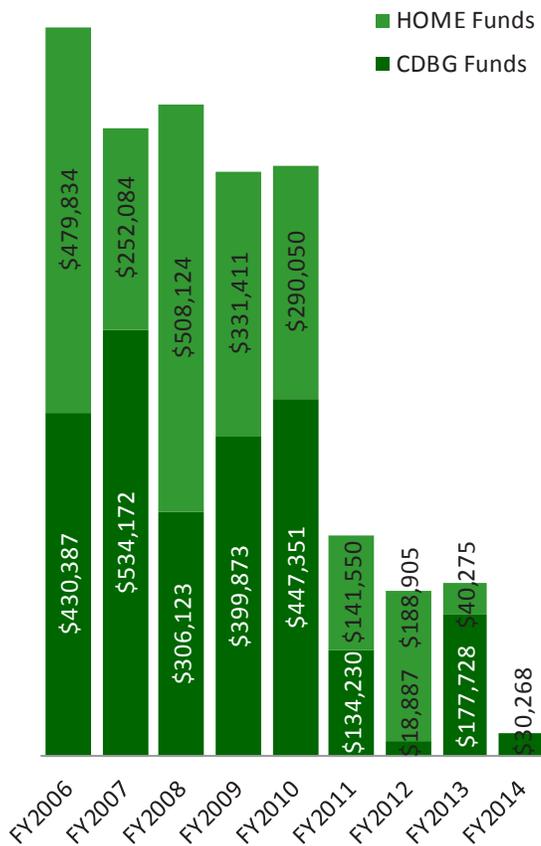


INVESTMENT AFTER NEIGHBORHOODS IN BLOOM

Public Investment

In the years since the end of the NiB program, the City has continued to direct Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funding to Blackwell. Approximately 13.2 percent of the City’s CDBG and HOME funding from FY2006 to FY2014 was spent on Blackwell revitalization efforts. Post-NiB local government investment in Blackwell was highest in FY2006 with a total of approximately \$910,221 and lowest in FY2014 with a total of approximately \$30,268 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Local Government Investment in Blackwell (FY2006-FY2014)



Source: City of Richmond CAPER Reports, FY2006-FY2014.

Nonprofit Investment

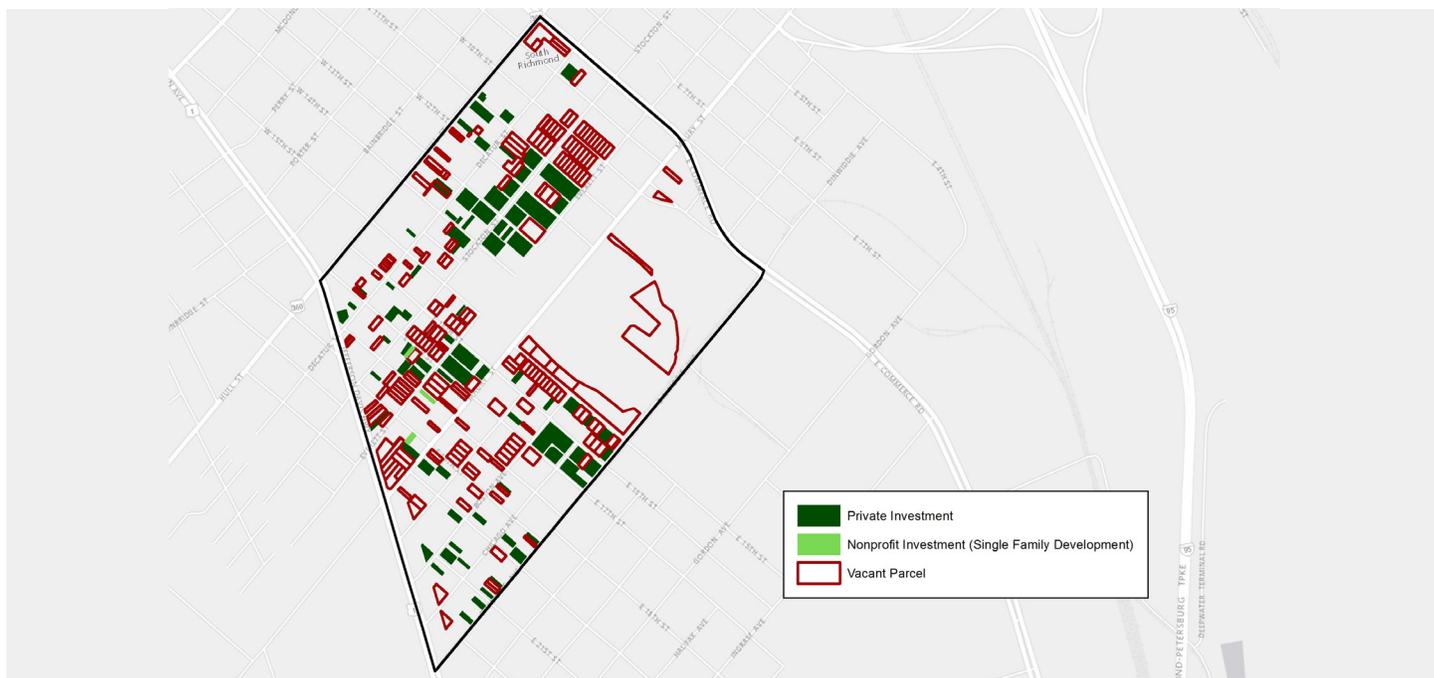
Numerous nonprofit organizations operated in Blackwell during the original NiB program, including RRHA, Housing Opportunities Made Equal (H.O.M.E.) and Southside Community Development and Housing Corporation (SCDHC). These organizations invested in Blackwell variously through the construction of new housing units, the rehabilitation of existing units and the provision of housing counseling services. In total, nonprofit development groups invested an estimated \$415,000 in three Blackwell properties from 2006 to 2015 (see Map 3), and H.O.M.E. invested approximately \$663,413 in down payment assistance for 67 Blackwell homeowners.

As of 2016, 23.5 percent of the parcels in the Blackwell NiB target area were vacant, which is 11.2 percentage points higher than the overall vacancy rate in the city (see Map 3).² The 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates indicate that 56.6 percent of residents in the census tract containing the Blackwell target area are housing-cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs.³ This figure is 10.7 percentage points above the 45.9 percent of housing cost-burdened residents in the City as a whole.

According to the 2015 ACS 5-year estimates, the census tract that contains the Blackwell target area has a median family income of \$40,074 and a poverty rate of 33.2 percent. By comparison, the City has a median family income of \$50,307 and a poverty rate of 19.3 percent. Given Blackwell’s relatively high poverty rate and low median family income, opportunities may remain for local government, nonprofit and private investment to help improve neighborhood conditions in Blackwell.



Map 3: Nonprofit Investment and Vacant Parcels in Blackwell (FY2006-FY2015)



Note: This map quantifies investment based on property sales and renovations, and thus may underestimate reinvestment.
 Source: City of Richmond Property Sale Data, Building Permit Data and Land Use Data, FY2006-FY2015.

CONTINUING TO BLOOM: BLACKWELL TODAY

The HOPE VI grant and NiB helped Blackwell experience a steady stream of revitalization projects throughout the early 2000s, including the HOPE VI-funded replacement of public housing units with mixed-income properties for rental and ownership and the construction of the Blackwell Community Center.

After decades of revitalization efforts that largely displaced low-income residents and offered few opportunities for them to return to Blackwell, community members spoke out. Activists groups such as the Residents of Public Housing in Richmond Against

Mass Eviction (RePHRAME), which formed in 2008, began to demand that the city implement a one-to-one ratio of demolished and constructed affordable housing units. However, as of 2017, the City has yet to formally adopt such a policy.

Cover photo by Emily Wavering

Additional Sources: [City of Richmond Planning and Development Review, "Blackwell Neighborhood Revitalization Plan," \(1996\).](#)
["RRHA Breaks Ground on 188 New Homes in the Hope VI Blackwell Community," PRNewswire \(April 23, 2004\).](#)

1 Amy L. Howard and Thad Williamson, "Reframing public housing in Richmond, Virginia: Segregation, resident resistance and the future of redevelopment," *Cities* 57: 33-39 (September 2016).

2 The American Community Survey 2015 5-Year Estimates for the City indicate a vacancy rate of 12.3 percent.

3 The share of the population that is housing-cost burdened may be a function of housing supply, housing prices, household incomes and personal preferences.

