

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: “IF WE OWN THE STORY, WE OWN THE PLACE”:
CULTURAL HERITAGE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION,
AND GENTRIFICATION ON U STREET

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This thesis investigates the roles of cultural heritage and historic preservation in the gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Its larger purpose is to critique historic preservation’s contribution to urban revitalization and look closely at who does and does not benefit from this relationship. Conducting interviews with five “heritage experts” and using the materials created by Cultural Tourism DC to promote the neighborhood’s rich history, culture, and heritage produce a complex view of the neighborhood and its contested stories—past and present. Through analysis of the competing stories told about the U Street neighborhood and three case study buildings (the Whitelaw Hotel, Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, and the Lincoln Theatre), I developed a cultural critique of the heritage and preservation efforts and the gentrification process, concluding that such heritage activities do contribute to the revanchist nature of gentrification.

“IF WE OWN THE STORY, WE OWN THE PLACE”:
CULTURAL HERITAGE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND
GENTRIFICATION ON U STREET

by

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Storytelling is one of the myriad ways we make sense of the world around us. Different interests dictate different stories. This thesis investigates the role of historic preservation and cultural heritage activities—certain stories—in the gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood in Northwest Washington, D.C. Historic preservation and cultural heritage activities have especially thrust themselves into the gentrification debate within the last decade with the rise of plans, models, and projects that combine heritage and economic development. Cultural Tourism DC (CT/DC), a non-profit coalition of heritage and cultural institutions throughout the city, was born in this effort, and CT/DC's activities remain the most prominent of heritage activities in the Greater U Street neighborhood. The marriage of heritage and economic development is an uneasy one—often the power structures of capitalism determine whose stories are told and to what end. The questions to ask in order to interrogate their roles in the gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood include: What are the cultural heritage stories? Are there competing ones? Who controls what stories are told? Have there been power struggles over the stories (and subsequently winners and losers)? How have the stories changed over time? Who do these stories benefit and not benefit? I conclude that historic preservation and cultural heritage activities in the Greater U Street neighborhood contribute to the revanchist nature of gentrification. If whoever owns the story owns the place, what does the white middle class have to say about its new territory?

The effort to investigate the relationship among historic preservation, cultural heritage activities, and gentrification involved traditional historical methods such as

archival and newspaper research and working with secondary materials, fieldwork and experiencing cultural heritage attractions such as walking tours and heritage trails, and interviews with people involved with these processes in the neighborhood.

The crux of the research was gathering and making meaning of the stories told about the Greater U Street neighborhood. The keys to unlocking such stories are the five audio-taped interviews I conducted with neighborhood heritage experts. Each was asked a similar line of questioning tailored to each interviewee's expertise and what he or she could contribute to the Greater U Street story. Uncovering the stories of the neighborhood also involved collecting and analyzing all promotional materials about the neighborhood I could find, which were primarily from in-print free brochures produced by organizations such as Cultural Tourism DC and 14th & U Main Street¹ as well as out-of-print brochures held in vertical files at the Washingtoniana² and Historical Society of Washington, D.C. collections and archives at Manna Inc.'s office.³ Newspaper articles and other primary documents including photographs were also found in these sources. Manna Inc. was especially helpful in lending promotional videos on the neighborhood, the Whitelaw Hotel, and the Thurgood Marshall Center. Experiencing, more than once, the CT/DC "Before Harlem, There Was U Street" walking tour and the CT/DC "City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail" also provided solid grounding in the stories told in those formats. Additionally, I spent more than one year critically experiencing the neighborhood and its changes in my own personal explorations.

¹ 14th & U Main Street is an organization that follows the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street four-point approach to developing the commercial facet of an historic neighborhood.

² The Washingtoniana Collection, an archive of local Washington, D.C. newspapers and sources, is housed at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (the main branch of the District of Columbia Public Libraries).

³ Manna, Inc. is a non-profit affordable housing developer based in Washington, D.C.

Secondary sources including previously published histories on the neighborhood and gentrification literature also round out my sources.

To analyze the Greater U Street neighborhood, I studied the physical changes to the built environment. To understand what stories were being told about the neighborhood, I participated in several walking tours, consumed printed literature, and visited websites, which presented the dominant stories. I listened to and analyzed the stories of several informants to ascertain how they resembled and differed from CT/DC's interpretation of the neighborhood. I analyzed demographic changes documented in the U.S. census that demonstrated the increasing presence of white middle-class residents and the shrinking number of African-American residents along with the dramatic rise in property values. Comparing demographic and property-value analysis in relation to changes in the built environment confirms that a gentrification process was occurring. Moreover, an analysis of CT/DC's interpretive framework as juxtaposed with the strong views of other voices in the neighborhood suggested that heritage interpretation in the Greater U Street neighborhood was aimed at attracting an affluent middle-class cohort into the neighborhood. My data conformed to Neil Smith's argument that gentrification is a revanchist enterprise. Hence, Smith's theory enabled me to understand the forces at work and the stakes occurring in the gentrification of U Street. Merging gentrification theory with field work, traditional historical methods, interviews, and demographic mapping proved to be a successful interdisciplinary approach to investigating an understudied facet of historic preservation: the increasingly popular, but uneasy, marriage of heritage and economic development.

Following this introduction—which defines and explains gentrification as well as

some cursory information on the neighborhood—chapter two provides insight into the competing histories of the neighborhood. Mainly drawn from my interviews with five heritage experts (Kathryn S. Smith, Marya Annette McQuirter, Norris A. Dodson III, Hon. Frank Smith, and Lawrence Guyot) and CT/DC materials, this chapter uses the dominant narrative of Greater U Street as told by CT/DC as the base and then uses other sources to show the complexities and discrepancies of the neighborhood’s heritage. Chapter three builds upon chapter two’s conflicting stories by employing three case study buildings (the Whitelaw Hotel, the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, and the Lincoln Theatre) to further illustrate the contested history of the neighborhood and the role of historic preservation and cultural heritage activities in concrete examples. Chapter four provides a cultural critique of these processes and explores who the stories of the neighborhood do and do not benefit. Chapter five concludes with a research toolkit and action recommendations for gentrifying neighborhoods based on research conducted in this work.

GREATER U STREET BOUNDARIES AND NAMING CONTESTATION

The next chapter will provide a history of the neighborhood, but before continuing to more background information, it is important to understand the location and boundaries of the Greater U Street neighborhood as well as its contested naming. Located in the northwest quadrant of the city, the neighborhood lies mostly within the northern boundary of the original federal city planned by Pierre Charles L’Enfant in 1791. Washington, D.C. does not set, maintain, or track official neighborhood boundaries, which has made the task of establishing boundaries for my work that much more

difficult. The boundaries of Greater U Street vary depending on whom you speak with, but for the purposes of this thesis, the boundaries are roughly 16th Street east to 7th Street and Florida Avenue south to R Street, as shaded in pink in the map on the next page (Figure 1). These boundaries were provided by Marya Annette McQuirter in an interview, and they closely correspond with the boundaries of the Greater U Street Historic District (outlined in blue on the map), which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. However, as Lawrence Guyot informed me in the interview, he and others observed those historic district boundaries to be arbitrarily chosen. CT/DC uses the urban renewal limits for the Shaw neighborhood set by the attendance boundaries of Shaw Junior High School (the area between Florida Avenue to the north and M Street to the south and between North Capitol Street to the east and 15th Street to the west) as the larger neighborhood boundaries, but designates Greater U Street (two blocks north and south) as the heart of that community.

While CT/DC labels the neighborhood as Greater U Street in its materials, the organization also uses the more generic term Shaw to describe its related project. However, the name Shaw did not exist prior to 1966 when the National Capital Planning Commission and the city government designated it as an urban renewal area—joining many smaller neighborhoods, including Greater U Street. Greater U Street is not an official name, and asking people what to call this vicinity often draws a blank. I use Greater U Street to describe the significance of U Street, but also acknowledge that there is a cohesive element that extends beyond that one street. The label is supported by the work of CT/DC and the historic district.

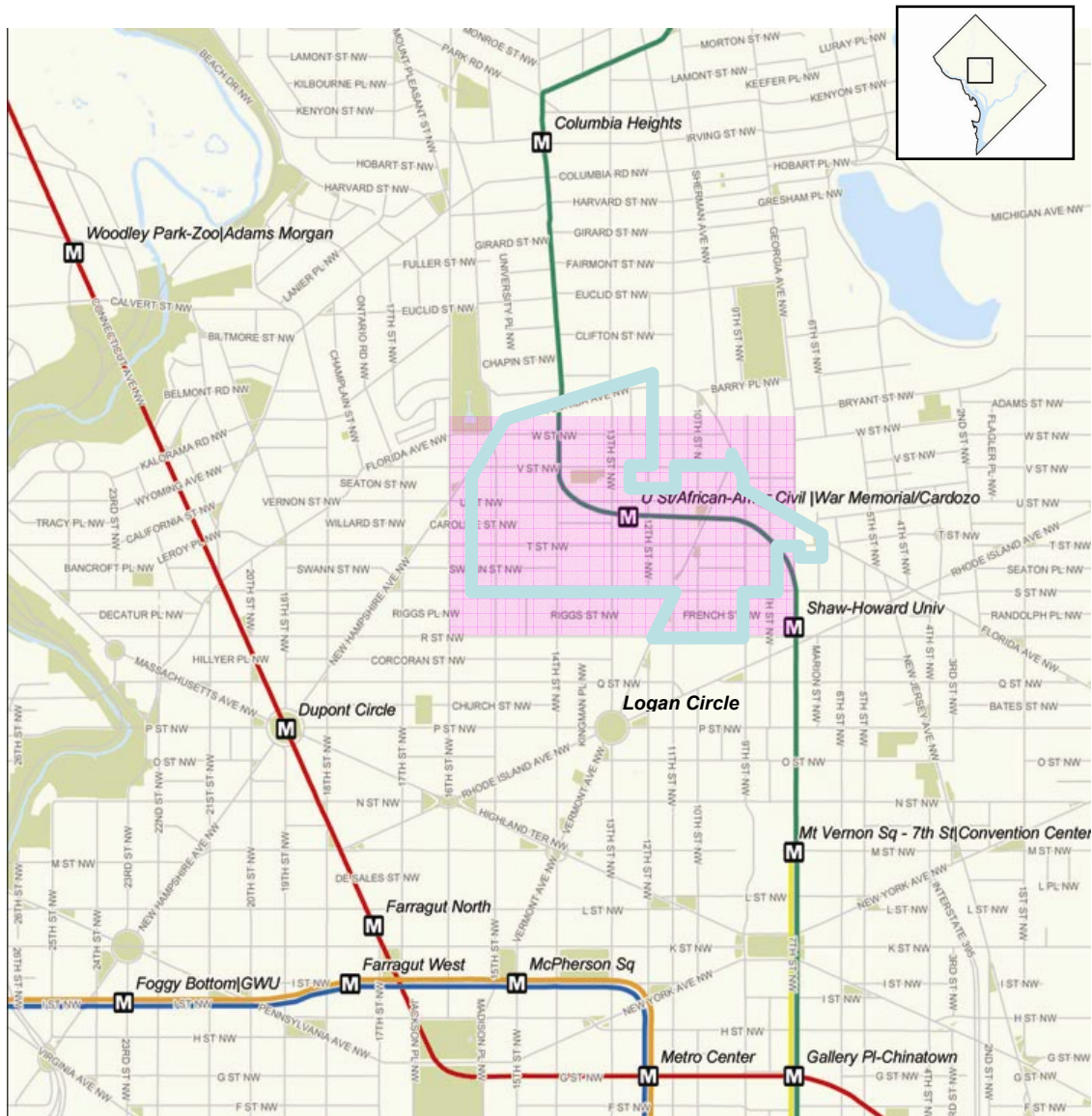


Figure 1. Greater U Street Neighborhood Map

This map illustrates the Greater U Street neighborhood (shaded in pink) in context in Northwest Washington, D.C., north of downtown and northeast of Dupont Circle and its accessibility via Metrorail. The Greater U Street Historic District is outlined in blue.

WHAT IS GENTRIFICATION?

Gentrification is a process that preserves historic vernacular or ordinary architecture and buildings (especially houses) in a given district or neighborhood. Historic buildings are often abandoned or allowed to deteriorate once a neighborhood declines; gentrification brings the neighborhood back by renovating these historic houses, thereby increasing their resale value and making the area once-shunned by the middle class more attractive to its standards. Historic neighborhoods within cities are often where the affordable housing for the metropolitan area is found and also where racial and ethnic minorities are most likely to make up the majority of the population. Gentrification tends to change both of these characteristics. Gentrification has an uneasy relationship with historic preservation, in which the goal is often to preserve the physical and social character of a place. While gentrification may preserve the historic fabric of a neighborhood, the process often pushes out the long-standing residents who can no longer afford the increase in rent, property taxes, or maintenance and may prefer to stay in order to take advantage of the new amenities of the “improved” neighborhood.

In thinking about the larger settlement patterns of the U.S. population, it is important to understand the historical context of gentrification. After World War II, suburbanization exploded in this country, and the early period is often characterized as “white flight,” whereby white middle-class residents fled the cities for the suburbs and left the cities with a higher concentration of poor minorities, but the white middle-class was not the only population to leave cities. As early as the 1960s, gentrification was observed in some cities where blighted neighborhoods were being reclaimed by the white middle class. Sociologist Ruth Glass coined the word when she applied it to her study of a

London neighborhood; the term quickly spread to the United States.⁴ Since then gentrification has happened in cycles, which tend to correlate with economic prosperity. But some researchers suggest that current spurts of gentrification are different than in previous cycles.

In “Cities and the Reinvestment Wave: Underserved Markets and the Gentrification of Housing Policy,” Wyly and Hammel note that many predicted the death of gentrification after the decline of the real estate market of the 1980s and the recession of the early 1990s. But they note that current gentrification is different than in previous generations because of policy choices:

We find that today’s urban revival is very different from previous cycles, because gentrification has become tightly linked to housing policy. New methods of financing home purchases, along with regulation and community activism, have funneled a wave of reinvestment into parts of the city that were once ignored by most lending institutions. One unexpected result was to unleash powerful market forces in areas attractive to the upper middle class. In turn, as gentrification transformed these neighborhoods, it became an important factor in its own right. It began to shape the choices available to policy makers working toward other housing goals—such as redeveloping dilapidated housing projects in an age of cutbacks in public assistance to the poor.⁵

Prior to this new wave of gentrification, mortgage-lending institutions practiced widespread discrimination, especially in the form of redlining—denying all mortgage applications for property in certain neighborhoods that had been identified as having an overwhelming minority population. Wyly and Hammel credit the Clinton administration with stricter enforcement of fair lending laws that diminished this activity. They also note that with the booming economy of the 1990s, financial institutions began to reach out to

⁴ Elvin K. Wyly and Daniel J. Hammel, “Cities and the Reinvestment Wave: Underserved Markets and the Gentrification of Housing Policy,” *Housing Facts & Findings* 2, no. 1 (2000): online at <<http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hff/v2i1-reinvestment.shtml>> (25 March 2004).

⁵ Wyly and Hammel

underserved and untapped markets (low- and moderate-income people, minorities, immigrants, single mothers, and so forth) with relaxed downpayments, and simultaneously began greenlining areas that were once redlined.⁶ Middle-class households took advantage of this greenlining and spurred this most recent wave of gentrification.

Gentrification is a hotly-debated topic in many of the major metropolitan areas in the United States and other parts of the industrialized world. Part of the controversy surrounding the causes and especially the effects of gentrification is lack of a universal definition. Researchers and academics, politicians, journalists, and the public employ varying definitions for the term. Depending on how narrowly or broadly defined, gentrification is claimed to be the savior of dying cities or an increased burden for the poor. Some confuse urban renewal (usually characterized by demolition and rebuilding of the commercial cores of inner-city neighborhoods) with gentrification, while many others conclude that they may share some results in common, but are two distinct processes. Other definitions depend on the perspective of the author or proponent. For example, Raphael W. Bostic and Richard W. Martin, in their study of African Americans as a gentrifying force, put forward this definition: “Gentrification is often characterised [sic] as a neighbourhood [sic] evolutionary process in which affluent, usually young, households move into and upgrade distressed neighbourhoods, with many of the neighbourhood’s original residents being displaced...Specifically, gentrification...also often involves the displacement of minority households by White households.”⁷ Another

⁶ Wyly and Hammel

⁷ Raphael W. Bostic and Richard W. Martin, “Black Home-owners as a Gentrifying Force? Neighbourhood Dynamics in the Context of Minority Home-ownership,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 1 (2003): 2428.

example, provided by Wyly and Hammel, focuses on the broader patterns of American settlement:

For half a century, Americans have tampered with the word “urban,” reflecting our long-standing ambivalence toward the city. First we ran away to the suburbs, then we moved on to distant exurbs or brand-new technoburbs wired into the “infoedutainment” economy. But the outward spread of urbanization always generates countervailing pressures to recycle old central-city neighborhoods for the middle and upper classes. The result is a tighter market for affordable rental units in the city, and, sometimes, direct displacement of low- and moderate-income households.⁸

Even the Oxford English dictionary weighs in on the issue: “The process by which an (urban) area is rendered middle-class.”⁹

In my earlier work on gentrification in the neighborhood, I relied upon the definition put forth by Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard in the Brookings Institution-PolicyLink discussion paper *Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices*: “In this paper we define gentrification as the process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood.”¹⁰ I preferred this definition because Kennedy and Leonard also take note of the racial implications noted by Bostic and Martin as well as the greater regional settlement forces (such as the push and pull of cities) that Wyly and Hammel include in their definition. Although gentrification is felt most acutely at the local level, it is the result of metropolitan area conditions and indicators. A particularly crucial part of their definition, which is still applicable, is a physical as well as socioeconomic change in the neighborhood—the

⁸ Wyly and Hammel

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd ed., s.v. “gentrification.”

¹⁰ Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard, *Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices* (Washington, D.C. and Oakland, Calif.: The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and PolicyLink, 2001), 5.

housing stock is upgraded and there is a significant shift in the socioeconomic status of the residents that changes the “social fabric of the neighborhood.”¹¹ However, my primary reason for jettisoning this definition in favor of my own (see below), is that Kennedy and Leonard require displacement of the original, low-income residents to occur in order to call the process gentrification. As many studies have pointed out (some of them to be discussed), it is extremely difficult to quantify and qualify displacement, and some researchers argue it does not occur. While I maintain displacement or potential displacement is a key issue in tackling gentrification from a policy standpoint and crucial to my conception of the ramifications of gentrification, it is not the focus of this particular investigation.

Instead, I have developed my own definition of gentrification, heavily influenced by the work of geographer Neil Smith. Smith defines and editorializes gentrification in *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* as “the process...by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters—neighborhoods that had previously experienced disinvestment and a middle-class exodus. The poorest working-class neighborhoods are getting a remake; capital and the gentry are coming home, and for some in their wake it is not entirely a pretty sight.”¹² As Smith further contextualizes his work on gentrification, I, too, situate gentrification in a globalization, neoliberal, and revanchist context. I often question priorities and the dedication of city leaders to aid the most-needy residents; this is why I am interested in the notion of the revanchist city—policies designed for the white middle-class to take back inner cities that

¹¹ Kennedy and Leonard, 5-6.

¹² Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 32.

have been claimed by generally poor minorities in the decades following the mid-twentieth-century white flight from cities. While the neighborhood in question was never dominated by a white middle class, the former heart of black Washington, perhaps deadened by the exodus of the black middle class, is now in the process of being made attractive to the white middle class. Smith also serves as inspiration in his critique of the economic benefits of historic preservation in “Comment on David Listokin, Barbara Listokin, and Michael Lahr’s ‘The Contributions of Historic Preservation to Housing and Economic Development’: Historic Preservation in a Neoliberal Age.” In this article he boldly points out the relationship between historic preservation and gentrification (the former often contributing to the latter) and criticizes historic preservation practice for not having social responsibility at its core or even within its main concern, which is one of my shared critiques.¹³ In other words, the preservation field largely ignores its role in driving up the cost of housing in historic districts and the displacement it may cause. A movement such as historic preservation which is increasingly more inclusive of social and cultural issues should accept that it may produce a socially negative outcome (economic hardship and displacement) and work to minimize such an effect.

This work uses the following definition of gentrification: A process of restructuring physical and social (neighborhood) space as a result of historic preservation and/or cultural heritage activities that also interact with global, regional, and city forces. Often the result is the immigration and dominance of the middle class over a traditionally affordable, low- and moderate-income neighborhood that previously experienced disinvestment following a middle-class exodus. While not the mainstream trend in

¹³ Neil Smith, “Comment on David Listokin, Barbara Listokin, and Michael Lahr’s ‘The Contributions of Historic Preservation to Housing and Economic Development’: Historic Preservation in a Neoliberal Age,” *Housing Policy Debate* 9, no. 3 (1998): 479-485.

urbanization (suburbanization is), this is a centripetal process spurred by global, regional, and local economic and quality of life concerns which results in a new value and assessment of historic communities. What should be apparent from the earlier discussion of gentrification is its cyclical and evolutionary characteristics. Gentrification and urban renaissance or revitalization were considered distinct processes until recently (many may still maintain their separation), but my understanding views them as forging together via public-private funding and policies designed to economically infuse underdeveloped portions of the city. Also central to my rethinking of gentrification is the role of historic preservation. I have long been suspect of the use of historic preservation as an economic tool (not questioning that it is one, but instead how it is utilized). Historic preservation literature often cites gentrification as problematic in relation to the otherwise deemed positive effects of rising property values for historic homes, but yet preservation is rarely presented as having negative effects.

What is historic preservation? Historic preservation is traditionally regarded as the preservation, maintenance, rehabilitation, and restoration of buildings of a certain age (generally more than fifty years old) with significance in terms of architectural character or people associated with building, designing, or inhabiting. I conceive of historic preservation in much broader terms. While the traditional notion focuses attention on the building and its materials, I am more concerned with the people, the communities, the stories, and the larger character of historic fabric than simply its integrity and authenticity. For example, affordable housing is a historic preservation issue under my terms; it is vital to preserve a level of affordability for those who wish to remain in socioeconomically climbing neighborhoods. In addition, cultural heritage activities—

formalized efforts to promote a neighborhood's rich culture, heritage, and history—are also closely linked with historic preservation. Historic preservation may generally be concerned with the physical protection and restoration of a place, while cultural heritage activities focus on preservation of intangible qualities encased within those buildings. Though, as with most social and cultural phenomena, both historic preservation and cultural heritage activities are subject to the politics of power dynamics. Just as not every significant building is saved from demolition (after all, every building is significant to someone), not every story is told or told in the spirit of full disclosure. Who determines what is saved, what should be said about it, and how inclusive that story may be is not fixed but instead a complicated web of power and conflict.

WHAT IS THE BIG DEAL WITH GENTRIFICATION?

Gentrification is largely such a controversial issue because of the consequences of it. On one hand, cities welcome gentrifying populations because they bring with them plenty of tax dollars (especially through income taxes and the increasing property taxes on improved homes) and commercial money to spend in city retail and restaurants, while requiring less social services (such as schools and public health care). Gentrification also brings in new upscale businesses that will bring more money into city coffers. Gentrified neighborhoods tend to exhibit more social, racial/ethnic, and economic diversity than non-gentrified neighborhoods. Gentrified neighborhoods also tend to sustain themselves as thriving communities, and thus, improve the safety and especially the perceived safety and attractiveness of the neighborhood to outsiders; long-time residents also benefit from these changes. On the other hand, gentrification causes displacement of poorer minorities

and changes the character of a historic neighborhood. Ultimately, gentrification's negative affects are felt because of a shortage of affordable housing. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "The generally accepted definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care."¹⁴ This holds for all income levels. By decreasing the affordable housing stock, poor minorities bear the greatest hardship in the gentrification process, which reinforces unequal power relations among race and ethnicity and classes. People who have been displaced may end up in another pocket of poverty; thus, gentrification may actually contribute to concentrating or reconcentrating poverty in other parts of the city at the same time that it deconcentrates it in one location. With the displacement, small, family, local, and/or ethnic retail and restaurant establishments as well as community centers and places of worship may be lost because they lack the community to support them or because they can no longer afford the space.

Often national and international chains replace local entities, plugging a once disinvested neighborhood into a global network of commerce. This often contributes to the homogenizing of the built environment. For example, U Street in recent years has acquired a Starbucks, Quiznos Sub, Rite Aide, 7-Eleven, H&R Block, and Subway (all clustered on U Street between 11th and 13th Streets). These establishments are immediately recognizable in any setting due to standardization of signs and facades. In this instance, they all occupy newly-constructed buildings that lack distinction from

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Affordable Housing," *Homes & Communities: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*, 20 April 2005, <<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/index.cfm>> (26 May 2005).

suburban counterparts; in other words, these buildings and establishments do not provide or enhance the unique character of U Street, but instead detract from it by the addition of bland, ubiquitous elements.

While my characterization of gentrification has focused on how portions of the white middle class have moved in and pushed out poor racial and ethnic minorities, some studies suggest that minorities are part of the gentrifying force in certain cities. Kennedy and Leonard note that Asian Americans took part in gentrifying a neighborhood in the San Francisco Bay area and African Americans were gentrifiers in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Cleveland.¹⁵ In “Black Home-owners as a Gentrifying Force? Neighbourhood Dynamics in the Context of Minority Home-ownership,” Raphael W. Bostic and Richard W. Martin investigate whether or not African Americans were part of the gentrifying force in the 1970s and 1980s, and concluded that they were in the former but not the latter decade. They conjecture that this change was due to fairer mortgage-lending practices that allowed African Americans to obtain mortgages in neighborhoods that were not majority African American as had been the case before.¹⁶ What does this mean? Gentrification is more of a class-based phenomenon than a race-based one. In all known cases of gentrification, the middle class has invaded a previously disinvested neighborhood occupied by the poor and working classes, therefore the embedded class distinction holds true across case studies. The race of the gentrifiers, however, is not always white, allowing for some variability. Due to the correlations between socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity, a greater number of gentrifiers are white and the communities that are gentrified are minority neighborhoods. This does not undermine

¹⁵ Kennedy and Leonard, 2.

¹⁶ Bostic and Martin, 2447.

the role of race in gentrification. In the case of Greater U Street, it is the white middle class gentrifying a predominantly black working-class neighborhood, and as will be explored in later chapters, race is an important factor in this process.

Not everyone agrees that gentrification harms the poor. In “Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?” Jacob L. Vigdor argues that little is really known about what happens to the poor because of gentrification. There may not always be involuntary displacement or the displacement may not cause harm. In the end, Vigdor concludes, using Boston as his case study, that it is too difficult to empirically determine harm, which leads him to believe that gentrification may not harm the poor. Vigdor does argue that steps should be taken to minimize harm, if there is any.¹⁷ In another study by Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi, using New York City as the case study, they concur with Vigdor that the poor are no more likely to leave a gentrifying neighborhood than a non-gentrifying one. In fact, Freeman and Braconi find that the poorer residents are less likely to leave a gentrifying neighborhood than a non-gentrifying one.¹⁸ However, Vigdor, Freeman, and Braconi’s findings do not say anything about the sacrifices that the original residents may make by staying in a gentrifying neighborhood. More money for housing means less for other necessities and lower standards of living. In addition, these findings should not stand for the general characterization of gentrification. Since, by its very nature, gentrification is determined by regional forces, different metropolitan areas will have different situations and forces that not only contribute to gentrification but the choices original residents make. Boston and New York City are generally very expensive places

¹⁷ Jacob L. Vigdor, “Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?” in *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs: 2002*, eds. William G. Gale and Janet Rothenberg Pack (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 172.

¹⁸ Lisa Chamberlain, “The G-Word,” *Metropolis*, March 2004, 26.

to live (nearly all of the city and inner suburbs), but not all cities undergoing gentrification are. Washington, D.C., for example, has a severely unequal distribution of wealth within the city and surrounding suburbs. Original residents pushed out of gentrifying D.C. neighborhoods can often afford to move to another city neighborhood—usually one with a high concentration of poverty.

There is a general trend of escalating housing costs in D.C., but the growth and wealth is not equally distributed. Radhika K. Fox and Kalima Rose, principal authors of the PolicyLink report *Expanding Housing Opportunity in Washington, DC: The Case for Inclusionary Zoning*, note: “Incomes have not kept pace with housing prices; from January 1999-March 2003, the sale price of homes rose four times faster than income, and the price of rentals rose three times faster. A household in DC would need to earn \$85,052 to afford to purchase the average home, and \$72,160 to afford the average rental. Yet, the median household income is \$52,300.”¹⁹ They also note that thirty-five percent of renters and twenty-four percent of homeowners are paying more than they can afford on housing (greater than thirty percent of their income).²⁰ A disproportional share of the increasing value of property in Washington is found west of the Anacostia River; this puts a greater strain on the once transitional and traditionally affordable neighborhoods (Greater U Street and other portions of Shaw, including Logan Circle) on this side of the river while those east of the river see little revitalization and continue to contain some of the greatest concentrations in poverty. *Housing in the Nation’s Capital: 2003* informs that despite the prosperity of the 1990s in the Washington region, “the number of extremely poor census tracts in the District rose, their populations increased, and their

¹⁹ Radhika K. Fox and Kalima Rose, *Expanding Housing Opportunity in Washington, DC: The Case for Inclusionary Zoning* (Oakland, Calif: PolicyLink, 2003), 9.

²⁰ Fox and Rose, 9.

poverty deepened.”²¹ This trend is particularly alarming, because while concentrated poverty nearly tripled in the District, poverty declined by an average of one-third in other large urban areas during the same time period.²² The authors of *Housing in the Nation’s Capital: 2003* link this concentration in poverty with gentrification:

The causes of rising concentrated poverty in the District are unclear. However, the trend might reflect a connection between the District’s gentrifying neighborhoods, like the Logan Circle area, and those that have been left behind by the city’s housing revival, like the Ivy City area. Only limited information is available to trace the flow of households into and out of the city’s neighborhoods, but it appears that some of the city’s poor may have moved into neighborhoods with rising poverty rates. This evidence is not definitive, but it suggests that displacement of poor households from the superheated housing markets of neighborhoods like Logan Circle might contribute to the concentration of poverty in neighborhoods like Ivy City.²³

This suggests that gentrification in Northwest neighborhoods, including Greater U Street, is displacing the poor to deeper concentrations of poverty within the city.

What makes Washington, D.C. a site for gentrification? Researchers have acknowledged that gentrification happens in different parts of the country, but not everywhere. There are specific indicators at the regional, city, and neighborhood level that encourage gentrification. Prominent among this list is a tight housing market at all three levels, which is usually found in economically-prosperous metropolitan areas with strong job growth (in the city and/or suburbs) which make them magnets for migration, and hence, increased demand for housing at all levels.

Researchers have identified other conditions in different settings. In “Understanding Gentrification: An Empirical Analysis of the Determinants of Urban

²¹ Margery Austin Turner, et al., *Housing in the Nation’s Capital: 2003* (Washington, D.C.: Fannie Mae Foundation, 2003), 2.

²² Turner, et al., 2.

²³ Turner, et al., 2.

Housing Renovation,” Andrew C. Helms uses data collected from city-permit applicants to renovate properties in Chicago. He finds:

Older, low-density houses in older, moderate-density neighborhoods are most likely to be renovated [and gentrified]. Accessibility to the CBD [central business district] matters: improvement is more likely in areas that are close to downtown and well-served by mass transit. Housing vacancy does not deter renovation, but nearby public housing projects do. Neighborhood amenities, including city parks and bodies of water (Lake Michigan in this case), encourage renovation activity.²⁴

Kennedy and Leonard also have a set of indicators: high proportion of renters, easy access to job centers (highways and public transit), high level of regional traffic congestion, housing stock of neighborhood has architectural value, and comparatively low property values.²⁵ Meanwhile, Margery Austin Turner and Christopher Snow, both of the Urban Institute, identified the five leading indicators of gentrification specific to Washington, D.C. as low-priced areas 1) adjacent to higher-priced areas; 2) with good Metro access; 3) with historic architecture; 4) with large housing units; and 5) with recent property-value appreciation.²⁶ All five indicators are present in the Greater U Street neighborhood.

Chief among those indicators is the recent property-value appreciation. In 2001, one source noted that residents in Shaw had seen their property-value assessments increase by greater than fifty percent over a period of three years.²⁷ Additionally, the newly-constructed Ellington Apartments, which are located at 13th and U Streets, as

²⁴ Andrew C. Helms, “Understanding Gentrification: An Empirical Analysis of the Determinants of Urban Housing Renovation,” *Journal of Urban Economics* 54 (2003): 496.

²⁵ Kennedy and Leonard, 8.

²⁶ Margery Austin Turner and Christopher Snow, “Leading Indicators of Gentrification in D.C. Neighborhoods,” Urban Institute, 14 June 2001, <<http://www.urban.org/Presentations/Events/DCGentrification/sld012.htm>> (23 April 2004).

²⁷ Government of the District of Columbia, *Title-by-Title Summary of the “Housing Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Production Omnibus Amendment Act of 2001”* (Washington, D.C.: PDF on website, 2001), 5.

reported in October 2003, rent for \$1,315 per month for a one-bedroom unit to \$2,550 per month for a two-bedroom apartment with a den. In the 1900 block of 12th Street, new two- and three-bedroom townhouses were on the market in October 2003 for \$650,000 to \$1 million each.²⁸ Furthermore, property value assessments in the neighborhood increased by 19.18 percent between 2004 and 2005.²⁹

Due to the lack of official neighborhood boundaries, it is difficult to obtain data that corresponds directly with the neighborhood, but the use of two Census tracts (4300 and 4400), which correspond closely with the neighborhood boundaries utilized in this work (see Figure 2), can provide a rough idea of changes in property values and demographics as well. The increase in the median price of single family home sales in tract 4300 between 1995 and 1998 was 9.8%; between 1998 and 2001 was 16%; and between 2001 and 2003 was 24%.³⁰ The increase in the median price of single family home sales in tract 4400 between 1995 and 1998 was 6.7%; between 1998 and 2001 was 16%; and between 2001 and 2003 was 31%.³¹ During those same time periods, the average for the city was 0.4%, 12%, and 12% respectively.³² At the same time, the racial demographics of the same Census tracts dramatically changed. According to the 1990 Census, Census tract 4300 was broken down as follows: 55% black (non-Hispanic), 30% white (non-Hispanic), 14% Hispanic, and 1.5% other race (non-Hispanic). By 2000, the same area had changed to the following: 41% black (non-Hispanic), 37% white (non-

²⁸ Bryan Anderton, "A makeover for U street," *Washington Blade*, 24 Oct. 2003, accessed online 3 May 2004.

²⁹ Eric M. Weiss, "D.C. Assessed Values Rise 14.6 Percent," *The Washington Post*, 25 Feb. 2005, B1.

³⁰ NeighborhoodInfo DC, "DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4300," *NeighborhoodInfo DC*, 7 Feb. 2005, <http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/censustract/nbr_prof_trct65.html> (6 May 2005).

³¹ NeighborhoodInfo DC, "DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4400," *NeighborhoodInfo DC*, 7 Feb. 2005, <http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/censustract/nbr_prof_trct66.html> (6 May 2005).

³² "DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4300." and "DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4400."

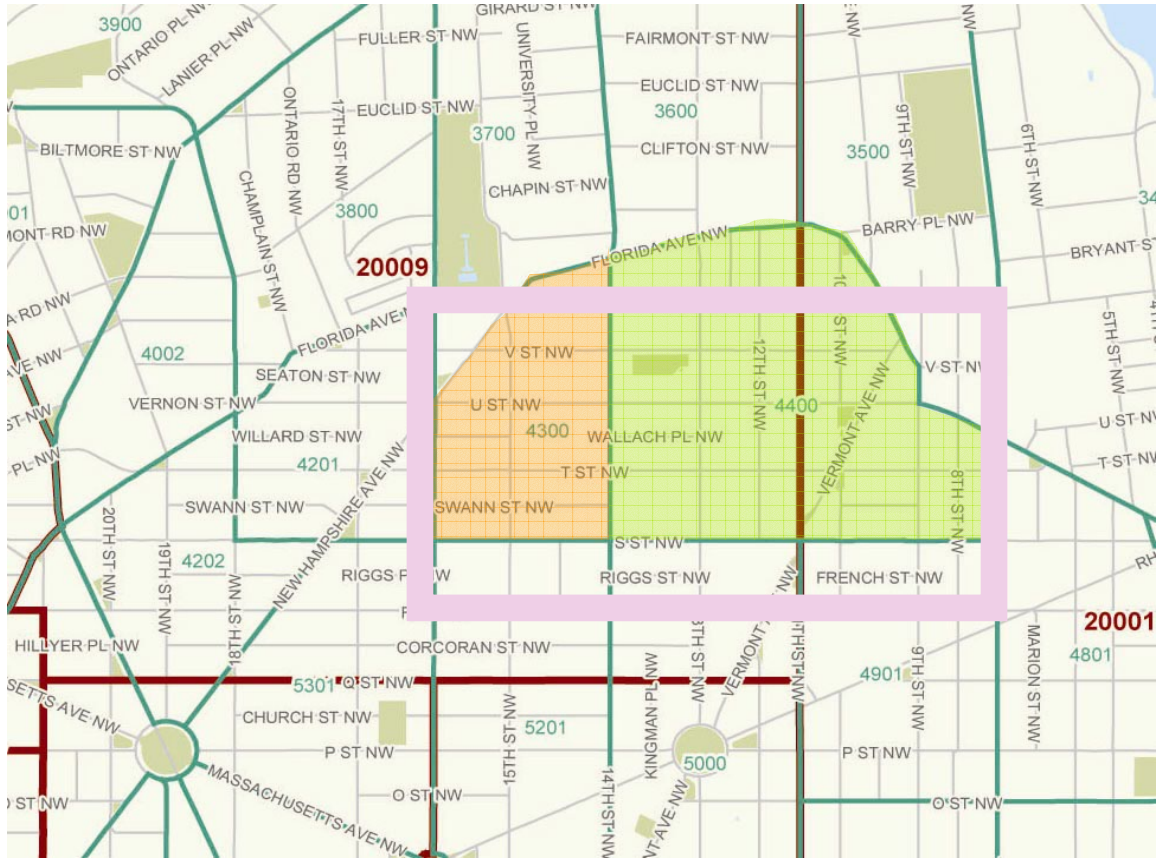


Figure 2. Greater U Street Census Tracts
Map of the Greater U Street neighborhood illustrating Census Tracts 4300 (orange) and 4400 (green) in relation to the neighborhood boundaries (purple).

Hispanic), 19% Hispanic, and 2.8% other race (non-Hispanic).³³ The 1990 Census described the following of Census tract 4400: 77% black (non-Hispanic), 8.7% white (non-Hispanic), 12% Hispanic, and 1.8% other race (non-Hispanic). The 2000 Census details an even more dramatic change for Census tract 4400: 58% black (non-Hispanic), 22% white (non-Hispanic), 17% Hispanic, and 2.7% other race (non-Hispanic).³⁴

What this demonstrates is the correlation between the increased cost of housing and the increasing presence of white residents and a decreasing presence of black

³³ “DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4300.”
³⁴ “DC Census Tract Profile: Tract 4400.”

residents. The appreciation in single family homes over the last decade in the neighborhood far out paces the city as a whole. The price increase dramatically escalates in tract 4400, which spans the eastern portion of the neighborhood. In the decade between 1990 and 2000, there was a dramatic increase in the percentage of white residents, especially in tract 4400. It should be no surprise that the most dramatic changes occur in the eastern Census tract; the gentrification pressures are traveling east, which is a common pattern for Washington, D.C.

While the majority of this discussion of gentrification has centered on housing, the intent of this work is to shift focus to cultural heritage activities, which in the case of Greater U Street, concentrates more on commercial and cultural enterprises than housing. There is such a heavy focus on housing in my efforts to define and explain gentrification, because those are the terms in which most of the gentrification literature discusses and comprehends the process. Housing is at the core of gentrification, after all, because the process involves the influx of middle-class residents rather than simply establishments for their use, and the residential real estate market affects a great deal of people by bolstering their property values, which signals a solid economic investment or the threat of displacement. However, cultural heritage activities and related historic preservation of not only residential spaces are also salient to the gentrification process, but their roles remain understudied. In the last decade, preservation and cultural heritage activities have increasingly aligned with capitalistic pursuits, most notably in the creation of organizations and models designed for the specific purpose of combining heritage with economic development. This activity has been on the rise and under the radar in many locations and contributed to gentrification in the Greater U Street neighborhood. As

Cultural Tourism DC has created a model out of its efforts on U Street to be replicated in other District neighborhoods and cities across the country, it is important to investigate these efforts and the impact they have had on the neighborhood in order to better handle challenges in Greater U Street and the many places that will undoubtedly receive similar attention from similar efforts.

Having demonstrated that the Greater U Street neighborhood appears to be gentrifying based on the indicators aforementioned, but especially evident in the demographic changes and rises in property values discussed above, the remainder of this thesis strives to show how cultural heritage activities are framing that process and what the results are. In the next two chapters I examine the competing stories of Greater U Street—first about the neighborhood in general and then in three case study buildings—before launching into a cultural critique of these processes.

Lacking any official, comprehensive, or authoritative written history, the Greater U Street neighborhood possesses a multitude of competing stories about the past.³⁵ The context and discourse of the past, present, and future depend on how one frames those stories. Never claiming to be an authority on the neighborhood, I interviewed five heritage experts, or those deemed to have intimate knowledge of the neighborhood, heritage activities, and changes due to gentrification in order to confirm and illustrate these competing histories. In struggling with how to present these histories, I have decided to use CT/DC's narrative—culled from its various activities and brochures detailed below and the most prominent of these stories—as the starting point. Interviews and other sources illuminate the discrepancies in order to leave the reader with a more complex, if not exhaustive, depiction of Greater U Street.

Before delving into those competing stories, however, it is appropriate to present the history of CT/DC. Born in the effort to combine economic development with cultural heritage, CT/DC's institutional history is salient to the history presented about Greater U Street.

³⁵ Check these volumes for some partial histories of the neighborhood: Greenlee, Marcia M. "Shaw: Heart of Black Washington." In *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation's Capital*, edited by Kathryn Schneider Smith. Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1988; Smith, Kathryn S. "Remembering U Street." *Washington History* 9, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1997-1998): 29-54; Fitzpatrick, Sandra and Maria R. Goodwin. *The Guide to Black Washington: Places and Events of Historical and Cultural Significance in the Nation's Capital*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990; Green, Constance McLaughlin. *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967. Also consider for a more holistic view of Washington: Green, Constance McLaughlin. *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800-1950*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

THE GENESIS OF CULTURAL TOURISM DC

Cultural Tourism DC (CT/DC), known as the DC Heritage and Tourism Coalition until June 2003, describes itself as “a grassroots, nonprofit coalition of more than 140 arts, heritage, cultural, and community organizations throughout Washington, DC...Cultural Tourism DC also promotes economic development and hometown appreciation of the capital’s rich variety of heritage and arts attractions.”³⁶ CT/DC, the key player in the cultural heritage activities on U Street, was created for the purpose of linking heritage and economic development. The emergence of this organization is paramount in the heritage activities in the neighborhood as well as its use as a role model for other organizations across the country, and therefore a brief history of its evolution informs my analysis and cultural critique. This history is based on my interview with Kathryn S. Smith, founding executive director of CT/DC; no written institutional history exists as of this writing. Smith, a white historian specializing in Washington as a residential city, has been a resident since 1965, originally hailing from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A past president of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., she retired as executive director of CT/DC in March 2005.

Smith observes that cultural tourism emerged in discourse in 1995. That year, the same as the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism which also focused on the issue, Smith attended a national conference that brought the issue to her attention. These conferences set cultural tourism as one of the major goals for the U.S. travel industry. Reflecting on this sometimes uneasy marriage of heritage and economic development, Smith observes:

³⁶ Cultural Tourism DC, “About Us,” *Cultural Tourism DC*, n.d. <<http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/information2531/information.htm>> (8 May 2005).

What you're really doing with cultural tourism is bringing the worlds of culture and commerce together and you speak different speak, you talk different. One's mission driven, the other one's bottom-line driven, and you still see that all the time...and it's not easy, because, in fact, sometimes there are misunderstandings or you're not quite on the same wavelength because your boards are different, the people who are paying you look for different things, and you have to understand that and you have to compromise. You have to compromise.³⁷

It was not Smith who instigated this marriage of heritage and profit, but instead the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C. Smith credits Carmen James Lane, then with the Humanities Council, of bringing the attention of the concept of combining heritage and economic development to then executive director of the Council Francine Cary. Smith became involved when Cary convened a small group to discuss possibly organizing around this phenomenon. In 1996, they informally organized as the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition (DCHTC), which operated under the fiscal umbrella of the Humanities Council. Serving as one of the first paid consultants, Smith assumed the role of executive director when the group officially incorporated and assumed an independent status in 1999.

DCHTC's original mission statement, as Smith recalls, was: "To strengthen the image and economy of the District of Columbia by engaging visitors in the unique history and culture of the city of Washington."³⁸ For the first time, there was city-wide organization of small heritage organizations such as house museums, cultural centers, neighborhood organizations, and historical societies. The organization's original goals "were to call attention to the culture and history of the city beyond the monuments," and in 2000, DCHTC along with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (known as Metro), the Washington Convention Center, and other sponsors produced a series of 8.5"

³⁷ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

³⁸ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

by 3.5” double-sided cards featuring sites “Beyond the Monuments.” Reflecting on her interest in pursuing this kind of work, Smith explains:

It intrigued me because what it provided was a way within commerce—which this is about—to make a point that place matters and that while doing local history can be considered sort of quaint in this country anyway, not every place...doing local history is antiquarianism. I’ve been working a long time saying that it’s the local, the more particular, the closer you get to something the truer it is. The study of small places really contains a lot about American history and human history. All of these things led me to look at cultural tourism as an opportunity to investigate within the marketplace, where there was actually money to pay for this, what creates identity, what means things to people, and can there be funding actually to support an investigation of culture and heritage as economic assets. So this is now, in 2005, common parlance, you know, we’ve got Richard Florida [author of *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*] out there and all that, but in 1995 it was still a rather new idea.³⁹

In 1999, Smith authored and DCHTC published *Capital Assets: A Report on the Tourist Potential of Neighborhood Heritage and Cultural Sites in Washington, D.C.* Organized by neighborhood and theme, *Capital Assets* assesses what is ready, what is almost ready, and what could be ready. During the interview, Smith indicated that *Capital Assets* became the blueprint for how to proceed with developing heritage activities, beginning with the U Street neighborhood, which had many items identified as ready and a handful of those almost ready and some that could be ready.⁴⁰ U Street was also selected for Smith’s experience in working on previous heritage projects such as the Thurgood Marshall Center and “Remembering U Street” art installation as well as her

³⁹ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

⁴⁰ Kathryn Schneider Smith, *Capital Assets: A Report on the Tourist Potential of Neighborhood Heritage and Cultural Sites in Washington, D.C.*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, 1999), 42-45.

concern for the looming gentrification she feared would wipe out this rich history (to be detailed below).⁴¹

In June 2003, DC Heritage and Tourism Coalition changed its name to Cultural Tourism DC. The name change reflected the evolution to the organization's approach to promoting the city's heritage. In this field, "heritage" is often used to refer to the underrepresented history and culture of peoples, while "culture" refers to high culture or culture of the dominant group(s). The convention was that cultural tourism was conducted in big cities and heritage tourism in smaller towns. DCHTC realized they were trying to conduct heritage tourism in a big city and lacked credibility by not engaging the bigger attractions in the city for tourists, which included institutions on the National Mall. By evolving to CT/DC, the organization changed from promoting only the heritage aside from the monuments and extended its efforts to promoting all of Washington's culture and heritage in big and small venues. Smith believes that partnering with larger institutions has boosted visibility and attendance of some of the smaller venues the organization was originally dedicated to promoting. At the same time, CT/DC revised its mission statement to "To strengthen the image and economy of the District of Columbia by engaging **residents and** visitors in the unique history and culture of the city of Washington." The addition of "residents" to the mission statement indicates a change in thinking about how the activities it conducts build pride and develop a sense of place for "the first audience": the residents of Washington, D.C. and the metropolitan area.

What has resulted from these efforts at the city level as well as at the micro-level of Greater U Street is a model sought for replication in the city and other cities across the country. Known as the Greater Shaw Model Heritage and Economic Development

⁴¹ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

Project, Smith has been asked by the Deputy Mayor of Economic Development to assist in implementing this model in other city neighborhoods, particularly the ones targeted under the Mayor's Great Streets Initiative. Considered widely successful, it is difficult to measure the success. There are quantitative and qualitative means of measuring success, and CT/DC has never had the funding required to capture any hard statistics on its activities, but Smith notes that the promotion CT/DC provides for the neighborhood, its businesses, and its institutions has resulted in job creation, more visitation to the neighborhood, and solid national press (including the cover of the *Los Angeles Times* travel section in 2000). Partnerships and special promotions can sometimes bring in more precise measures. Smith also points out that not all of the success can be subscribed to CT/DC; for example, Ben's Chili Bowl has spawned its own national identity with the assistance of Bill Cosby. Smith notes, "people certainly consider it [the model] successful."⁴²

THE CULTURAL TOURISM DC STORY

CT/DC's "City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail" booklet welcomes visitors to the history of the neighborhood with the opening paragraph of its introduction written by Kathryn S. Smith:

Until 1920, when New York's Harlem overtook it, Washington, D.C. could claim the largest urban African American population in the United States. The U Street area provided the heartbeat. It inspired and nurtured the elegance and the musical genius of Duke Ellington. Leaders in science, law, education, and the arts—such as Thurgood Marshall, Dr.

⁴² Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

Charles Drew, Langston Hughes, and the opera star Madame Evanti—walked these streets and lifted the aspirations of its families.⁴³

Emblematic of CT/DC's narrative of Greater U Street with a decided emphasis on the black middle class, this paragraph illustrates the four reoccurring themes in CT/DC's story: the focal point of African American life in Washington, D.C., the black middle class focusing on prominent residents and visitors, Duke Ellington (a category unto his own), and comparison with Harlem, arguably North America's most well-regarded site of African-American culture, also largely associated with the black middle class.

Cast as a rise and fall narrative, CT/DC begins the story in 1791 with the L'Enfant Plan for Washington; the neighborhood lies within the northern boundary of the original plan but lay nearly completely undeveloped until the Civil War when the area housed scattered Union encampments. After the war, as the city's population grew by leaps and bounds and increased demand for housing, the neighborhood developed along the tracks of streetcars on 14th Street. Most of the neighborhood's housing stock, comprised of Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne style brick row houses, sprang up between 1870 and 1900 and sheltered white and black residents of all economic backgrounds. By the turn of the twentieth century, segregation had tightened and transformed the area into the "heart of black Washington." By 1920, the neighborhood boasted more than 300 black-owned businesses including a host of fashionable dining establishments and a rich entertainment district (earning U Street the title of "Black Broadway") visited by all the famous African-American musicians, including Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Sarah Vaughn, Jelly Roll Morton, and favorite native son Duke Ellington. At the same time,

⁴³ Kathryn S. Smith, introduction to *City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail* by Paul K. Williams (Washington, D.C.: The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. and DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, 2001), no page numbers.

this was the place to find prominent black doctors, dentists, and lawyers. CT/DC focuses on the golden age of the neighborhood from 1920 to 1950 illustrated by the numerous commercial establishments, institutional and social organizations, churches, and educational facilities (including nearby Howard University).

One of those establishments is the True Reformer Building (1200 U Street). Commissioned by the Richmond-based United Order of True Reformers, the building was designed by one of the first African-American architects, John A. Lankford, and completed in 1903.⁴⁴ On a recent walking tour of the neighborhood, the tour guide pointed out that this was the first building in which a black architect functioned as solely an architect and not as a contractor-builder.⁴⁵ The True Reformer Building hosted a variety of activities from fancy balls to plays to basketball and battalion drill practice. The building also hosted one of Duke Ellington's first paid performances.⁴⁶

On the walking tour, in front of 1910 Vermont Avenue, tour guides introduce Madame Evanti (Lillian Evans Tibbs) as the first internationally known African-American opera singer who made her home here. Madame Evanti was also an art collector, and one of her male heirs continued the tradition of collecting exceptional works by black artists. If I remember correctly from the tour, this prominent art collection was donated to the Corcoran Gallery, which has a reputable collection of black art in part because of the Tibbs family.⁴⁷

Many CT/DC stories of the neighborhood focus on the glamour and glitz of the balls, night clubs, and jazz entertainment. CT/DC cites the many old timers that spoke of

⁴⁴ Paul K. Williams, *City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail* (Washington, D.C.: The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. and DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, 2001), no page numbers.

⁴⁵ Cultural Tourism DC and Judith, "Before Harlem, There Was U Street" walking tour, 17 April 2005.

⁴⁶ Williams

⁴⁷ Cultural Tourism DC and Judith

how “people dressed [fancifully] in those days” and that “U Street was so grand that to come here ‘you had to wear a tie.’”⁴⁸ But CT/DC also tells of the intellectual gatherings in Greater U Street. With Howard University on its eastern border, the area attracted countless professors, students, lawyers, and doctors who lived, worked, and patronized U Street. In addition, on a recent walking tour, the guide credited Greater U Street as the birth of the New Negro Renaissance (more popularly known as the Harlem Renaissance) since *Cane*, credited as the first book in this movement, was written by Jean Toomer in this neighborhood.⁴⁹ Others associated with the movement met here, including Georgia Douglas Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke.⁵⁰

Such grand and detailed stories are told about the golden era, but the period following it receives very little attention. The extent of CT/DC’s detail of the period following 1950 is best summarized by this portion of the concluding paragraph for the aforementioned introduction to the *City Within a City* guide:

The neighborhood began to change in the 1950s when the end of legal segregation opened new housing opportunities for African Americans and many chose to leave for newer, less crowded places. Then the 1968 riots following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., which began at 14th and U, marked the neighborhood as unsafe. Today the neighborhood is experiencing a renaissance, sparked by the construction of the Reeves Municipal Center in 1986, connections to the city’s Metrorail system in 1991, a revival of local nightclubs and restaurants, and renewed interest in the neighborhood’s historic buildings.⁵¹

The Frank D. Reeves Municipal Center is a large District government building located at the corner of 14th and U Streets. Then Mayor Marion Barry selected the site intentionally to draw investment to the neighborhood. Its opening in 1986 is noted by many as

⁴⁸ Williams

⁴⁹ Cultural Tourism DC and Judith

⁵⁰ Williams

⁵¹ Kathryn S. Smith, introduction to *City Within a City*.

symbolic. Also in 1986, Metro began construction of the stop, which effectively killed the neighborhood until it opened in 1991. Many observe that the five years of Metro construction, which closed down U Street between 10th and 13th Streets, was more harmful to the neighborhood than the riots.⁵² Only three businesses survived Metro construction: the Industrial Savings Bank, Lee's Flower and Card Shop, and Ben's Chili Bowl.⁵³

CT/DC tells this story through its many activities and brochures, which largely credit Kathryn S. Smith, founding and former executive director of the organization. Smith's work in the neighborhood predates the creation of CT/DC. While she had been aware of the Greater U Street neighborhood for decades as a Washington historian, Smith became directly involved with it when she went to the ceremony for the unveiling of the National Historic Landmark plaque for the 12th Street YMCA building in 1994 and decided she wanted to assist the Thurgood Marshall Trust in compiling a history and oral histories for the building. From that part-time voluntary involvement grew an affiliation with the U Street Festival Foundation headed by Chauncey Lyles and assisted by Henry P. Whitehead. With assistance from Lyles and Whitehead, Smith and Marya Annette McQuirter, an independent scholar, co-curated "Remembering U Street," an art installation mounted on a Metro fence for two and one-half years starting in 1997, but Smith recalls wanting something permanent, knowing the fence would come down. "Remembering U Street" relied on personal as well as library archives of photographs and memorabilia and oral histories.

⁵² Nizam Ali and Virginia Ali, "Local History Series: Ben's Chili Bowl, The First 47 Years," lecture at the Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C., 31 March 2005. and Hon. Frank Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 18 April 2005.

⁵³ Hon. Frank Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 18 April 2005.

The oral histories conducted for the “Remembering U Street” installation served as primary sources for the products CT/DC created to promote the Greater U Street neighborhood. Beginning with a bus tour in 1997, CT/DC marketed the neighborhood as “Duke Ellington’s DC: A Tour of the Historic Shaw Neighborhood in the Nation’s Capital.” For \$39.95 per person, the half-day tour included a small, five-block walk on U Street, but was intentionally designed as a sheltered experience for tourists.⁵⁴ Tourists experienced the neighborhood, not as Duke Ellington did or any other person who lived in the vicinity did, but instead from the safety of a bus. Very little contact was made with people and the physical environment of the neighborhood since tourists were mostly confined to the bus. The next product CT/DC developed was the “Before Harlem, There was U Street” guided walking tour, which continues on the first and third Saturdays of each month for \$12 per person. The success of the walking tour led to the development of the “City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail,” which opened in 2001. Fourteen sites are marked by trail signs and an accompanying free booklet that is currently out of print, but still available in select places in the neighborhood and city. In 2003, CT/DC published the free *African American Heritage Trail* booklet and companion online database with additional and expanded entries. Greater U Street is the most represented neighborhood with thirty-one entries in this collection of significant African-American sites throughout the city. Finally, beginning in December 2003 and continuing in the spring of 2004, CT/DC with the 14th & U Main Streets Initiative installed

⁵⁴ “Duke Ellington’s DC: A Tour of the Historic Shaw Neighborhood in the Nation’s Capital,” undated bus tour brochure sponsored by DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, Manna Community Development Corporation, and DC Chamber of Commerce.

permanent heritage window displays in 7-Eleven, Lee's Flower and Card Shop, and the Industrial Bank that showcase the heritage of the neighborhood.⁵⁵

When asked about the process of creating heritage activities for the neighborhood, Smith informed me of her primary steps: to build awareness in the community and then organize around that awareness to express the neighborhood heritage. During the awareness-building phase of the project, Kathryn Smith contacted her friend Hendrick Smith (no relation), whom she worked with to craft the 1999 PBS documentary *Duke Ellington's Washington*. When asked about the relationship between CT/DC's heritage activities and the rapid gentrification of the neighborhood, Smith recalled:

I thought, if this place loses its African-American identity something huge will be lost for the city. Can't understand this city without understanding it as a black, major impact of black culture. I thought of all places that might stand against being wiped out by gentrification it would be this place, because African Americans had such a strong foothold there and it would never probably be the same as it was—no place ever is—but that it would be a place that could honestly be economically and racially and ethnically mixed because it had such a strong base. And I still think that. I think that what we've done is helping to energize the people who are reinvesting in the history that was theirs. It's a huge force to stand up against, but I think part of the push against it is knowing this history.⁵⁶

OTHER STORIES: PROBLEMATIZING CT/DC'S NARRATIVE

Marya Annette McQuirter, who received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Michigan in 2000, served as project director and historian for the *African American Heritage Trail and Database* and previously worked with Kathryn Smith on the "Remembering U Street" project. McQuirter, an African American independent scholar

⁵⁵ Cultural Tourism DC, "Heritage Window Display Links Heritage with Economic and Workforce Development on U Street," *Cultural Tourism DC: Press Room*, 25 March 2004, <http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/dch_tourism2608/dch_tourism_show.htm?doc_id=220603> (7 April 2005).

⁵⁶ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

originally from Washington who has lived on 11th Street between U and T since August 2004, contests CT/DC's story, as she disclosed to me during our interview. In her experience working on the oral history project that resulted in "Remembering U Street," McQuirter observes that the CT/DC story is a "rise and fall narrative which I totally disagreed with. So I was attempting to insert more poor and working class and tensions around gender and all these different things, but that's not the thrust that folks were interested in."⁵⁷ In her interview with me, Kathryn Smith admits that the narrative told was shaped by the oral histories of which admittedly "some of it's nostalgia, but some of it's real. There was a real community there." People told stories of triumph against incredible odds.⁵⁸ But that does not diminish the role of the historian in shaping how these stories are told. McQuirter notes that "class was downplayed" and that the neighborhood was "cast as a middle-class haven or upper-middle-class haven" in which poor and working classes only enter the story to either point out that they lived next to the successful entertainers, lawyers, and doctors or as the dominant and debilitating force in the neighborhood following desegregation and the riots.⁵⁹

While CT/DC never specifically declares Greater U Street as an exclusively African-American neighborhood, the description and focus on black middle and upper class institutions and general lack of attention to others suggests this. McQuirter notes:

There's a sense, for example, that between 1920 and 1950 every business on U Street was owned by blacks, now they're not. That's just not true. The majority of the movie theaters were owned by whites. There were Chinese-Americans who owned chop suey joints since 1907. There were Jewish Americans who owned businesses. Clearly in between 1920 and 1950 there were black business folks who were marketing U Street as a black business [district]. You also have—there was an organization that I

⁵⁷ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

⁵⁸ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

⁵⁹ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

can't think of the name of it—they were black theater owners but primarily black theater managers who would organize themselves in the late 1920s because they had to work to convince black folks that they needed to patronize black businesses or needed to patronize businesses that had black managers; that wasn't an automatic thing.⁶⁰

Additionally, the April 1946 edition of *Newspic* featured “Washington’s You Street,” in which it supports McQuirter’s assertions and observes both the prominence and diversity of U Street:

Washington, D.C. has two streets known above all others: Constitution Avenue, down which all dignitaries parade en route to the White House, and U Street, a perpetual parade of sepia Washington en route anywhere and nowhere. For a bustling, teeming mile from Scurlock’s Photo Studio at 9th St., to Schlossberg’s Hardware Store at 18th, the main stem of technicolor Washington is crowded with the business enterprises of whites and blacks, Jews, Italians, Greeks, and all possible polygot combinations.⁶¹

Unsurprisingly, CT/DC’s neighborhood history does not include the many queer sites once located in the vicinity or details on the queer identities of some of its most celebrated residents, including Langston Hughes and Alain Locke, prominent intellectual and professor at Howard University who is credited with first naming the phenomenon that is now known as the Harlem Renaissance. In his book *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, Kevin J. Mumford “recounts the story of how interracial vice districts were formed and reconstructs the social experiences of the people who inhabited them.”⁶² These interracial vice districts were usually located in African-American neighborhoods and featured heterosexual as well as homosexual sites of interaction. While Harlem is a well-known interzone, CT/DC does not extend its comparison of U Street to Harlem into this realm. Such places

⁶⁰ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

⁶¹ “Washington’s You Street,” *Newspic*, April 1946, no page numbers.

⁶² Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xi.

certainly existed in Washington, specifically in the Greater U Street vicinity as the Rainbow History Project has documented the existence of some queer single-race and interracial locales.⁶³ By omitting the presence of certain people and focusing on a heterosexual black middle class, CT/DC dictates a very specific narration of the neighborhood that consequently frames the discourse about the neighborhood's past, present, and future. McQuirter argues the following about "the way that the history of U Street is narrated":

We're looking at this sign now, "City Within a City"—that's one way of narrating it. And it could have actually been narrated in different ways. Like I've always said you could have narrated U Street as a place of cross-racial, cross-gender, cross-sexual interaction...cross-class interaction...And then if you do that, then what does that do for the whole rise and fall narrative? What does that do for "outsiders"? Then you couldn't necessarily say well these are maybe outsiders coming in because those people who are seen as outsiders actually have a history in the neighborhood.⁶⁴

In other words, the presentation of the neighborhood's history directly impacts the discussions, questions, and definitions of current neighborhood change. The CT/DC narrative plays a direct role in the gentrification of the neighborhood at the discourse level.

In stressing "the way the story has been framed has restricted in some ways what we can talk about what's going on today," McQuirter does not simply mean the stripes of people omitted from the story, but also the period of significance.⁶⁵ CT/DC has clearly constructed 1920-1950 as the neighborhood's golden age, era of interest, or period of significance in preservation terms. The time before, but especially the time after is

⁶³ The Rainbow History Project, "Places & Spaces: Clubs, Bars, Community Centers, etc. of Washington DC's LGBT Community (1920 to the present)," *The Rainbow History Project of Washington, D.C.* <<http://www.rainbowhistory.org/clubs.pdf>> (24 Dec. 2004).

⁶⁴ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

⁶⁵ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

spoken of in minimum detail. Between the riots in 1968 and the opening of the Reeves Center in 1986, there is hardly a mention of the poverty, drug, and prostitution prevalence in “Shameful Shaw” as Norris Dodson described it—let alone any word of the positive events and efforts that occurred. For example, in the essay Kathryn Smith published in *Washington History* on the “Remembering U Street” project, she notes:

In the 1950s, as legal segregation ended, members of the black middle class moved to less crowded neighborhoods recently opened to them, and the Shaw area lost the mix of people that had been one of its greatest strengths. After the April 1968 riots that occurred in the wake of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, more left, and buildings fell into disuse and despair; many remaining residents struggled with the problems associated with poverty and joblessness.⁶⁶

McQuirter points out that the absence of 1968 through 1986 in CT/DC’s narrative does not frame the discussion and history in a good way. It also overlooks the positive strides during that same time frame when the neighborhood hosted a flourishing of black arts, radicals, institutions, and jazz clubs in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, people were interested in reviving the neighborhood for the residents who remained and entered during this period—an urban renaissance planned to benefit the poor and working classes. McQuirter also notes the shaping of the neighborhood by Africans who bought properties and opened restaurants and businesses in the 1980s and possible racial issues involved with how blackness is nationalized.⁶⁷

The documentary *Duke Ellington’s Washington*, which Kathryn Smith lent her historical consulting skills to, follows CT/DC’s narrative of the neighborhood, but it provides a bit more detail on the riots and the period following the riots. Over a graphic of a newspaper headline that reads “‘Crime is Taking Over This Neighborhood,’

⁶⁶ Kathryn S. Smith, “Remembering U Street,” *Washington History* 9, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1997-1998): 30.

⁶⁷ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

Residents Say,” Virginia Ali, one of the proprietors of Ben’s Chili Bowl narrates, “After the riots, this area just deteriorated to absolute slums. Drugs started to infiltrate the community. People were just intimidated, people didn’t want to come into this community, and I’m talking about African-American people...We [Ben’s Chili Bowl] were the only light on U Street for a long time.”⁶⁸ A few minutes later, historian Edward C. Smith explains, “The darkest period came about four or five years after the riots, and it wasn’t the physical deterioration of the community that I felt was darkest. It was that sense of forlornness on the part of long-time residents who felt that the world that they knew, that made them what they were, had gone and would never be brought back.”⁶⁹

Hon. Frank Smith, former Ward One Councilman (1982-1996) and civil rights activist, also has a different perspective on the neighborhood story. Frank Smith, no relation to Kathryn Smith, originally from Mississippi, moved to Washington just before the 1968 riots after working with the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta. As founder and executive director of the African American Civil War Museum located on the first floor of the True Reformer Building two blocks west of the National Park Service African American Civil War Memorial, Smith places the neighborhood’s history in a broader context that encompasses the Civil War. African Americans fought for freedom during the Civil War, which the Memorial and Museum detail, and then once free built churches, schools, and communities in places including Greater U Street.⁷⁰ Extending the history of the neighborhood to the Civil War creates a narrative of struggle; African Americans struggled under slavery, struggled for freedom during the war, and struggled for survival during segregation and post-segregated Washington. Frank Smith’s narrative is one of

⁶⁸ *Duke Ellington’s Washington*, Washington, D.C.: Hendrick Smith Productions, Inc., 1999.

⁶⁹ *Duke Ellington’s Washington*

⁷⁰ Hon. Frank Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 18 April 2005.

black citizenship and nation-building. As McQuirter noted the many different ways that Greater U Street could be narrated, this is yet another option.

CT/DC does provide space for the Civil War in the neighborhood history, but it lacks any real context. Tourists on the walking tour are told that this is an appropriate location for the African American Civil War Memorial, but the why is ambiguous. Tour guides often cite the fact that the larger neighborhood name Shaw, which is a controversial label discussed in chapter one, is in honor of Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the African American 54th Massachusetts Regiment featured in the film *Glory*. The “City Within a City” booklet asserts (before mentioning the neighborhood’s namesake): “The Cardozo Shaw Neighborhood and the Greater U Street Historic District are rich in African American and Civil War history. The area is the ideal place for the African American Civil War Memorial now located at the intersection of Tenth and U Streets and Vermont Avenue.”⁷¹ After referencing the scattered Union encampments in the vicinity, the booklet continues, “These camps were safe havens for freedmen fleeing the South, and some chose to stay and make their homes in the area.”⁷² This vague reference, which is generally not stressed in the narrative of the neighborhood, alludes to some of the themes that Frank Smith speaks of, but yet is short of the full force of placing the neighborhood history in a more powerful national and civil rights story of struggle to survive and create space.

Not all those I interviewed took issue with CT/DC’s story of the neighborhood. Norris A. Dodson III, an African-American real estate agent based in Sheppard Park south of the Maryland-District border, who also serves the Greater U Street

⁷¹ Williams

⁷² Williams

neighborhood, spoke of his and familial memories of the neighborhood that uphold the black middle class narrative.⁷³ While Dodson himself was not raised in Greater U Street, both his parents were and both grandfathers owned separate real estate brokerage firms in the neighborhood during the golden era. Dodson played basketball at the 12th Street YMCA as a youngster and has worked in the neighborhood as a realtor and volunteer since the 1970s, witnessing attempts to revive the area soon after its decline.⁷⁴ Besides memories passed down from his elders, Dodson's knowledge of the neighborhood has been enriched by his daughter Lori Dodson, who recently resigned from her position with CT/DC as director of the Greater Shaw Model Heritage and Economic Development Project.⁷⁵

Norris Dodson did provide me with a contested story within the greater neighborhood history, however. Dodson's wife is also in the real estate business, but with a different office, and recently sold 1212 T Street, NW, which the Dodsons and others maintain to be one of the childhood homes of Duke Ellington. In an effort to promote the neighborhood history and legacy of Duke Ellington, the realtors celebrated the sale of the house to an Ellington enthusiast with politicians and press, including the *Washington Post*, which covered the story in its Sunday magazine.⁷⁶ However, Judith (no last name given), the tour guide of the "Before Harlem, There was U Street" walking tour I took shortly following the interview, disputed this story. She credits Kathryn Smith with discovering that 1212 T was an Ellington family home, but one they occupied after Ellington left Washington. While Ellington may have visited the home, it is incorrect to

⁷³ Norris A. Dodson III, interview by Stephanie Frank, 17 April 2005.

⁷⁴ Norris A. Dodson III, interview by Stephanie Frank, 17 April 2005.

⁷⁵ Lori Dodson did not respond to interview requests.

⁷⁶ Norris A. Dodson III, interview by Stephanie Frank, 17 April 2005.

advertise it as one where he lived, which she believes is a rumor started in *The Guide to Black Washington* by Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin.⁷⁷

In the conclusion of the introduction to the “City Within a City” guide, Kathryn Smith boldly asserts, “Restored as a lively center of community life, the neighborhood is now shared by people of all races who honor its legacy.”⁷⁸ However, not everyone would agree with this statement. Lawrence Guyot, an African-American ANC commissioner for district 1B for sixteen years until 2004 and civil rights activist, is one of those dissenters. Guyot lives in the 500 block of U Street, and in the years he served as ANC commissioner witnessed the deterioration of race relations in the neighborhood, which he characterizes as an attack on black interests by white “vigilantes” headed by Jim Graham, Councilman for Ward One (who defeated Frank Smith in the Democratic primary for that seat). Guyot explains his perspective on race relations, which informs his critique of neighborhood activities: “The problem with race in Washington is that it involves everything. There’s nothing done in Washington that’s not done through the prism of race, but there is no public dialogue which makes it more dangerous, more devastating.”⁷⁹ He contends this tension is especially visible in liquor license applications; white applicants have never been challenged on U Street, but black applicants face increasing opposition. At the same time, many of the new residents in the high-priced apartment and condominium buildings have made overt attempts to extinguish existing entertainment establishments. While Greater U Street has always been both an entertainment and

⁷⁷ Cultural Tourism DC and Judith. and Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin, *The Guide to Black Washington: Places and Events of Historical and Cultural Significance in the Nation’s Capital* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), 182.

⁷⁸ Williams

⁷⁹ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

residential district, many relative newcomers believe there is no place for entertainment in this residential zone.⁸⁰

Guyot spoke candidly about his experience with the creation of the Greater U Street Historic District and his observations of the cultural heritage activities headed by CT/DC. Although some—including Paul K. Williams, who has consulted with CT/DC—have tried to pin the opposition to the historic district solely on Guyot, he maintains the entire ANC 1B delegation opposed the creation of the Greater U Street Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998). Guyot recalls there was little invitation for the ANC commissioners to get involved with the historic district process, that it was predominately white-led, and that he did not know of anyone he trusted who supported its creation. When deciding how to vote on the proposition, the ANC commissioners considered the following three items to be troublesome: it did not include LeDroit Park,⁸¹ there were many more white people involved in the organization than black people, and they could not logically explain how the boundaries were drawn. He and his fellow 1B representatives opposed the district because they feared a “crumpling of the individual rights of development for blacks who owned property there,” especially without their involvement in the process.⁸² Those fears have become reality; Guyot told me how Jim Graham and his followers have successfully thwarted the Public Welfare Foundation’s attempts to donate land behind the True Reformer Building to Manna, Inc. for the development of self-perpetuating affordable housing (a project known as

⁸⁰ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

⁸¹ LeDroit Park, immediately to the east of the Greater U Street neighborhood, was designed in the 1870s as an exclusive, white, gated suburb at the steps of all-black Howard University. By the turn of the twentieth century, LeDroit Park had not only integrated but transformed into a black enclave. It is not entirely clear to me why the inclusion of LeDroit Park, its own historic district, should be included within Greater U Street other than its position as the link between Greater U Street and Howard University.

⁸² Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

Temperance Row) as well as preventing Lee's Flower and Card Shop and the Industrial Bank from developing their properties. Guyot explains, "The historic district, as far as I'm concerned, is less known for what advances it implemented or helped accelerate than it is for its negative utilization of power. It's saying to Mr. Lee and to Mr. Banks at the bank, 'you're not going to develop this property, it's not consistent with what we see as [appropriate].'"⁸³ In other words, historic preservation ordinances and oversight are being misused in order to direct what is desirable to white interests at the expense of black interests.

Guyot is also highly critical of the results of the cultural heritage activities undertaken in the neighborhood by CT/DC for their political stance that suits the interests of white economic development at the expense of racial reconciliation. When first asked about his thoughts on CT/DC, Guyot immediately mentioned the recent resignation of Lori Dodson:

What it means to me is that this, a white professional, apparently neutral, group of professionals that are communicating their message as it relates to what is acceptable, what needs to be changed, who should be here, and at what pace this place be developed, and who should develop it, what should be the end result. Now, you don't have to use direct language to do that, it's significant that recently...a young black professional dropped out of that group. She didn't drop out because there were too many white people it in, but I think she dropped out because there was a message that she couldn't really ethically be identified with and have her reputation back up. And we'll see more of that...U Street will never not be salient to tourism. The question is, can you sell it without black people being there? I think the intent is to say, "yes, you can."⁸⁴

He contends that the process is currently geared to eradicate the black population "as a participating, functioning, stable unit."⁸⁵ Guyot continues, "This is not the first time that

⁸³ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

⁸⁴ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

people have said, ‘okay, we’re going to define what is the best outcome of the situation,’ over which they have no historical claims to ownership, but how, to paraphrase Kathy [Smith], ‘gentrification is coming, we’re just trying to save what we can before it gets here.’ But you know the most effective thing the devil can ever do is persuade people there ain’t no devil.”⁸⁶ Hitting specifically at the combination of heritage and economic development, Guyot observes, “Heritage and the memorabilia and nostalgia and all that is used by them for economic development, and whenever there’s a clash between the two there is no clash. But if you really want to make sure the heritage apparatus remains, there’s going to have to be other groups that make that continue.”⁸⁷ In other words, Guyot observes that when economic interests collide with heritage interests, economic development interests always trump heritage. For heritage to be more accurately represented there need to be other groups actively participating in cultural heritage activities—particularly those less concerned with economic development.

When asked if cultural heritage activities provide anything positive for the neighborhood, Guyot did not hesitate to answer “no.” He explains:

The most positive thing about them is that they exist. Everyone builds a lot of expectancies into that, but if that exists that means there’s a real honest attempt to deal with racism, that means there’s a real honest attempt to get to the reality of the situation, how we can really fashion some way to live together. None of that’s happening. If I said that to the tourist people, they’d be shocked and amazed, they’d want to know why am I interfering in their business, why am I bringing them these problems. See it’s that unrelatedness to the reality that is the negative aspect. The positive aspect is that at least they exist...By definition they can’t afford to tell the complete story...Therefore, they’re going to tell their story. But don’t we all? The problem is that there is not another storyteller that is committed to telling the whole complete truth. That instrumentality is not in competition with anyone else or anything else.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

⁸⁷ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

⁸⁸ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

THE FUTURE

In our interview, Kathryn Smith observed, “I think that it’s very hard to say—this is where we’re going to get into gentrification and changes in the neighborhood—is to what extent does the story about the place just change everything? It’s one of the most dramatic stories in the city, it’s nationally recognized as a place that is changing overnight, also as a place where real estate values are skyrocketing.”⁸⁹ Smith is aware of her many critics, and is also a proponent of evolving the story of Greater U Street. To address some of the issues these competing stories have raised, Smith received a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to organize the “What’s the Story?” Conference in December 2004. CT/DC hosted a large group of scholars and other stakeholders at the conference designed to invite participation in the evolution of the story, to use the many cultural establishments in the neighborhood to broaden and deepen it, and to recognize the multitude of stories within a dominant narrative.⁹⁰ Smith explains:

How could you interpret this whole neighborhood truly deeply? How could you interpret this human experience in this place from all sides? Because it wasn’t just Duke Ellington, it wasn’t just the successful people, it was poor people, it was people struggling, it was people who never made it, it was prostitutes and the numbers. And don’t stop the story at 1960. It isn’t just black either, it’s white and black relationships, it’s gay relationships now, it’s an urban phenomenon that’s going on there. While the story, when we started it, that’s kind of seen on those signs is “let’s look at the wonderful ’30s, ’40s, and ’50s.” Now because everybody’s moved beyond that—and we really are moving with what—it’s not what we sit there and decide which is the story. It really is, “okay, here you all are, what is the story?” It came out very clearly at that conference, I thought. That it’s got to tie the past to the present and the future, you gotta talk to youth, and if you want youth to listen, it has to have some relevance. And so what’s happening in the neighborhood today, what does that have to do with what happened in the past, how does this affect the future? I thought that conference really did what we thought it would do. It also was right out there about, “so what is the

⁸⁹ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

⁹⁰ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

relationship about what we're doing and the changes in the neighborhood today?" And a strong sentiment saying "well, if you're going to do this then you also need to be aware of the need to preserve the people as well as the place." How can people who are advocates for history also be advocates for affordable housing?⁹¹

The proceedings of the conference will be available to the public, but were not available as of this writing. What actually results from this exercise remains to be seen.

Frank Smith, in our interview, asserted, "If we own the story, we own the place."⁹² "We" meaning African Americans. I pose the question, do African Americans own the story, and subsequently own the place?

⁹¹ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

⁹² Hon. Frank Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 18 April 2005.

*Three Spirits of Greater U Street:
The Whitelaw Hotel, The Thurgood Marshall Center
for Service and Heritage, and The Lincoln Theatre*

In order to focus the understanding of the historic preservation and cultural heritage activities in the Greater U Street neighborhood, I selected three case study buildings. While many prominent buildings have been maintained or restored within the neighborhood, the chosen three, the Whitelaw Hotel, the 12th Street YMCA (now known as the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage), and the Lincoln Theatre, are emblematic of the history, heritage, culture, and community that built and maintained them and each has been reincarnated for the current purposes of the revived neighborhood. All three have been widely praised for the restoration of the facilities and current uses and receive attention from CT/DC, especially in the *African American Heritage Trail and Database*, “Before Harlem, There Was U Street” walking tour, and *City Within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail*.

These three case studies are an extension of the previous chapter, illustrating the contested meanings and stories of Greater U Street, especially in relation to class dynamics. The dominant narrative of the neighborhood, prominently told by CT/DC, of the triumph and glory of the black middle class during segregation, shapes and reflects the histories of these buildings. As a result, like with the stories of the larger neighborhood, there are contested meanings for each of these properties. There are many ways to narrate these stories yet only one or two surface to present a narrow or less than comprehensive perspective. Each of the buildings also represents the symbolic importance of early preservation projects that lead to revanchist gentrification of the

neighborhood. While restoration of none of these buildings involved CT/DC, the organization plays a prominent role in the current promotion of their past, present, and future.



Figure 3
THE WHITELAW HOTEL
1839 13th Street, NW

Located on the southeast corner of 13th and T Streets, one block from U Street, the Whitelaw Hotel was the only first-class hotel and apartment house for African Americans in Washington, D.C. when it opened in 1919. The brainchild of John Whitelaw Lewis, designed by architect Isaiah T. Hatton, and built by black laborers, the hotel—which originally combined twenty-five apartments with twenty-two hotel rooms—was created by and for African Americans, making it a completely black experience. As noted in the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, the hotel “is an excellent example of architecture created by blacks in response to the increasingly restrictive social and economic climate of the early twentieth century. It originated from the concepts of self-

help and racial solidarity that form a continuing theme in black intellectual history.”⁹³ Recently restored, four stories of the brick Italian Renaissance Revival building rest above a raised basement with classical proportions and simple ornamentation. The interior, which exhibits a U-shaped plan above the first floor, reflects an eclectic Beaux-Arts detailing complete with Art Deco stained-glass skylights in the lobby. Electric lights were originally included—along with gas for backup—which is an early use of the technology in an African-American establishment. The style, detail, and amenities—which included a restaurant and ballroom, a grotto in the basement, and beauty and barber shops, a dry cleaners, and a doctor’s office on the first level—were indicative of the period and comparable to white facilities.

Laborer-turned-entrepreneur Lewis envisioned the Whitelaw as a luxury apartment hotel for the upper-middle-class residents and visitors to Washington. After founding the Industrial Savings Bank—the first African-American owned bank in the city—in 1913 and commissioning Hatton for its home on the corner of 11th and U Streets, Lewis sought to capitalize on the demand of affluent African Americans for luxury housing and amenities and for luxury accommodations for prominent visitors to the city who were turned away from downtown hotels due to segregation. To finance the project, Lewis sold \$12 shares of the building to community residents. When the Whitelaw opened in November 1919, 20,000 people visited the hotel in the first week.⁹⁴

Successful from the beginning, the Whitelaw Hotel was one of the most fashionable addresses for African-American residents and *the* place for all the traveling

⁹³ Ronnie McGhee, The Whitelaw Hotel National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 20 Jan. 1993.

⁹⁴ *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*, directed by Patricia Cook, Washington, D.C.: Manna, Inc., 1996.

entertainers (performing in the many theaters and clubs of U Street) and other notables to stay (including those associated with nearby Howard University). The ballroom regularly hosted dances and other social occasions for the African-American community. Edward Smith, American University professor and native son, comments in the Manna, Inc.-produced documentary *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*, “This hotel was a greater source of pride than anything else in the neighborhood, even the theaters, because this hotel just exuded class.”⁹⁵ The hotel remained a high-class establishment until the woes of the Depression sunk in. When John Whitelaw Louis ran into financial difficulty, Talley Holms bought the building at auction in 1934. Holmes managed the hotel differently, instead catering to a middle-class public. This change in management compounded with desegregation rulings in the late 1940s and early 1950s sent the hotel in decline as other establishments (including previously white only) were now available to African-American residents and visitors.⁹⁶ Rarely mentioned incidents during this period include the murder of a thirty-three year-old woman in the building. In November 1954, Helen Mae Smith was bludgeoned to death with a hammer in her apartment.⁹⁷ By the time the 1968 riots devastated the neighborhood—though leaving this building untouched—the Whitelaw had sowed the seeds for its notorious reputation as a house of drugs and prostitution. Finding hotel rooms more profitable than apartments, as apartments became available they were converted, perhaps encouraging further instability. Finally, citing 351 separate housing and fire code violations, the Whitelaw closed its doors and boarded its windows in 1977. Sold to the first in a series of for-profit

⁹⁵ *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*

⁹⁶ *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*

⁹⁷ “Woman Slain With Hammer, Man Sought,” *Washington Post*, 29 Nov. 1954, 23.

developers in 1980, then devastated by a massive fire in December 1981, many thought that would be the end of the Whitelaw.⁹⁸

In the 1980s there were public reflections on the building, pushes for revitalizing the once-grand landmark, and suggestions for teaching that heritage. In September 1983, prompted by the reemergence of the Whitelaw on the real estate market again, Dorothy Gilliam published a column in the *Washington Post* urging, “The time is ripe for Washingtonians to recognize this hotel’s historic value and utilize it as a landmark. It is a building that stands for much in black history and once served the community in important ways that shouldn’t be forgotten as blacks yearly spend millions of dollars at the Washington Hilton and the Shoreham.”⁹⁹ Perhaps predicting the wave of cultural heritage tourism that would later sweep the neighborhood, toward the end of her column Gilliam notes, “But it isn’t enough to identify a landmark and revitalize it. The Whitelaw, Howard Theatre and similar places need to be highlighted with tours where people are told about the past.”¹⁰⁰ Three years later, as many speculated about the neighborhood’s impending renaissance with the opening of the Reeves Center, yet another plan to reinvent the Whitelaw presented itself in the press. While this plan also never materialized, it is one of the first instances of utilizing the Whitelaw as a metaphor for the neighborhood. Anne Simpson, a *Washington Post* staff writer, dubs the Whitelaw “a kind of economic barometer for its neighborhood, falling from splendor to squalor.”¹⁰¹ Both the renaissance of the hotel and the neighborhood would have to wait.

Then Shaw-based non-profit housing developer, Manna, Inc., purchased the

⁹⁸ *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*

⁹⁹ Dorothy Gilliam, “Landmark,” *Washington Post*, 12 Sept. 1983, D1.

¹⁰⁰ Gilliam, D1.

¹⁰¹ Anne Simpson, “Better Days Ahead For the Whitelaw,” *Washington Post*, 18 Sept. 1986, DC1.

property in 1990 and reopened the Whitelaw in November 1992 following a period of renovation. Although badly damaged by the 1981 fire and the subsequent decade of exposure to the elements, the building remained structurally sound. The restoration team restored the exterior and first floors to approximate the look of when it opened in 1919 while the remaining floors were gutted to create a total of thirty-five new apartments for those with low and moderate incomes.¹⁰² Made possible by federal low-income housing and historic preservation tax credits, the nearly \$4 million cost of the restoration and renovation was financed by the D.C. government, Signet Bank, and the Metropolitan Life social investment foundation. In 2007, when the tax credits expire, the building will convert to a cooperative.¹⁰³ Manna, with its motto “Housing for People, Not Profit,” has been preparing tenants for this transition.

Manna was not only concerned for the need for quality affordable housing in the neighborhood, but also the heritage value of the building—but that may not have always been the intention. Kathryn S. Smith, who did not consult with this project, indicated to me during her interview that Manna was not aware of the significance of the building and had just planned to redevelop the property as affordable housing. Instead, community members rallied around the building, promoting its significance and subsequently, the ballroom was saved and restored.¹⁰⁴ Before the building reopened, Manna placed a request in the *Washington Post* and circulated fliers for photos and memorabilia of the Whitelaw in order to create an exhibit for the lobby. Digging through Manna’s archives indicates that it held a celebration of the building and Black History Month each February

¹⁰² Nancy L. Ross, “The Whitelaw Is Back,” *Washington Post*, 12 Nov. 1992, T8. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005.

¹⁰³ Peter F. Sisler, “Former fans register joy at new plan for old hotel,” *Washington Times*, 26 Feb. 1992, B1. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

from 1992 through at least 1996. The exhibit opened in February 1993 and tells visitors to the lobby, the CT/DC story of the neighborhood with details on the building's rebirth. The lobby exhibit may have prompted an oral history project that produced the 1996 *The Whitelaw Hotel: A Legacy Restored*, which includes interviews with former residents and staff of the Whitelaw; one interviewee is featured for her association with the building's drug and prostitution era, but during the course of the film we learn that she is also a tenant in the newly restored building, illustrating how both histories (hers and the building's) have come full circle. (A similar tenant is featured in the same vein in the 1999 *Duke Ellington's Washington* documentary produced for PBS.)

A well documented and respected building both before and after renovation, the Whitelaw was documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1979, placed on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 1992, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993. Featured prominently in CT/DC activities, it is a star of the walking tour when tourists are allowed into the private building to view the lobby and exhibit; it also has its own trail marker in the *City Within a City* heritage trail, and receives attention in the *African American Heritage Trail and Database*. During the walking tour, where the building is usually the last stop, tour guides often emphasize the significance of the building by linking the hotel with the story we've learned about the neighborhood; in other words, the building's fall from grace to utter decay and rise from the ashes is a metaphor for the trajectory of the neighborhood. This is also echoed in the lobby exhibit. It is through Patricia Cook, the director and co-producer of the Whitelaw documentary and author of an article on the Whitelaw for *Washington History*, the magazine of the Historical Society of Washington, that the Whitelaw takes on another

metaphor: the phoenix rising from the ashes. A resident interviewed in the film talks about rebirth from fire, which is usually a destructive force, and specifically describes the Whitelaw as a phoenix. The title of Cook's article in *Washington History* is "Like the Phoenix': The Rebirth of the Whitelaw Hotel." Additionally, high school students recently compiled an eight-minute documentary on the Whitelaw titled *Exploring an American Phoenix: The Whitelaw Hotel: Cultural Encounters and Exchanges in Washington, DC from Segregation through Integration*. Though it is important to note that the fate of the neighborhood and the building do not necessarily match up. The hotel, originally a high-class establishment, now serves as a home for the working classes in a neighborhood that is increasingly middle and upper-middle-class due to the rapidly rising land values.

What else is problematic about the narrow interpretation of the Whitelaw is that it focuses only on those who created it, lived there, and visited. What about the people who worked there and made it the high-class establishment that it was? Perhaps their working-class status would mar the upper-class image. This is just one of the ways that demonstrates that the "phoenix" narrative is not the only way to frame the story of the Whitelaw Hotel. Just like the trajectory of the neighborhood is not as simple as the rise and fall narrative CT/DC tells, it is perhaps too easy to focus solely on the rise and fall of the building.

Of the three buildings, the Whitelaw Hotel, perhaps, has maintained the most stable meaning throughout its lifetime. It originally responded to a need for upper-class housing and today helps satisfy a need for lower-income housing. Its period of significance is defined as its period of elegance during the booming 1920s until the

Depression commanded a change in management, to which the building's façade and ballroom were restored to approximate. It appears that *Washington Post* reporters are early figures who publicly delineated the significance of the building to a larger public: Gilliam calling for its landmarking, restoration, and interpretation, and Simpson linking its life cycle to that of the neighborhood. Both of these ideas had caught on by the time Manna took charge, and since then—especially as the neighborhood has gentrified—CT/DC has led the way in promoting the building as a metaphor for the Greater U Street neighborhood. The actual preservation of the building has twisted its meaning, especially the one most promoted. Had the building lay derelict or been demolished, there would be no metaphor of the building mirroring the neighborhood. This case illustrates that the act of preserving a building can do more than preserve the old memories and meanings, but also create new ones. It strikes me as ironic that CT/DC and others promote a once expensive residence converted into affordable housing as a metaphor for a gentrified neighborhood.



Figure 4
THE THURGOOD MARSHALL CENTER FOR SERVICE AND HERITAGE
1816 12th Street, NW

The Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, located on 12th Street between S and T Streets and only one block from the Whitelaw Hotel, exists in the former 12th Street YMCA which was renamed in honor of its founder Anthony Bowen in 1972. Enslaved Bowen purchased his freedom and moved to Washington, D.C. Soon after he founded the first African-American Young Men’s Christian Association in 1853, only two years after the first American YMCA began in Boston. The branch settled in this 12th Street location in 1912. White philanthropists John D. Rockefeller and Julius Rosenwald and black Washingtonians who raised more than \$30,000 financed the design and construction of the building.¹⁰⁵ William Sidney Pittman, son-in-law of Booker T. Washington and one of the first trained African-American architects, designed the Italian Renaissance Revival building. The brick building includes four stories above a raised

¹⁰⁵ Marya Annette McQuirter, “Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage/12th Street YMCA Site,” in *African American Heritage Trail Database* (Washington, D.C.: Cultural Tourism DC, 2003), accessed online 20 April 2005.

basement. The front façade includes a portico and a flight of steep steps from the street to the entrance. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in November 1908.¹⁰⁶

Unlike the Whitelaw Hotel, which was designed for the upper classes, the YMCA was a place for racial uplift. Local historian Marya Annette McQuirter notes in the *African American Heritage Trail Database*, “As a full-service YMCA, the 12th Street facility worked to improve the mental, physical, and religious lives of boys and young men. Beyond that, the Y became an important resource for individuals and families, providing shelter, activities, meeting space, a library, and classes.”¹⁰⁷ Complete with a gym, basketball court, swimming pool, and boarding rooms, the YMCA was a vital asset to the community, especially in the rougher years. The YMCA closed the building in 1982 deeming it unsafe. The community sued the YMCA for neglecting the building and the community as a result of this closure. As early as 1985 there were plans to transform the building into a community center; this resulted in the dropping of the lawsuit.¹⁰⁸ However, that plan, never realized, was the beginning of many other attempts in the 1980s to revitalize the building.

In 1985, developer Jeffrey N. Cohen purchased the building and agreed to lease it for \$1 yearly to the Shaw Heritage Trust, which formed to combat the closing of the Y.¹⁰⁹ However, plans to transform the building into a community center did not cement until

¹⁰⁶ Anne H. Adams, The Anthony Bowen YMCA National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, May 1983.

¹⁰⁷ McQuirter, “Thurgood Marshall Center.”

¹⁰⁸ Marcia Slacum Greene, “Bowen YMCA Reborn in \$2.6 Million Deal,” *Washington Post*, 5 Jan. 1985, B4.

¹⁰⁹ Anne Simpson, “Old Bowen YMCA May Live Again as Community Center for Shaw Center,” *Washington Post*, 2 March 1989, J1. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005.

September 1998, when the Shaw Heritage Trust celebrated the beginning of the renovation. At the time, they had only raised \$3.7 million of the required \$6.2 million.¹¹⁰

At some point before renovation began, the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage produced a twelve-minute promotional video titled *The Thurgood Marshall Center: A Heritage of Hope*. Created for the purpose of soliciting money for the project (the tape is even labeled “capital campaign”), it provides excellent insight into how the backers sold the concept and shared the heritage of the building. Described as the “spiritual center of the Shaw community for most of the twentieth century,” the video credits it with helping neighbors to “overcome hardship, discrimination, and poverty.” The YMCA and its building were described as serving the purpose of assisting the community in raising itself by its bootstraps. At the creation of the video, the building is needed again for its disciplinary structure for a neighborhood with absent parenting—the renovated building will “bring back the vision for the community” and serve as a “comprehensive community support structure.” At the video’s conclusion, the narrator (Jim Vance of NBC4) states, “This building will be once again as it has been in the past: a foothold for families climbing toward a better life.”¹¹¹ Closely linking the troubled community’s need for the building to serve in a similar capacity to its celebrated era as a YMCA constructs a more complicated view of that past: one that illustrates the struggle and vulnerability and varied class structure of this neighborhood dominantly portrayed as solidly black middle class.

In my interview with Norris Dodson, who spearheaded the campaign to save and transform the building and is prominently featured in the video, he discussed the difficult

¹¹⁰ Linda Wheeler, “Preserving A Century of Service in Shaw,” *Washington Post*, 24 Sept. 1998, J1. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005.

¹¹¹ *The Thurgood Marshall Center: A Heritage of Hope*, Washington, D.C.: National Productions, n.d.

process and noted that the building is at risk—in fact it has always been at risk. Dodson explained to me that in order to keep the project going for eighteen years, the Thurgood Marshall Trust had to have an end goal in focus. The original intent was to save the building so that it could be used for activities that would serve an economically mixed community with stabilized families. Unfortunately, it took too long, and the cost of construction skyrocketed in the process and the neighborhood changed dramatically in those eighteen years with the rapidly rising cost of real estate. When the building reopened in February 2000, they were not able to completely fulfill their goal of providing the building to tenants based on the quality of their service rather than their ability to pay rent. Dodson noted that it was the Thurgood Marshall Trust's

dream to create a building where service and heritage connected activities would take place and where we would be able to house nonprofit organizations that were service and heritage related and where we would not have to judge these organizations by the amount of rent they could pay but by the quality of services they render, but it turned out that even though we were able to get large grants from organizations like the city, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac we couldn't get enough to keep the rents down at the level which would have been most effective.¹¹²

It has been difficult to secure funds to subsidize rents. While rents in the building are under market rate, Dodson observes that they are not sufficiently enough under market in order to service the types of tenants they had originally wanted. Even the current tenants that rent space in the building are threatened with evaporating funds for their activities. What this case demonstrates about historic preservation is that even with solid goals and the desire to achieve them, funding and the economics of the situation may be a greater determiner in what is possible.

The Thurgood Marshall Center provides space for the Shaw Heritage Trust, which

¹¹² Norris A. Dodson III, interview by Stephanie Frank, 17 April 2005.

operates a small museum on the neighborhood's rich African-American heritage in the building, as well as For the Love of Children, and small offices such as the 14th & U Main Streets. The mission of the building, as defined in its brochure, is "to be a beacon in the continuing struggle for equality and social and economic justice. We do this by engaging children, youth, families and the entire community in provocative dialogue and collective action. Our rich history and heritage is the foundation for future."¹¹³ Dodson is a proponent of these ideas as evidenced in my interview, newspaper coverage, and the video; the heritage of this building needs to be communicated to its users, community members, and visitors to strengthen future endeavors.

Documented by HABS in 1979 and listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 1975 and the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, this building was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1994.¹¹⁴ Featured prominently in CT/DC's activities, the Thurgood Marshall Center is usually the gathering and starting place for the "Before Harlem, There Was U Street" tour; tourists are often brought inside the building to visit the refurbished lobby and a dormitory room. It also receives its own trail marker in the *City Within a City* self-guided heritage trail as well as attention in the *African American Heritage Trail and Database*. The *City Within a City* booklet informs, "The 12th Street YMCA became a community center for black Washingtonians across the city. It was a place to play sports, learn to swim, meet friends, start organizations and mobilize for a cause, including important civil rights initiatives. For many, including travelers to segregated Washington, the Y dormitories were a home away from home."¹¹⁵ The

¹¹³ "Thurgood Marshall Center Trust, Inc." brochure, 2003.

¹¹⁴ Laura V. Trieschmann, Anne Sellin, and Stephen Callcott, Greater U Street Historic District National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, December 1998.

¹¹⁵ Williams

booklet continues to explain the significance of the Y as a living space for Langston Hughes, a place where Georgetown University basketball coach John Thompson was discovered, and that Joe Louis was a frequent visitor and Dr. Charles Drew an active member.¹¹⁶ The description of the building as a community meeting space and leisure place along with the selective mentioning of famous African Americans suggests the YMCA catered to a leisurely and activist middle class, when in fact, as the Shaw Heritage Trust itself suggests, the building was associated with more needy community residents. For example, Hughes and others who stayed at the Y probably did so because they could not afford the Whitelaw Hotel.

CT/DC is downplaying the role of class in the significance of the building, or rather, playing up the middle class ideals as the generic experience there. The Thurgood Marshall Trust transformed the former YMCA into a building originally intended and now approximates many goals of a YMCA—to support communities in need. While *The Thurgood Marshall Center: A Heritage of Hope* video and the building’s mission clearly delineate the space as a place to assist in uplift, struggle, and equality, CT/DC promotes the building’s heritage as a black middle class experience—a leisurely playground and political space for the civil rights movement. While it may have very well served in those capacities, CT/DC glosses over the importance the building had to those it infrequently mentions, the poor and working classes of the neighborhood. In doing so, CT/DC downplays and perhaps even down-right ignores the Center’s mission “in the struggle for equality and social and economic justice.” The Thurgood Marshall Center also strives to use the building’s rich heritage as a foundation for its present goals, but CT/DC’s efforts to depict the building void of its working-class orientation hampers that effort. CT/DC

¹¹⁶ Williams

has a more dominant role in the presentation of the building's history than the Thurgood Marshall Trust simply by its dominating presence in the public, and its story is more widely disseminated in various forms (trails, databases, walking tours, and so forth).



Figure 5
THE LINCOLN THEATRE
1215 U Street, NW

Located on U Street next to the famous Ben's Chili Bowl and directly across the street from one of the Metro exits, the Lincoln Theatre opened in 1922 as the most elegant first-run movie house in the U Street vicinity. Unlike the other two buildings, it was not developed or designed by African Americans for African Americans. White architect Reginald Geare designed white theater magnate Harry Crandall's movie house. With a 1,600-person capacity, it was one of the largest theaters on U Street, and it also hosted vaudeville shows and amateur competitions.¹¹⁷ Described by the *Afro-American* newspaper as "perhaps the largest and the finest for colored people exclusively anywhere

¹¹⁷ Marya Annette McQuirter, "Lincoln Theatre and Lincoln Colonnade," in *African American Heritage Trail Database* (Washington, D.C.: Cultural Tourism DC, 2003), accessed online 20 April 2005.

in the U.S.,” the brick and masonry Neoclassical rectangular building’s façade is simply adorned with metal pressings in typical Neoclassical style for this period. In 1927, A.E. Lichtman, a prominent theater owner, acquired the Lincoln and renovated the theater to reflect his model of combination movie house and cabaret. This remodeling included the addition of the Lincoln Colonnade, which closed and was demolished in the 1950s.¹¹⁸ The Lincoln Colonnade existed below and behind the Lincoln Theatre as a companion venue that hosted musical events and grand balls.¹¹⁹ Lichtman, a Jewish businessman, was highly regarded for his dedication to the African-American community and his management practices of hiring almost exclusively African Americans to manage and staff his many theaters, which eventually totaled sixteen and included U Street favorites the Howard, Booker T, and Republic Theatres.¹²⁰ Like other thriving businesses of this era on U Street, desegregation sent the theater into decline. After sporadically showing second-run features, the Lincoln Theatre closed in 1983.¹²¹

Jeffrey Cohen, who was actively pursuing many redevelopment projects in the U Street neighborhood in the 1980s, including the YMCA, purchased the Lincoln Theatre in 1983 and closed it for renovation that was supposed to reopen the theater within a couple of years.¹²² After years of false starts, scandals surrounding the financing deal Cohen had negotiated with his friend and infamous D.C. mayor Marion Barry, and declaring bankruptcy after overextending himself in redeveloping many properties in close proximity, the D.C. government took ownership of the Lincoln Theatre in 1991 as

¹¹⁸ Luci Blackburn, Lincoln Theatre National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 30 July 1993.

¹¹⁹ McQuirter, “Lincoln Theatre and Lincoln Colonnade.”

¹²⁰ Blackburn

¹²¹ McQuirter, “Lincoln Theatre and Lincoln Colonnade.”

¹²² Edward D. Sargent, “Small Merchants Feeling Squeezed in U Street NW Redevelopment,” *Washington Post*, 18 Aug. 1983, DC1.

Cohen's largest creditor. After nine years and \$9 million invested in restoration, the Lincoln Theatre reopened in February 1994 as a performing arts and cultural center.¹²³ In 1993, the U Street Theatre Foundation was created as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization to oversee restoration and manage the Lincoln Theatre. The foundation's undated fact sheet (probably from the first half of 1997), explains its role in the community as administrator of the Presenter-Assistance program which allows D.C.-based non-profits to use the Lincoln Theatre rent-free for special events among other activities like supporting high quality and culturally diverse performances and arts and public school programs. Notably, the sheet states that the foundation "participates in community development, historic documentation/preservation, and heritage tourism activities," and indicates membership in DC Heritage Tourism Coalition.¹²⁴

Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993, the city-owned Lincoln Theatre now boasts 1250 seats, a thirty-three by thirty-eight foot stage, and state of the art sound, lighting, and other relevant systems.¹²⁵ Despite the promotion and frequent use of the building by politicians and others for press conferences, city-wide festivals, and other activities, the Lincoln Theatre struggles to find its current identity and audience. Kathryn Smith notes that the reborn Lincoln Theatre, meant to be the "sparkplug" of the neighborhood, was ahead of its market.¹²⁶ In other words, the Lincoln Theatre reopened without a market-ready audience. Referred to by the Lincoln Theatre brochure and newspaper reporting during the long restoration period as the "crown jewel"

¹²³ Laura Outerbridge and Matt Neufeld, "Jazzing up the Lincoln," *Washington Times*, 15 Sept. 1993, C12. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005. and Roxanne Roberts, "The New Jewel of U Street," *Washington Post*, 5 Feb. 1994, G1. LexisNexis Academic, accessed 11 April 2005.

¹²⁴ The U Street Theatre Foundation, "The U Street Theatre Foundation at Washington's Historic Lincoln Theatre Fact Sheet," n.d.

¹²⁵ "Lincoln Theatre" brochure, n.d.

¹²⁶ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

of U Street (probably for its high architectural details and its well-off clientele), other sources including other newspaper reporting and documentaries dispute that title. Some consider the Whitelaw to be a grander representative of the golden age of the U Street neighborhood. The sparser documentation on this building's heritage also indicates this as well as its less prominent role in the guided tour and self-guided heritage trail. The last time I took the tour, we as a group remained on the opposite side of the street while the tour guide pointed out the building. At the same time, much of this conflicting documentation laments the derelict state of the Howard Theatre—comparable to but the predecessor of Harlem's Apollo Theatre—suggesting that of the two remaining U Street theaters, the Howard is the more significant one.

The Lincoln Theatre also has highly contested meanings. Currently touted as the crown jewel of U Street, it struggles to find its reborn identity and an audience. This is particularly significant since of the three buildings this is the only one that needs to draw the public in order to survive and fulfill its mission. Kathryn Smith, during our interview, informed me that resulting from the March 2001 conference that CT/DC (then DC Heritage Tourism Coalition) held to garner community support for its heritage activities, the number one desire of attendees was the rehabilitation of the Howard Theatre.¹²⁷ More than a decade after the re-opening of the Lincoln Theatre, the Howard is gearing up for its restoration as the centerpiece of the Uptown Destination District, also known as the DUKE Plan. The prioritization of the preservation of the Lincoln over the Howard despite its perhaps inferior significance to many old timers reflects the class dynamics of the two. The Lincoln, at 12th and U Streets, was a high-class establishment where people of greater means dressed elegantly to attend shows and balls in the Colonnade.

¹²⁷ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005.

Meanwhile, the Howard's more eastern site at 7th and T Streets located it in the less fashionable, more prominently working-class portion of the neighborhood attracting a greater variety of people.¹²⁸

CT/DC has little to say about the Lincoln Theatre other than its high-class existence during the golden age of U Street, and that is how the building fits into CT/DC's narrative focused on the black middle class. While some outlets advertise the Lincoln as the crown jewel of U Street, many others are anxious for the return of the Howard Theatre, which CT/DC has been aware of since its early days in the neighborhood. The Howard may be more significant to the old timers of varying class status, but the Lincoln may have been restored more than a decade earlier than the Howard because of its association with the middle class rather than the working-class Howard. Considering the many interests CT/DC has in upholding a tale of the black middle class, it should be no surprise that of the two remaining theaters, the higher class one would be restored first. Many charge that historic preservation is for the privileged, and this illustrates such a preference within historic preservation practice to preserve that which upholds middle-class values before the less privileged.

SYNTHESIS

The long struggles and difficulties encountered in the renaissance of each of these buildings are more than reflective of the arduous process of reviving an historic neighborhood and the trials and complexities of historic preservation, but perhaps more importantly of the complex and contested meanings and stories embodied in these

¹²⁸ Kathryn S. Smith, interview by Stephanie Frank, 5 April 2005. and Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

structures. Each reveals great class tensions as well as the significance of preservation in the gentrification process of the Greater U Street neighborhood. Though meaning over time may change and contestation may occur, it is evident that each of these buildings are significant in the Greater U Street story, suggested by the very public efforts to restore the buildings soon after they were reluctantly boarded up.

Deciphering what roles the preservation and restoration of these buildings have played in the gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood is a difficult process. Perhaps their most prominent role is the symbolic importance of early preservation projects in the neighborhood. Preservation plays a large role in helping to make the neighborhood appear safe and attractive to middle-class residents, enabling revanchism. These three early examples of preservation in the neighborhood achieve that symbolic role and encourage more preservation and gentrification.

The buildings also have individual importance for the different functions they serve. The Whitelaw, now an example of affordable housing in a neighborhood which has a greater demand than supply for such housing, was possible at a time when land values allowed for such a project. At the same time, the neighborhood was improving and fulfilled Manna's goal to provide affordable housing in neighborhoods in which families feel safe. Manna has since moved away from this portion of the city, because land values make affordable housing projects impossible. What made the Temperance Row project, thwarted by Jim Graham and others, even feasible was the donation of the land. The Lincoln Theatre was meant to be a sparkplug for the neighborhood as Kathryn Smith claims; it was intended to revitalize the cultural life of the neighborhood, but its role in that is impossible to tell. There have always been musical and theatrical spaces in the

neighborhood, even when the Lincoln was dark. The Lincoln, in fact, struggles while other venues thrive. The Thurgood Marshall Center, on the other hand, was the longest in preparation for its renaissance because of difficulties in funding compounded with growing needs for funds as the neighborhood's economic cachet increased. As its purpose to serve underprivileged members of the community it was more difficult to finance since it did not have a built-in money-making source (especially since the rents would need to be subsidized). While there are mechanisms for subsidized housing, it appears more difficult to gather similar resources for services designed to help the underprivileged.

The role of historic preservation and cultural heritage activities in the Greater U Street neighborhood is a revanchist one. The efforts guised as those meant to preserve the neighborhood have instead put into motion the refashioning of the former “heart of black Washington” into a white middle-class neighborhood. Revanchism, according to geographer Neil Smith, is the white middle class reclamation of a neighborhood dominated by poor and working-class minorities following a white middle-class exodus. In the instance of Greater U Street, the neighborhood was never dominated by the white middle class. Instead, the neighborhood began as a racially and economically diverse place that transformed into an African-American dominated location at the turn of the twentieth century. Following the end of legal segregation and riots, Greater U Street experienced a black middle-class exodus, and now the white middle class is in the process of claiming the neighborhood.

The white middle-class claiming of the Greater U Street neighborhood is aided by CT/DC’s efforts, particularly the story it presents about the neighborhood. Lacking any single authoritative and comprehensive neighborhood history, CT/DC filled the void and created what remains the dominant narrative of the neighborhood history. As detailed in chapter two, that history is simplistic, narrowly focused on the period between 1920 and 1950, and almost entirely centered on the black middle-class experience of Greater U Street while betraying its racial, ethnic, and economic diversity. Chapter two also illustrates the existence of other stories that complement, contradict, contest, and enrich the Greater U Street narrative. However, rarely are those other stories told, and it is

instead the CT/DC story that is replicated and repeated while the other storytellers lack the platform to publicly tell their stories. It is the narrow construction of CT/DC's Greater U Street history that enables revanchism; the discourse dictates that if the neighborhood was once a middle-class haven, it is safe for the middle class to once again dominate. CT/DC enables revanchism by framing the story as one of rise and fall. A rise and fall narrative requires symmetry: CT/DC emphasizes the rise of the neighborhood, exaggerates the fall, and encourages another rise. CT/DC tells the story of the rise, provides only the essentials for an outline of the fall (the silence ironically speaks more than details could in order to exaggerate the deterioration of the neighborhood). These stories encourage another rise: gentrification.

The construction of the story of the past is instrumental in how we perceive the present and the future. As Marya Annette McQuirter pointed out, CT/DC's narrative is only one way of framing the story, and as chapter two indicates, there were many other ways the story could have been framed. By constructing a story essentially about the black middle class and omitting the greater variety of actors in the larger story, CT/DC determines who are insiders and who are outsiders in the neighborhood historically, contemporarily, and for the future. If the neighborhood was historically black and solidly middle class as CT/DC would lead you to believe, anyone not part of that mainstream black middle class is an outsider. CT/DC does not mention the racial and ethnic diversity of those who owned businesses and therefore portrays the recent diversity in businesses as a new phenomenon in a neighborhood undergoing rapid change. But is the change so rapid? By omitting any hint of the Greater U Street's interzone status and failing to

mention sexual identities, CT/DC plays down the neighborhood's long-standing diversity and subsequently marginalizes large portions of the community.

But perhaps the lack of discussion on class, specifically the existence of poor and working-class people who have always lived in Greater U Street, is the most glaring construction that frames the story in a particular way. This is especially evident in the case study buildings. The Whitelaw Hotel, once a high-class hotel and apartment complex has been restored by Manna, Inc. as affordable housing (rentals that will convert into a cooperative for current tenants). As one of the prominently featured locations on the "Before Harlem, There was U Street" walking tour, the Whitelaw is used as a metaphor for the neighborhood and both building and neighborhood's return to glory. However, the building was reborn as affordable housing, the antithesis to its upper-class housing roots. Yet CT/DC still uses this metaphor, perhaps because the façade, lobby, and exhibit within the lobby (the most public portions of the building) tell the high-class story and reinforce the misconception. This narrative manages to ignore the rest of the building's purpose as affordable housing. The Thurgood Marshall Center is also touted as a middle-class establishment as office space and museum just as the building's prior incarnation as a YMCA was glamorized as a leisure and meeting space for the middle class. However, YMCAs have always been gathering places, lodging, and recreational space for the less fortunate, and the Thurgood Marshall Center promotes itself (independent of CT/DC's literature) as a place to continue the community support similar to what the YMCA provided.

The Lincoln Theatre was a middle-class movie theater that has been reborn as a middle-class performing arts and cultural center. However, of the two remaining theaters

in Greater U Street, the Howard Theatre (still untouched as of this writing)—the one frequented by everyone, especially the poor and working classes—appears to be the more significant theater. While CT/DC did not have a role in selecting the Lincoln over the Howard for restoration first, it also does not promote the Howard Theatre’s heritage to the extent that it does the Lincoln’s (no marker on the trail or stop on the walking tour) nor mention its less than solid middle-class audience. In fact, while CT/DC promotes the neighborhood as existing from 16th and U Streets east to the Howard Theatre at 7th and T Streets (especially in its involvement with the DUKE Plan), the eastern most point in the walking tour and heritage trail is 10th and T Streets. Why is the eastern most section neglected? It is historically the less fashionable side (i.e. less than middle class) and also currently less gentrified.

This lack of depth in explaining the class dimensions of the Greater U Street neighborhood also allows CT/DC to exaggerate the fall portion of the rise and fall narrative, which has consequences for the contemporary gentrification. By framing the community as the successful triumph of the black middle class despite the challenges of segregation, what happens to that community when legal segregation disintegrates? Most of the black middle class left the vicinity for newer, larger, and less crowded conditions. CT/DC has very little to say about the period between the end of legal segregation and the opening of the Reeves Center in 1986, but what it does mention is wholly negative: the start of the 1968 riots at 14th and U Streets and the neighborhood’s infestation of drugs, prostitution, and poverty. But that is far too simplistic. Lawrence Guyot has an explanation for this “silence”: “If there is but one side, if the total truth is presented by the tourism group,” he continues in a very sarcastic tone, “well then, hell it ain’t this

wonderful, some of these darkies actually stayed here, and they lifted themselves up, and they behaved, and if they'll just work with us we'll turn this into a great kind of benevolent society in which we can all thrive."¹²⁹ In other words, the lack of complex detail about this period and the overwhelmingly negative image CT/DC portrays allows CT/DC to construct the outcome: the neighborhood's ascension from a dark age of less-than-civilized residents to a depiction of improvement for those residents and the neighborhood.

While sources on this particular era may be sparser than those for the 1920-1950 golden age, witnesses to the period can attest to its more complicated existence. While the neighborhood may have become infamous as the quintessential inner-city ghetto, there have always been many productive members of society in the neighborhood who lived and worked to improve the neighborhood for its (then) current residents. McQuirter spoke of the flourishing of black arts, radicals, and jazz clubs and attempts to reverse the neighborhood's decline.¹³⁰ Norris Dodson attended many hours-long meetings in the 1970s that were organized to revive the neighborhood. He commented to me that it is unfortunate that many activists, he surmises, were probably not able to stay in the neighborhood once its renaissance was in full swing due to the escalating cost of living there.¹³¹ In *Duke Ellington's Washington*, Jim Dickerson, founder of Manna, Inc. observes, "That's where the community was, it was buried under a lot of rubble and stereotyped in a way by outsiders that would say 'this can never be any different.'"¹³²

¹²⁹ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

¹³⁰ Marya Annette McQuirter, interview by Stephanie Frank, 19 March 2005.

¹³¹ Norris A. Dodson III, interview by Stephanie Frank, 17 April 2005.

¹³² *Duke Ellington's Washington*

However, Dodson too falls prey to the stereotyping of the neighborhood by repeating its dishonorable nickname, “Shameful Shaw.”

Even Edward C. Smith, who appears to support the rise and fall narrative of the neighborhood, commented in *Duke Ellington’s Washington* that the physical deterioration was not the darkest part of the neighborhood’s decline. Instead, it was the morale of the residents that was bleakest. This shifts the focus from needing to restore the built environment to one where people are the problem. Since much attitude about longer-standing residents in gentrifying neighborhoods often views them disdainfully (see below), this kind of problem appears to be one that can be solved by gentrification: replace the depressed poor people with “urban pioneers.”

The exaggeration of the fall of the neighborhood is to CT/DC’s benefit because it enables a larger gentrification force. If one of CT/DC’s primary goals is economic development, the lower the neighborhood’s value (economically and culturally) before gentrification the greater the return once it strikes, because it means a greater increase in the revaluing of the neighborhood. Additionally, by providing very little detail on this period of the neighborhood in contrast to the lively personalities of the preceding era, CT/DC lacks empathy for those who remained in the neighborhood. This is a common occurrence in gentrification. As Neil Smith points out:

The language of revitalization, recycling, upgrading and renaissance suggests that affected neighborhoods were somehow devitalized or culturally moribund prior to gentrification. While this is sometimes the case, it is often also true that very vital working-class communities are culturally *devitalized* [emphasis in original] through gentrification as the new middle class scorns the streets in favor of the dining room and bedroom. The idea of “urban pioneers” is as insulting applied to contemporary cities as the original idea of “pioneers” in the US West.

Now, as then, it implies that no one lives in the areas being pioneered—no one worthy of notice, at least.¹³³

Lawrence Guyot also evokes Western metaphors in his critique of this process. He says that he has always understood what the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program has meant. Guyot says that it was first introduced by Sharon Ambrose on the City Council as a "way to manage gentrification gently," but he now compares it to "selling land to the Indians," because it is not designed to facilitate the original community's maintenance.¹³⁴ Guyot is commenting on how he perceives the Main Street program is utilized to serve white interests at the expense of black interests.

WHO DOES AND DOES NOT BENEFIT?

Should such an outcome be a surprise when the organization at the helm was born in an effort to combine heritage with economic development? Existing models of economic development dictate that the influx of capital flows from middle-class investment, commerce, and residents, not the underprivileged or even those working on behalf of the underprivileged. While there has been service-sector job creation due to the increased traffic to existing neighborhood restaurants and the emergence of new ones, where are those workers supposed to live? As real estate values skyrocket, a service-sector job cannot provide the income required to afford housing in the vicinity, and as this neighborhood was one of the few remaining affordable neighborhoods in Northwest and the city as a whole, there are increasingly fewer options for affordable housing.

As my revanchist argument dictates, it is the white middle class who benefits from the gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood. However, there are more

¹³³ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, 32-33.

¹³⁴ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

complex tensions involved with this than that statement would suggest. The CT/DC story of the neighborhood's history is relatively neutral on race (in the sense that it presents the neighborhood as wholly black, and therefore race is a non-issue in terms of its daily functioning). While the CT/DC story lacks much discussion of class dynamics, I have succeeded in bringing those to the forefront in the neighborhood's history. In contemporary Greater U Street, class seems to be neutral as escalating real estate values transform the neighborhood into a middle-class one, but now race is the issue that no one wants to talk about—except Lawrence Guyot. He hopes that will change as a younger generation moves in:

You can have gentrification and you can have racial reconciliation, but if you make your choice of only one of those, that's it. The Kathryn Smiths and others have made their choice, they don't want to rock any boat. They want to make sure their story is told very carefully so as not to leave any questions open and not to invite in competition or inquiry about their position. Well, there are a lot of people now moving in that that approach doesn't fit, because they're going to look around and say, "well look, I know what the racial scene is as it comes to dating, as it comes to sex, but what else is different here and why is it different? I live here now, I have an interest in it."¹³⁵

Guyot expressed faith in a younger generation based on his experience with Rachel, a white relative newcomer to the neighborhood, who has organized white residents in support of black-owned Collage, a new space for artistic activities. Guyot believes younger generations are less encumbered by the centuries of racial strife and more likely to enact this kind of positive racial reconciliation.¹³⁶ I do not share his optimistic viewpoint.

In the introduction to his book *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Neil Smith asserts, "A new social geography of the city is being born

¹³⁵ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

¹³⁶ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

but it would be foolish to expect that it will be a peaceful process. The attempt to reclaim Washington, DC (probably the most segregated city in the US), through white gentrification is widely known by the African-American majority as ‘the Plan.’¹³⁷ While “the Plan” has not surfaced in such words in my research, those sentiments are echoed in Lawrence Guyot’s interview. Today, in Greater U Street, there is a very prominent racial struggle. Guyot explains, “Jim Graham has systematically organized white people against black interests purportedly using stability and law and order and racial reconciliation as his justification. He’s gotten away with it. I consider him the head of the vigilantes.”¹³⁸ As mentioned in chapter two, Graham and his followers have rallied against black interests in the development of property and applications for liquor licenses, but Guyot also notes the concerted effort to get white people to use the SunTrust Bank located above the Metro stop in the 1200 block of U Street rather than the locally black-owned Industrial Bank.¹³⁹

Though development on U Street appears to mainly serve white interests, it is not only whites that contribute to the renaissance. Near the conclusion of *Duke Ellington’s Washington*, historian Edward C. Smith states, “What you see on U Street and the surrounding area is a corridor being brought back with black and white cooperation. It’s not being brought back just by whites, it’s not being brought back just by blacks, it’s being brought back by a coalition of both.”¹⁴⁰ While this may be true, it does not diminish the racial tension, and as Guyot suggests, most of the cooperation is not promoting racial reconciliation either. High-end black-owned businesses have appeared on U Street along

¹³⁷ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, 29.

¹³⁸ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

¹³⁹ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

¹⁴⁰ *Duke Ellington’s Washington*

with the white-owned ones. Cake Love, an expensive bakery specializing in cakes and cupcakes, and its companion café Love Café as well as a handful of expensive clothing and shoe boutiques have sprouted up on U Street in the last few years. However, not all black-owned businesses receive equal support. In my interview with Guyot, we spoke about the eviction of Sisterspace and Books from its store in the 1500 block of U Street. He contends and I concur that Sisterspace touted a freedom-oriented, avant-garde ideology that threatened the white middle-class domination that gentrification may bring. Cake Love, on the other hand, is a non-risk-taking, genteel business with a heavily white clientele—and thus an association with whiteness that carries a lot of political clout in the new neighborhood order. Guyot says that if whites had supported Sisterspace to the extent that it does Cake Love, it would still be there today.¹⁴¹

In the end, CT/DC has produced a model—a promotion of revanchism—that is set for replication in other parts of the city and other cities across the country. I conclude with Guyot: “Despite the fact that this is a model, this is a model that has nothing to do with the thwarting of racism, it has nothing to do with the empowerment of black people, it has nothing to do with racial reconciliation, it has nothing to do with bridge building, and yet it’s a model... That is a very costly experience, because we are running through some developmental stages in which there should be some developments on race, and they’re not occurring.”¹⁴²

What becomes apparent in the effort to understand the gentrification process of the Greater U Street neighborhood is the cautionary tale this example presents. The complexities of the stories of Greater U Street are deeper than this thesis can

¹⁴¹ Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

¹⁴² Lawrence Guyot, interview by Stephanie Frank, 22 April 2005.

communicate, but yet it provides a solid grounding of the situation in order to provoke a serious discussion of the implications of combining heritage and economic development, particularly the CT/DC model. As this investigation illustrates, when outsiders—welcomed or not—shepherd insiders’ histories, discrepancies likely occur. Even outsiders with the best intentions load their efforts, interpretations, and framing with cultural baggage and politics unique to their situation that do not necessarily coordinate—and may be glaringly at odds—with some insiders’ interests, desires, and, especially, stories. Participation of insiders may mitigate such discrepancies, but it does not diminish them. In the case of U Street, insiders provided sources and the outsiders packaged them. The stories CT/DC tells are not false, but they lack complexity in a way that does not make them wholly accurate. Essentially a white-middle-class-led organization designed and told the stories of a historically African-American-dominated neighborhood in a way that emphasized the imprint of middle-class aspirations and whiteness. In this way, heritage interpretation promotes revanchist gentrification and betrays the long history of economic, racial, ethnic, sexual, and other diversity in the same space.

Tensions along racial and class lines are at the heart of the Greater U Street Neighborhood story. While CT/DC may have downplayed class in the history of the neighborhood, class and the increasing cost of living make newspaper headlines today. Yet it is the racial strife that goes largely unchecked. Lawrence Guyot spoke frankly about the dangers of white-middle-class stewardship of African-American heritage and the racial politics of development of the neighborhood, which should provide strong warning for the replication of the CT/DC model. A more positive marriage of heritage and economic development in the Greater U Street neighborhood (and similar

environments) should thwart racism, empower black people, and promote racial reconciliation and bridge building rather than utilize African-American heritage to benefit middle-class-white interests. The gentrification of the Greater U Street neighborhood may have passed the point of no return, but it can still serve as a model and cautionary tale of this kind of public-private economic development and its consequences.

This study of the Greater U Street neighborhood can serve as a model for future research and discussion about the uneasy relationship of cultural heritage and economic development. Below is a toolkit, based on my experience, which can be applied broadly to similar research in other neighborhoods and cities. Action recommendations for gentrifying neighborhoods with (pending) cultural heritage activities follow the toolkit.

TOOLKIT

I conceptualize the toolkit in two parts: understanding the mechanisms of gentrification and understanding and making meaning of the stories of the neighborhood that gentrification may shape. As this study shows, gentrification shapes not only the current and future stories of the neighborhood, but also those told about the past.

To understand gentrification in general terms, I recommend the work of Neil Smith, especially his book *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, and also other works I have cited in this investigation, including Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard's *Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices*. Smith is particularly informative for understanding how the revanchist nature of gentrification operates. Kennedy and Leonard provide a good background with references to other works that help build a foundation for understanding gentrification, especially its ramifications for public policy. On the policy end, it is also useful to read "Cities and the Reinvestment Wave: Underserved Markets and the Gentrification of Housing Policy" by Elvin K. Wyly and Daniel J. Hammel, which explains the change in

lending policies and how they may have contributed to gentrification. For works focusing on indicators of gentrification or prime areas where gentrification may occur, consider Margery Austin Turner and Christopher Snow's "Leading Indicators of Gentrification in D.C. Neighborhoods," which is available as a slide presentation online (see bibliography) and Andrew C. Helms's "Understanding Gentrification: An Empirical Analysis of the Determinants of Urban Housing Renovation."

Gentrification is a very local process and, therefore, it is essential to seek out specific primary sources for your city and neighborhood of interest. Newspapers of large scope, such as the *Washington Post* in this case, can provide a sort of public record on the events and changes over time. Neighborhood papers or more locally-focused newspapers such as *DC North* or *City Paper* can do the same, but may have a much more localized focus and provide a different perspective on the issue. Following city policies on development, housing, and other economic- and heritage-related issues is also paramount. Gentrification, as a process fueled by public and private investment, certainly depends on the policies and actions of local governments, and local governments' stances vary widely. Other primary source materials for analyzing gentrification and pending gentrification are changes tracked by the U.S. Census. A solid understanding of the geographic and spatial relationships of people and place is invaluable to understanding gentrification and why it occurs one place before another.

The key to unlocking the stories about the neighborhood undergoing gentrification is first-hand exploration of the people and the place. This involves visiting the place, conducting visual analysis of the built environment, and making keen observations about your experience. In addition, speak with local people formally (e.g.

recorded interviews) and informally (e.g. chats on the sidewalk); consult with long-time residents and relative newcomers. Interviews and ethnography are perhaps the best methods for truly understanding the place as an outsider. Without speaking formally with local residents, it is hard to grasp the essence of the neighborhood and its stories. Archival information will only provide so much information; it is the people that give the place personality and meaning, and it is best to get such invaluable information directly from the source. Depending on the scope of your project, it may be essential to speak with a cross-section of the community in order to receive a more comprehensive depiction of the neighborhood.

If heritage efforts are underway, experience them and compare what you learn from them to what you heard from the people you spoke with and your experience in the place. If there is a disconnect, what is it? You can discuss this with your local informants. Possible disconnects may be an (over)emphasis on certain people, places, or events, an (over)emphasis on certain groups of people while underrepresenting other groups, an exaggeration of the extent of the neighborhood's decline, or even an exaggeration of the prosperous era for the neighborhood. It is very difficult to understand any disconnects without making contact with local people and interviewing them. Also investigate previous attempts to record the place in written histories and archives in libraries and especially personal collections.

When studying diverse neighborhoods such as Greater U Street, it is essential to understand larger patterns and dynamics of race, class, inequality, and the built environment. Below I suggest three books and three articles that are accessible yet informative to those with little background on the topic. While *Sento at Sixth and Main*

may be about preserving Japanese-American heritage, its concepts are applicable to any ethnicity. I have also included selections that complicate the issues of gender and sexuality; these are also useful for thinking about other categories of difference such as race and class. There are many others, but here is a sampling:

Dubrow, Gail and Donna Graves. *Sento at Sixth and Main: Preserving Landmarks of Japanese American Heritage*. Seattle: Seattle Arts Commission, 2002.

Dubrow, Gail Lee. "Blazing Trails with Pink Triangles and Rainbow Flags: Improving the Preservation and Interpretation of Gay and Lesbian Heritage." In *Restoring Women's History Through Historic Preservation*, edited by Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.

Lee, Antoinette J. "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation." In *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Robert E. Stipe. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Ruffins, Fath Davis. "Four African American Women on the National Landscape." In *Restoring Women's History Through Historic Preservation*, edited by Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Sandercock, Leonie, ed. *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Heritage activities need to include local voices and should consult local official (i.e. professionally trained) and unofficial historians (i.e. witnesses to the history). Heritage activities are best directed by insiders with a direct connection to the heritage. Be wary of outsider-initiated efforts, because they can shape the entire process in a less than positive way. For example, they bring a different world view that highlights some information to the detriment of others. The difference in priorities and ideology may color the history in an undesirable way. The Humanities Council of Washington, DC along with the Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Maryland have organized a series of symposia to assist neighborhood residents in shepherding their heritage. Attendees are both local residents interested in promoting their neighborhood heritage and professionals and scholars who work in the field.
- Heritage activities should include a broad interpretation of the subject and should not shy away from conflicted history. The history presented should be thought of as always evolving. History is not a static entity and neither is cultural heritage. Keep an open dialog about this sensitive issue in all stages of development and implementation as well as organize formal venues like the CT/DC “What’s the Story?” conference to periodically evaluate the stories presented and expand and update them as appropriate.

- In response to the gentrification process, the city government needs to partner with the non-profit and private sectors to encourage affordable development for people of all means, especially for long-time residents to remain in their neighborhoods and benefit from the positive aspects of gentrification while mitigating the negative. As a process, gentrification is now spurred by public and private investments, but then the process goes unchecked by the government and can worsen the affordable housing crisis in the city. In Washington, the system works well for affordable developments if they are ahead of the gentrification curve, but due to the high cost of land and other political issues (e.g. certain city council members' efforts to keep such developments away from U Street) affordable housing projects are generally not feasible once gentrification is in full swing. Depending on the jurisdiction, local governments may need to make minor or more extensive modifications to their affordable housing policies, but the underlying principle should be the imperative to provide an acceptable standard of living to all residents regardless of income and class.

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