

# QUEEN CITY

## EAST ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

The contract for the construction of the Pentagon was awarded on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1941, and a 24-hour construction project began the same day. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the frantic pace increased even more. Residents of East Arlington watched the building's rise with fascination and curiosity, unaware their neighborhood was in danger. Indeed, while the Pentagon structure had been built with minimal impacts on East Arlington, the written plans for the project required razing the community in order to build roads and parking areas for the 35,000 war workers that would occupy the building. Tragically, this fact was not shared with the residents until the last possible moment – a detail that troubled few of the planners, apparently.

Jay Downer, a highway consultant on the project, even went so far as to frame the displacement of the African American neighborhoods as a benefit and described it as such in frankly racist terms. As he told the National Capital Planning Commission in October 1941, the new road network “takes out some troublesome “darkey” slave cabins” and “cleans up that strip.”

Construction was to begin around East Arlington on January 19, 1942. However, the War Department waited until early February to give notice to the area families that the property was being seized by eminent domain and they would have to vacate their homes by March 1. One resident, Gertrude Jeffress, later testified to the confusion and frustration of community members upon receiving this crushing news, “It was a predicament. Where in the world were we going to find a place to live?”