

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NOV 6 1987

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Propertyhistoric name Langston Terrace Dwellingsother names/site number N/A**2. Location**street & number Parcel 160, Lots 35, 36, 37, and 38☐ not for publication N/Acity, town Washington☐ vicinity N/Astate District of Columbia code DC county N/Acode 001 zip code 20002**3. Classification**

Ownership of Property

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>15</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>20</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/ANumber of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Carol B. Thompson
Signature of certifying official D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer9 September 1987
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National
Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.☐ other, (explain:)Carol O. Shull11-12-87

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ multiple dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

International Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Concrete slab and tar

other Terra-cotta

Cast concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Langston Terrace Dwellings are located on thirteen gently sloping acres overlooking the Anacostia River in Northeast Washington, D.C. The site extends north from Benning Road to H Street and encompasses sections of 21st and 24th Streets.

The complex is composed of attached 2-, 3- and 4-story masonry dwelling units which form a total of 14 separate housing blocks. The irregularly massed blocks are arranged about a large rectangular common space located in the center of the site. On both the east and the west sides of the site are a second and third peripheral row of housing blocks. These blocks are sited parallel to an adjacent residential area on the west and public school and park land to the east. The housing blocks are massed to conform to site gradation which ranges from 55 to 95 feet above sea level.

A one-way circuit route provides access through the complex with paved walkways leading to individual units. The 14 blocks, which contain a total of 274 individual rowhouse and apartment units, cover approximately 20% of the entire site area, providing ample greenspace.

All buildings are of fire-resistant reinforced concrete sheathed in two shades of common bond laid brick with flat roofs of varying height. The units are well lit with single paned sliding aluminum frame windows which replace the original metal casements. Entry doors of unadorned smooth steel replace the original wood units which had three vertical square lights and heavy brass hardware. Most exterior entrances retain their original wooden screen doors. Entryways on row houses and apartment blocks have surrounds, overhanging canopies, divider panels and related trim which are composed of pale red cast concrete. Segmental terra-cotta capping defines the horizontal roof edges. Tubular iron railing, in linear segments and a distinctive circular motif, adorns entry and walkway areas.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning and Development

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage - Black

Social History

Art

Period of Significance

1935 - 1938

Significant Dates

1938

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Robinson, Hilyard Robert, FAIA

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The significance of Langston Terrace derives from its architectural quality, historical importance and the prominence of its architect in the specialized field of housing design.

Langston is a well-preserved example of the nation's first group of federally initiated, funded and supervised peacetime housing projects for limited-income citizens. It possesses innovative architectural characteristics which reflect European prototypes of large-scale housing and urban design and displays high standards of construction and planning typical of the 51 housing projects built by the Public Works Administration (PWA) from 1933 to 1937.

Unlike most of the PWA housing, Langston was not a slum clearance project. Its open and sloping site accommodates fifteen massed blocks. The central common, International Styling, high construction standards and exceptionally low site coverage (approximately 20%) conform with guidelines established by the PWA in 1935. Sculptural features, pre-cast concrete components and the overall aesthetics directly reflect the architect's contributions. A restricted budget for the project (\$1,842,946) encouraged the use of readily available materials and basic unit plans that were designed, in the spirit of mass-production, to be duplicated.

A major feature is the terra-cotta frieze which adorns the arcade entrance. Entitled "The Progress of the Negro Race," it depicts a series of Black family groups being led by the prophetic likeness of John Mercer Langston. The first vignette shows downcast figures against leafy crops. Further along in the sequence are healthy and proud characters holding tools and books. An industrial smokestack and a schoolhouse loom in the background. Finally, at the end of the work is a three-

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bauer, Catherine. Modern Housing. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934.

Borchert, James. Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Cole, Mary Susan. "Catherine Bauer and the Public Housing Movement 1926-1937." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1975.

Ethridge, Harrison. "The Black Architects of Washington, D.C. 1900-Present." Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1979.

☒ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

☐ 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data: N/A

☐ State historic preservation office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property 13.7 acres

UTM References

A 18 328700 4307200
Zone Easting Northing

C 18 328970 4307330

B 18 328700 4307330
Zone Easting Northing

D 18 328970 4307200

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is outlined boldly on the enclosed map as lots 35, 36, 37, and 38 of parcel 160. The site contains 13.7 acres.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The Langston Terrace site includes lots 35, 36, 37, and 38 of parcel 160. Streets and fencelines provide clear definition of the property, which was amassed into its present form in 1935.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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date 1 December 1986

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The large central common space, which is entered via a pedestrian arcade on H Street, possesses several notable features. A life-size unglazed terra-cotta frieze, integral with the surrounding brick surfaces, frames the arcade opening. It depicts "The Progress of the Negro Race" through a series of bas-relief vignettes. On a projecting ledge is a representational figure of a female with two children, also of terra-cotta. Five large reinforced concrete sculptures adorn the paved playground in the central common which also includes non-original metal playground equipment. Low chain-link fences, walkways and garden plots surround the open common area.

The heating plant and maintenance shop building is located at the southwestern corner of the community. It is a two-story masonry structure with a massive, tall smokestack rising above its western wall. A commemorative cornerstone of polychrome pre-cast concrete, depicting the Langston site plan, rests in the southeast corner of this building.

A typical unit interior has three to six rooms with two-inch plaster partition walls and spartan trimwork. Floors were originally covered with linoleum over reinforced concrete. Bath and kitchen walls are composed of Keene cement. Original fixtures in all kitchens and many baths have been replaced. Common hallways in the apartment buildings have four-inch glazed tile on all walls and exposed metal stair units leading to roof exit ports.

Excluded from this nomination are the series of two-story brick row houses located on the north side of H Street and known as the Langston Addition. Completed in 1965, the 34 units were designed by architect Leroy J.H. Brown, AIA and are situated on lands originally obtained in 1935 for a northern section of Langston Terrace. Neither the layout nor the exterior stylization originally schemed in 1936 for this section are reflected in the 1965 addition.

The entire community is distinguished from its immediate surroundings by its cohesive International Styling, unusual arrangement of buildings and campus-like landscape. Although several alterations have occurred at Langston Terrace, it retains much of its architectural integrity and original appearance.

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dimensional mother with two small children at her feet. Perched on a shelf, the madonna appears to reinforce the themes of the PWA housing program that placed much emphasis on family unity and progress. Commissioned by the Treasury Art Program (TRAP), Dan Olney sculpted a representational treatment of the significant, but neglected, theme of rural to urban migration by American Blacks. A separate group of five large animal figures grace the central common area. Composed of cast, reinforced concrete the frog, walrus, sea lion and pair of cubist horses continue to provide durable non-mechanical entertainment.

Langston was built by the PWA, in part, to provide a "successful demonstration of the possibilities of...low-rent housing." Its construction, from 1935 to 1938, marked the beginning of the federal government's active involvement in the replacement of substandard alley dwellings that had long plagued Washington with a planned community specifically designed for needy Black families. Langston was widely accepted and praised. Washington writers called it a "planned utopia" and a "model community for the reclamation of human lives." Lewis Mumford found a "high standard of exterior design and the use of sculpture ... more conspicuously successful here than anywhere else I can recall... (I)t looks better than the best modern work in Hamburg or Vienna that I can recall." The United States Housing Authority (USHA), which superseded the PWA Housing Division in 1937, offered weekly tours of Langston via shuttlebus for employees and guests.

John Mercer Langston, the project's namesake, was an important and well-known Black American public figure. He was the first Black to hold elective office in the United States and he became a voice for social reform for poor Washingtonians in the late 19th century. At Langston Terrace, the government essentially declared war on such social problems as crime, disease, infant mortality and squalor. In a 1940 federal survey report it was found that Langston shared with other PWA-sponsored communities "a proud record free from" criminal activity. The total absence of Black infant mortality at Langston contrasted with the 1940 rate of 70.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in Washington and was cited by a former PWA administrator as "convincing proof that slum clearance pays dividends in human as well as economic terms."

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Hilyard Robert Robinson (1899-1986) was a pioneer in American public housing. After completing graduate studies at Columbia University he spent 18 months abroad examining European public housing during 1930 and 1931. Robinson attended Der Auslander Institute at the University of Berlin and visited the Weimar Bauhaus. Along with colleagues such as Catherine Bauer and Clarence Stein, Robinson participated in surveys for early New Deal programs that led to his commission for Langston in 1935. At Langston he applied his wide knowledge of housing theory and design principles, using European prototypes as his reference. The Langston commission, which came early in his career, was a tremendous success and quickly led to other assignments. In Washington, Robinson's housing credits include the Frederick Douglass Homes (1941) and the Arthur Capper Dwellings (1958). Robinson's affiliation with Howard University included teaching at and directing its Architecture School. He designed numerous campus buildings including Cook Hall (1938), The Engineering-Architecture School (1948), and the Fine Arts Complex (1957). Robinson remained the most prolific and successful Black Washington architect until his retirement in the 1960s.

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Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. Urban Housing: The Story of the PWA Housing Division, 1933-36. Washington, DC: Public Works Administration, 1935.

Fellheimer, Alfred. "Planning American Standards for Low-Rent Housing," American Architect, 146, (February, 1935), 12.

Green, Constance. Washington, Capital City 1879-1950. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.

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Mumford, Lewis. "The Sky Line," New Yorker, (29 February, 1936), 40.

Pommer, Richard. "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States During the Early 1930's," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 37 (December, 1978), 235-264.

Short, C.W. and R. Stanley Brown. Public Buildings- Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-1939. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1939.

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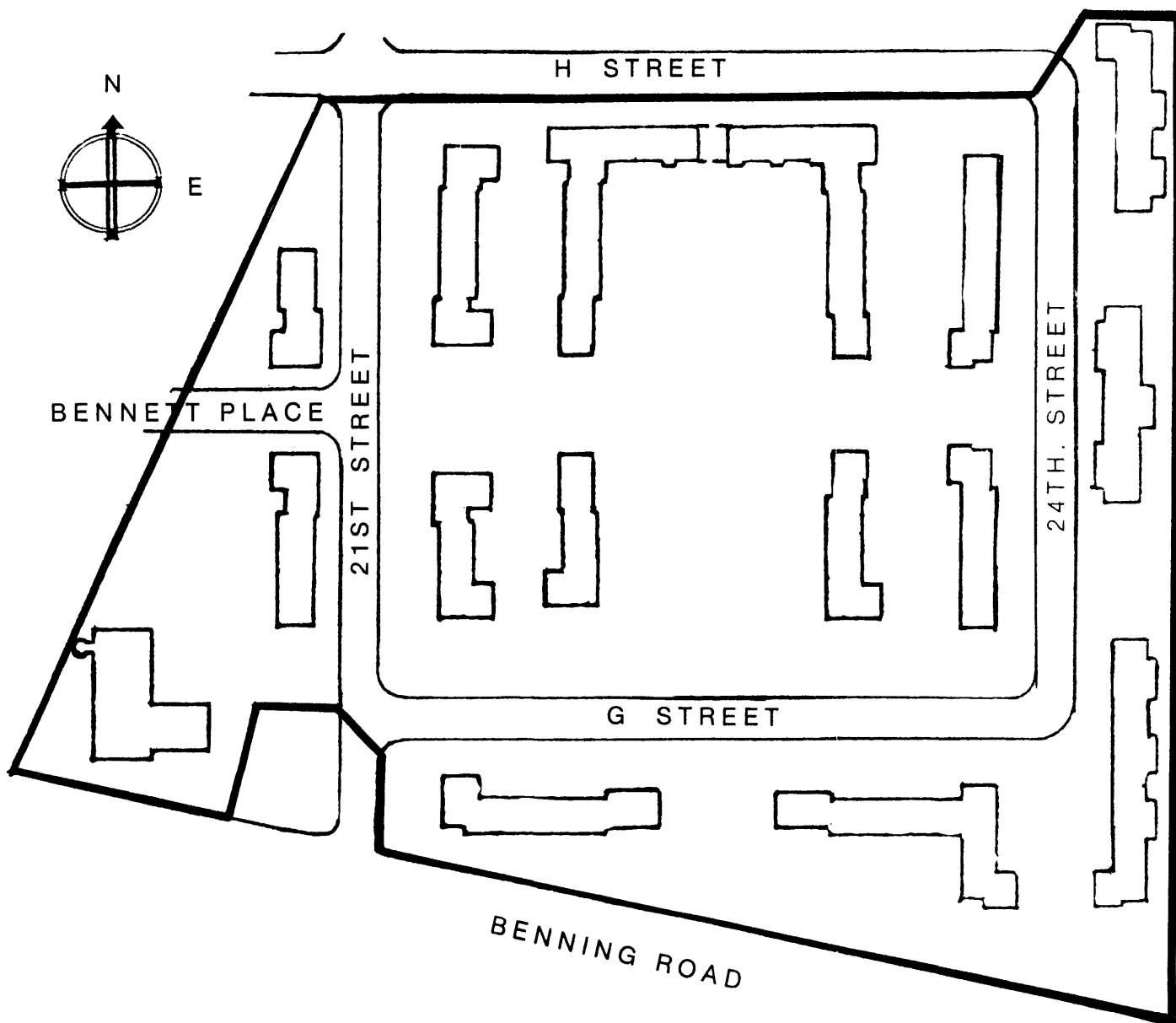
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approximate scale: 1" = 80'



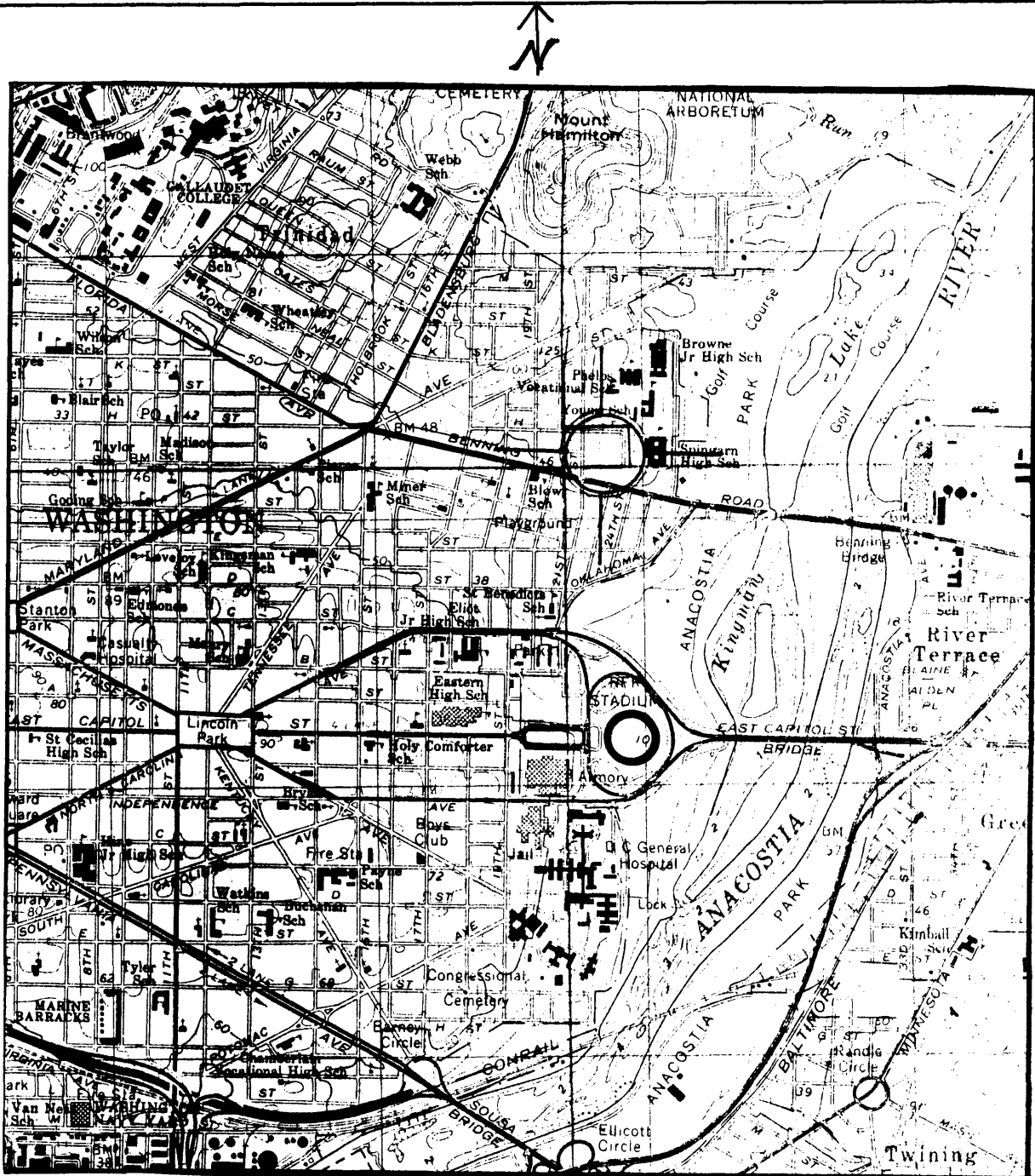
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Detail of USGS Map (Refer to Section 10 for UTM data)

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PHOTODOCUMENTATION OF LANGSTON TERRACE, WASHINGTON, DC

- 1) View of the common, circa 1938. Photographer unknown.
- 2) View of terra-cotta frieze entitled "Progress of the Negro Race" which surrounds the H Street arcade entrance, circa 1938. Photographer unknown.
- 3) View of row houses on Twenty-first Street.
- 4) View of the central common. The cast-concrete animals are original to the project; the playground equipment is a later addition. A pair of cubist horses is partially viewable in the background area near the frieze.
- 5) 718 Twenty-first Street: a typical apartment unit.
- 6) Apartment group at Twenty-fourth and H Streets, forming the northeast corner of the community.
- 7) Dwelling units arranged to conform with the hilly landscape at the southwest corner of the common.
- 8) Detail: terra-cotta madonna with children located on north wall of common area, to the east of the frieze. Sculptor: Dan Olney.
- 9) Frieze detail: agricultural work as depicted by sculptor Dan Olney, one of five vignettes in "The Progress of the Negro Race."

With the exception of Numbers 1 and 2, all photographs were taken by Gary Griffin in August, 1986. Negatives in possession of Glen B. Leiner, Washington, D.C.