

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LEDROIT PARK, A PORTRAIT IN BLACK AND WHITE: A STUDY OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE PROCESS OF NEIGHBORHOOD PLACEMAKING

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This research examines the process of placemaking in LeDroit Park, a residential Washington, DC, neighborhood with a historic district at its core. Unpacking the entwined physical and social evolution of the small community within the context of the Nation's Capital, this analysis provides insight into the role of urban design and development as well as historic designation on shaping collective identity.

Initially planned and designed in 1873 as a gated suburb just beyond the formal L'Enfant-designed city boundary, LeDroit Park was intended as a retreat for middle and upper-class European Americans from the growing density and social diversity of the city. With a mixture of large romantic revival mansions and smaller frame cottages set on grassy plots evocative of an idealized rural village, the physical

design was intentionally inwardly-focused. This feeling of refuge was underscored with a physical fence that surrounded the development, intended to prevent African Americans from nearby Howard University and the surrounding neighborhood, from using the community's private streets to access the City of Washington. Within two decades of its founding, LeDroit Park was incorporated into the District of Columbia, the surrounding fence was demolished, and the neighborhood was racially integrated. Due to increasingly stringent segregation laws and customs in the city, this period of integration lasted less than twenty years, and LeDroit Park developed into an elite African American enclave, using the urban design as a bulwark against the indignities of a segregated city.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century housing infill and construction increased density, yet the neighborhood never lost the feeling of security derived from the neighborhood plan. Highlighting the architecture and street design, neighbors successfully received historic district designation in 1974 in order to halt campus expansion. After a stalemate that lasted two decades, the neighborhood began another period of transformation, both racial and socio-economic, catalyzed by a multi-pronged investment program led by Howard University. Through interviews with long-term and new community members, this investigation asserts that the 140-year development history, including recent physical interventions, is integral to placemaking, shaping the material character as well as the social identity of residents.

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HISTORIC DISTRICTS, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE PROCESS OF  
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by

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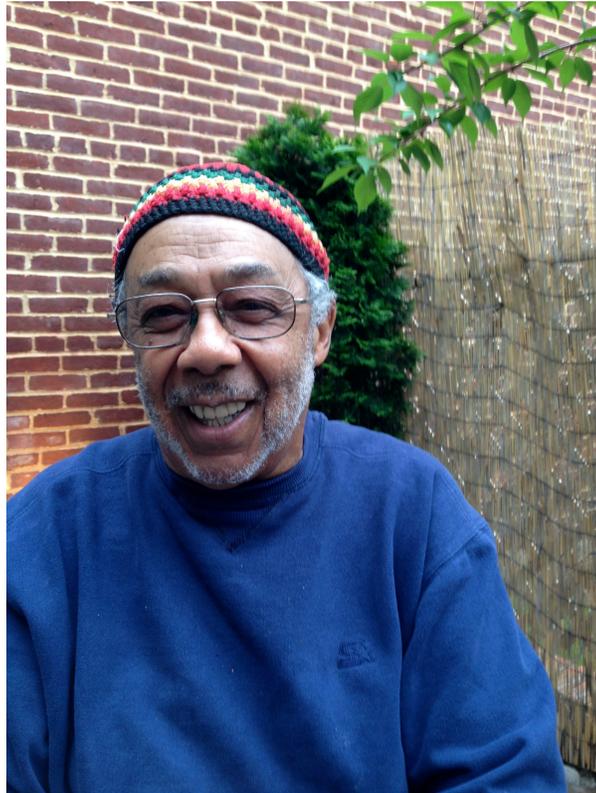
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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to Dr. James K. Hill who has been my neighbor, mentor, and friend in LeDroit Park for nearly two decades. When I asked him if he was willing to help with my doctoral research he didn't hesitate to volunteer, and continued to offer sage advice and insights on life, academia, and my garden.

Dr. Hill, I hope that as an old married woman I am able to pass on some of your wisdom.



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My brother for never doubting that I could finish.

My family for their support, encouragement, and understanding when sometimes I needed to retreat from everything in order to write.

Pete, for his sense of adventure and willingness to map out our path.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explores the relationship between residential local historic districts and population displacement, particularly within the context of African American communities in urban centers. More broadly, it examines conceptions of placemaking, defined as an emotional, intellectual, and physical process of delineating and characterizing space. Space is the physical reality while place encompasses the uses and social networks that operate within and around space, shaping both individual and group identity over time. Through tools like historic districting, historic preservation is often seen as a way to freeze this process of placemaking by halting change of the physical environment, and by implication controlling changes in the social environment as well. Yet preservation can also be a way to highlight the process of change using the built environment as material evidence to connect stories of the past with current residents.

A phenomenon that is often correlated with historic preservation in shaping urban places, though not necessarily in a causal relationship, is the experience of displacement, sometimes called gentrification, where people and businesses are forced to move out of an area because of economic, social, or a combination of pressures brought on by new residents. Rather than a gradual evolution and change of identity, gentrification is typically characterized by a violent and rapid upheaval in the demographic make-up of a neighborhood. The literature that examines questions about social change and the built environment, particularly displacement and gentrification, is vast and drawn from many disciplines including theoretical place studies, sociology, political science, cultural studies, architecture, and economics.

Economic theorists beginning in the 1970s, concluded that displacement is caused by an imbalance in the valuation of resources, and thus mostly a market correction of property values. Alternatively urban studies and architecture scholars have written about the process of gentrification from the point of view of disturbing or even destroying the social values and dimensions of place.

There is also an implicit racial aspect to the process of gentrification and the discussion of its consequences. In some communities, gentrification is seen as a process of prosperous European Americans moving into low to middle-income communities that are primarily composed of ethnic minorities, particularly historically African American neighborhoods. In other communities the racial aspect is perceived neutrally and the phenomenon is solely described as socio-economic displacement. Some of the literature on gentrification is particularly pernicious when it describes new residents as pioneers or homesteaders, implying that urban neighborhoods that have been occupied for generations by often working class ethnic minorities are actually wild places, in need of settlement by more well-heeled residents. Whether the new residents share the ethnic identity with long-term residents or not, this description demeans established residents and community norms leading to a sense of marginalization, or social displacement.

Disentangling the multiple factors at play in the process of gentrification is not easy, given the long history of housing discrimination faced by the African American community in the United States. In many northern cities, de facto segregation was caused by racial covenants attached to property deeds combined with implicit social conventions that prevented neighborhood integration. In southern communities,

increasingly explicit laws, collectively called Jim Crow laws, were enacted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to segregate everything from housing to education to public restrooms based along racial lines. National financial policies enacted after the Great Depression to reduce risk to banks and encourage mortgage lending also contributed to residential segregation by endorsing a mapping system where factors such as condition of housing were considered alongside racial composition in determining what neighborhoods were good investments. Ultimately this system was called redlining because of the color codes on the maps that were used to designate majority African American neighborhoods, and became a synonym for neighborhoods without choice in home loans. In Washington, DC, all of these factors were at play in molding neighborhood racial composition, and have shaped contemporary demographic patterns in the city until very recently. Thus, the racial composition of 21<sup>st</sup>-century urban neighborhoods in Washington is not the result of purely economic choices and social preferences alone.

Grounded in both in the literature on gentrification and the historical patterns of urban residential development, my questions center on the demographic evolution of residential historic districts and the dynamics of neighbor relationships. My research extends this work and contributes to this body of scholarship by examining the social dynamics that change when a neighborhood is recognized as a local historic district. Thus, my approach draws on a mixture of physical, social, and temporal inquiries into the formation of place. How is place experienced, both physically and emotionally? How does designation of a local historic district change the experience of place? Does it always lead to displacement? And if so, what is the temporal

relationship between displacement and historic designation? What does the physical form of the neighborhood, including urban design, street and transportation infrastructure, and housing size, type, and material, contribute to the preservation process and how does it influence social ties? How does stewardship (usually in the form of a historic preservation commission) change the power dynamics in a community? What is the relationship between race, income, gender, age, and the perception of historic districts? And finally, can the creation of a local historic district be used as a tool to prevent or mitigate displacement?

### **Brief Sketch of Case Study Site**

Research on these questions was undertaken using a single case study site in order to delve deeply into the multiplicity of historical and contemporary issues that influence neighborhood dynamics. The site selected was LeDroit Park, a small neighborhood in Northwest Washington, DC [Figure 1]; according to the 2010 census, there were 1,347 dwelling units in Tract 34, which includes all of LeDroit Park historic district, as well as a few portions of neighboring Bloomingdale and two dormitories for Howard University students, with a total population of 4,832 people. LeDroit Park is bounded on the south by Florida and Rhode Island Avenues, on the north by Howard University, on the west by Georgia Avenue, and on the east by 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW [Figure 2]. This site was selected primarily because of the length of time between its historic district designation in 1974 and visible evidence of rapid demographic change, dating to the early 2000s [Figure 3]. Because gentrification is often seen as an immediate result of historic designation, the large time gap between these two phenomena provided an opportunity to explore the interrelationships and



Figure 1: Map of Washington, DC highlighting location of LeDroit Park. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons using the [U.S. Census Bureau's American Factfinder](http://factfinder.census.gov/) at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

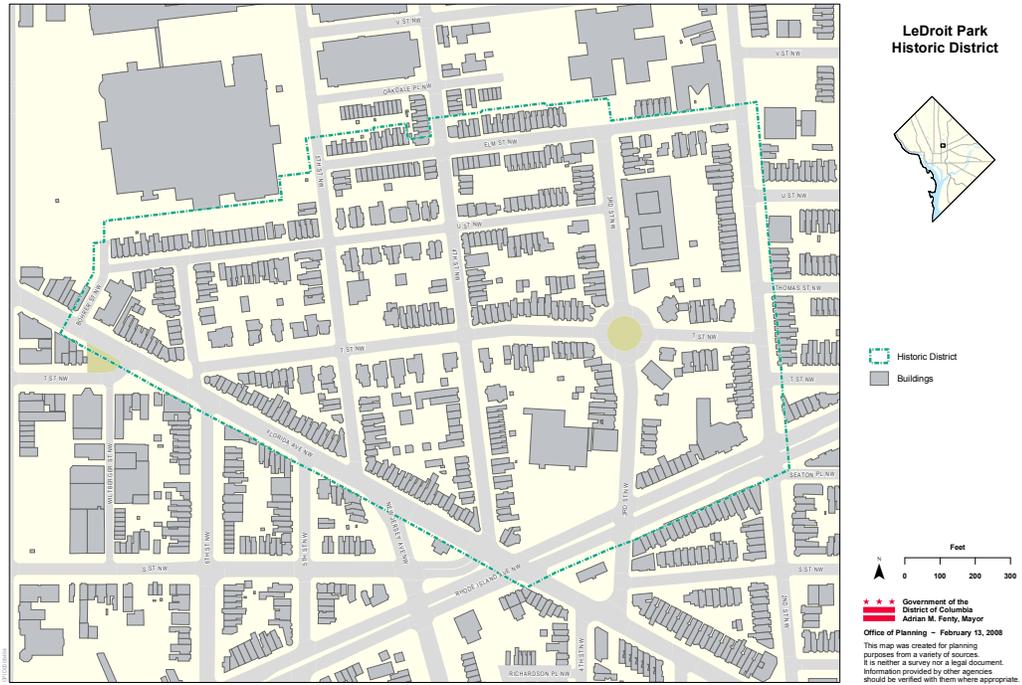


Figure 2: Map of LeDroit Park Historic District, courtesy of DC Office of Planning.

### Population by race in Census Tract 34 (containing LeDroit Park)

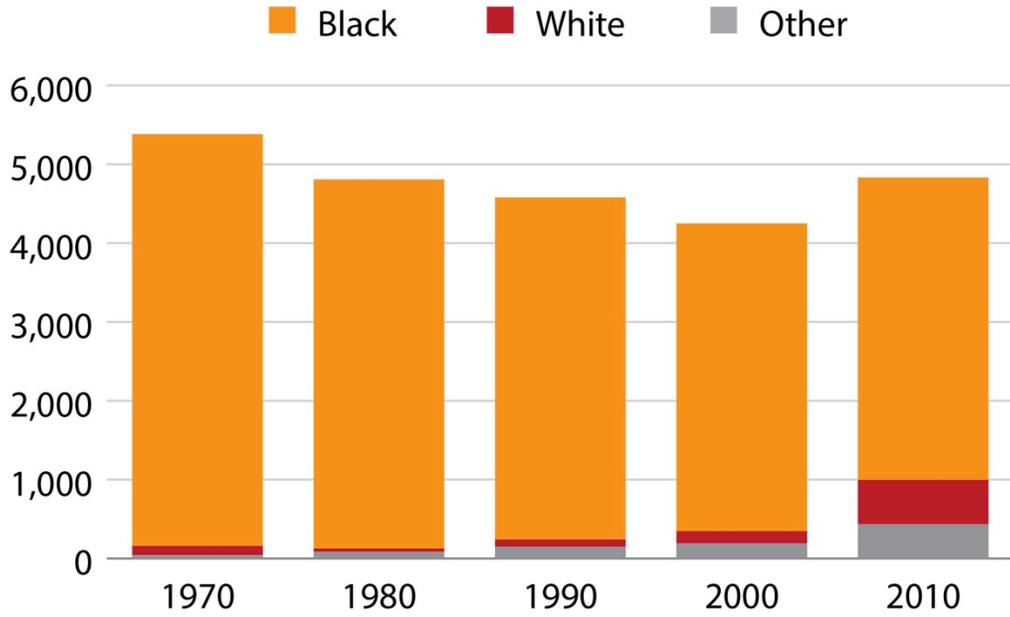


Figure 3: Chart of Census Tract 34 Racial Change 1970-2010.

factors influencing rapid change when it did occur.

LeDroit Park was also selected for its long and well-documented history of race relations in a city that has been described simultaneously as a place of opportunity for African Americans and as a segregated southern town. Developed in 1873 as a rural suburb just beyond the city boundaries of the L'Enfant Plan, LeDroit Park was designed and built as an explicitly white suburb. Though there were no covenants on the deeds, the neighborhood was surrounded by an iron and brick fence, with guards stationed at the entrances to private roads at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (historically named Harewood Avenue) and T Street (Maple Avenue) [Figures 4-5]; as such it was a clear precursor to contemporary gated communities.

By the 1890s, LeDroit Park had gone through an integration process, both racial and municipal; because of its proximity to both the U.S. Capitol and Howard University, it had become the center of an elite Black community and because of local politics, it had become fully part of the city of Washington. It remained a symbolic homeplace for much of the African American upper and middle class in Washington through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

By the 1960s dismantling of segregation laws and changes in residential patterns led to disinvestment. While racially the area remained largely African American, the socio-economic status of residents on average declined, and the neighborhood's large structures were aging and required costly maintenance. With the encroachment of Howard University Hospital and pressures from city-wide plans for urban renewal, residents joined together to create the second nationally recognized African American historic district listed on the National Register.

LeDroit Park Historic District Boundaries

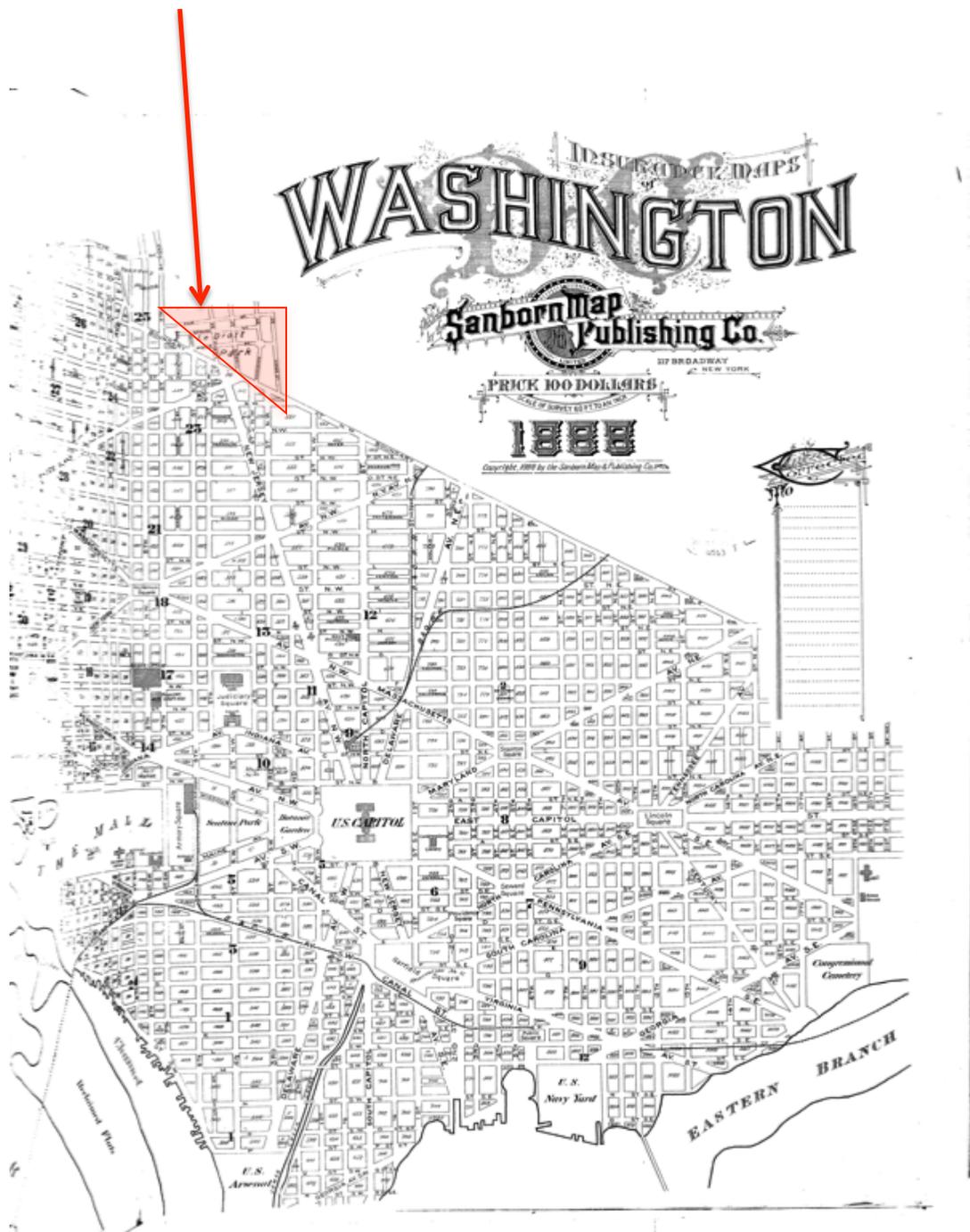


Figure 4: Sanborn (1888) map of Washington, DC indicating LeDroit Park.

LeDroit Park street names, current (and historic)

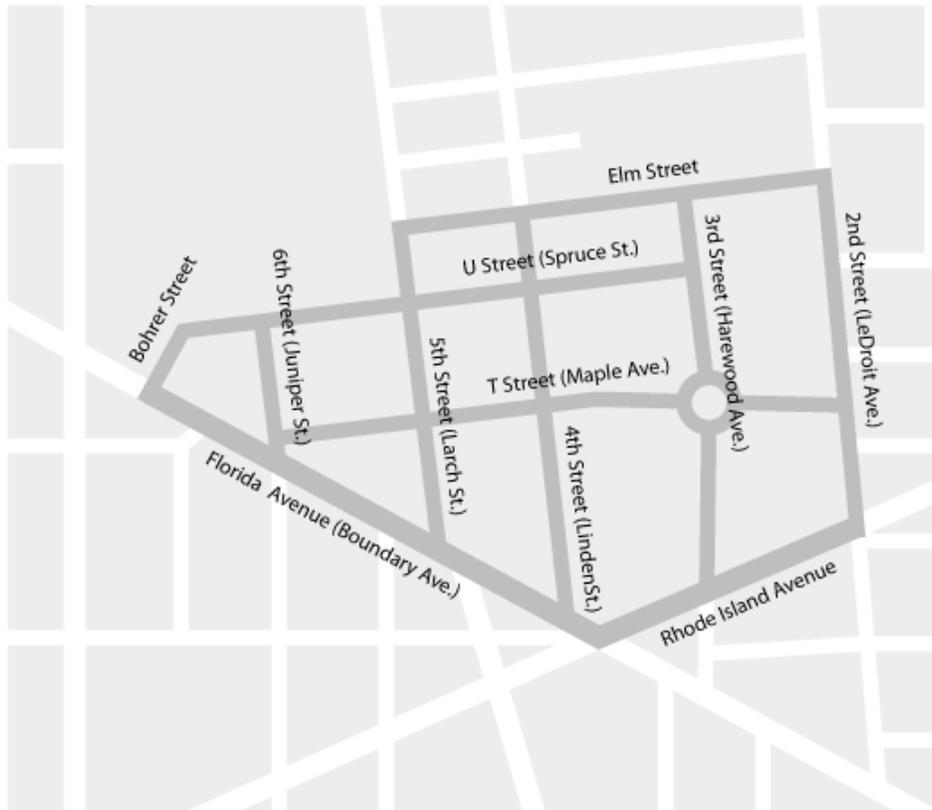


Figure 5: Diagram of LeDroit Park with historic and contemporary street names.

Completed in 1974, the significance narrative focused on the planning and architecture of the neighborhood as part of the national romantic suburb movement, a unique addition to the city of Washington. While associative significance was not a focus of the narrative, a brief description of some notable African American residents was included. Though this honorific designation in combination with local preservation regulations allowed for grants and some reinvestment, the neighborhood continued to slowly decay until the late 1990s, when a large influx of well-heeled and racially diverse residents began to reinvest in the architecturally attractive and varied housing stock [Appendix 1]. While individual investors made a tremendous impact, the catalyst for this change came from a revitalization plan from Howard University that dramatically reduced vacancy and paved the way for reinvestment.

Another salient reason for choosing this neighborhood to conduct research is that I am an 18-year resident of the LeDroit Park community. This positionality provided both challenges and advantages in the research process, which shifted based on the perceptions of the informant. Analyzing my positionality, I am a white middle-class professional pursuing a graduate degree, which means that I do not share my ethnic identity with a majority of the residents who are identified in census data as African American, but do share some socio-economic characteristics, as LeDroit Park was traditionally the residence of many Howard University professors and other African American white-collar professionals. Thus, I can be perceived as both an insider and an outsider to the community, depending on the criteria used.

My emic knowledge of change over nearly two decades was an advantage as informants referred to local places or stories in short-hand, expecting that I would remember and be able to put into context events like the replacement of concrete sidewalks with herringbone brick or the change of Simon's (the local name for the market) into the LeDroit Market [Figure 6]. But the perception of being an insider became a disadvantage when interviewing newer community members, who almost invariably tried to downplay their knowledge of the history of the community in deference to mine, beginning the interview with a power imbalance that I tried to reverse.

Because I do not share my racial identity with the majority of residents in LeDroit Park, I was also perceived as an outsider. This was to my advantage when individual informants would assume that I was not familiar with how racial prejudice affected African Americans in the city, and would go into great detail explaining individual experiences such as the process of financing their house, or how they are treated by European American neighbors, providing many more insights and deeper information than what I had explicitly asked in my questions. My race was also to my disadvantage because some informants took my racial identity to mean that I was only interested in the architecture and aesthetics of the neighborhood and not the deep social roots of the community. As such, they thought I was only interested in questions of space, rather than investigating place.

As a member of the community, I was able to use my involvement in the civic association as a way to observe community dynamics in a deep and meaningful way; I engaged in participation-observation while contributing to the neighborhood. One



Figure 6: The LeDroit Park Market, once known as “Simon’s.” Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Carol Highsmith, photographer, 2010.

of my roles is part of an ongoing effort to make the Park at LeDroit, a new city park in the neighborhood on the site of a decommissioned school, more usable and inviting. This included helping to organize a tree planting day and ongoing tree and park maintenance [Figures 7-8]. While the decision to help beautify the park has alienated me from some neighbors who feel that the school was torn down because of its association with African Americans, it has allowed me to get to know other neighbors who had a vision of a usable public space. One of the downfalls of participant-observation is that by necessity you have to choose a side on issues, and cannot remain neutral. But involvement allows the informant to engage in a more meaningful conversation, and either challenge or agree with my decisions, providing a richness of data. These informal conversations were an integral part of my understanding of the neighborhood dynamics and evolution, and helped to interpret and put into context the formal interviews conducted for the project.

### **Hypothesis and Analysis**

Although focused on the recent demographic changes in the LeDroit Park neighborhood as part of a greater trend within the District of Columbia, this study is also grounded in the 140-year history of physical, social, and political changes in the area. My hypothesis is that there is no direct causal relationship between creating a local historic district and the displacement of residents, but rather that the designation is one facet of a complex series of changes in the social construction of place; in combination with larger economic and policy changes these changes in place ultimately result in residents feeling a loss of identity and thus experiencing displacement, either physical or emotional. Though it may seem as if population



invite you to a

# FALL DAY IN THE PARK & Tree Planting

We're planting 45 trees in the **Park at LeDroit** with Casey Trees, but that's not all. We'll have pumpkin and face painting for kids and a dog costume contest as well.

● **Kids in costumes get a prize too!** ●

So bring your kids, wear closed toed shoes, meet some neighbors and join us for the fun!

- 8:30 a.m. Registration/breakfast
- 9:00 a.m. – noon Tree planting/Park Clean-up
- 10:00 a.m. & 11:30 a.m. Pumpkin and face painting
- 11:30 a.m. Dog Costume Contest

**This  
Saturday,  
Oct. 25**

Figure 7: Image of Tree Planting Day community flyer designed by author.



Figure 8: Image of trees being planted in the Park at LeDroit October 2014. Photo by author.

change is by choice rather than by force—a component of most definitions of gentrification—this type of rapid change in social networks exerts a very real pressure on both newer and long-term residents. Generational differences in experience are often exacerbated by racial and socio-economic differences among residents, thus compounding the impact of policy changes, and causing a major shift in group identity and sense of place. While this effect may not be intentional or anticipated, it results in a very real loss of the intangible heritage of the neighborhood, and thus becomes a concern for overall social sustainability of the neighborhood.

When a local historic district is created, the social dynamic will be altered in several, often unanticipated, ways. Both interpersonal relationships as well as the relationship between the neighborhood and the city will change based on this zoning intervention. On the level of personal networks and relationships, historic district residents will likely experience little immediate impact, but as the ordinance is enforced, power relationships among residents will change. Much will depend on the perception of equitable enforcement of rules and regulations. At the city level, citizens of a historic district may experience an increase in political clout or visibility because of their potential participation in cultural tourism or other revenue-generating programs; there may also be subsequent property value increases related to visual improvements associated with collective restoration and renovation efforts in the historic district. While these social changes may not cause direct displacement of residents, there will likely be some secondary displacement as the power relationships among residents evolve, and some long-time residents feel excluded from the shared

prosperity. Thus, gentrification can clearly be an outcome of local historic district designation.

However, I argue that if the historic district is created in reaction to a specific development pressure such as demolition for a highway or in the case of LeDroit Park, a hospital, then the subsequent increase in social capital among residents may overcome any pressures for secondary gentrification and reinforce a sense of shared identity, at least for property owners. Tenancy is significant in the perception of social change because renters have less control over the cost of their housing. If a property owner anticipates more demand on the property because of a historic district designation, they could raise the rent and displace current residents in order to get a higher return on their investment. Although there are a number of small-scale apartment buildings in LeDroit Park, renters were more likely to be displaced from the restoration of single-family houses beginning in the late 1960s.

The results of my investigation of LeDroit Park are described in detail in the chapters that follow, but the broad findings show that displacement has been happening not just since the historic district designation in 1974, but actually began in the late 1960s when single-family homes that had been converted into multi-family units were beginning to be returned to single-family use (or mostly single family with a basement unit) a result of desegregation and population shift in the city as a whole. This process of displacement changed the density of the area, which had intensified beginning in the late 1930s with pressures driven by the Depression followed by the need for war worker housing in a segregated city. The peak for the area was seen in the 1950 Census where 8,543 residents were recorded. Desegregation legislation,

beginning with the 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* case, which declared racial covenants unconstitutional and a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's equal protection clause, allowed African Americans to move throughout the city, easing overcrowding in traditionally African American neighborhoods like LeDroit Park.

Although it didn't lead to immediate gentrification as some of the literature predicts, the historic district designation halted a major intervention in the neighborhood by Howard University, when plans for the hospital expansion were thwarted. This expansion would have changed the overall character of the neighborhood from primarily residential to mostly institutional. However, this designation process did not immediately change the aesthetics of the neighborhood because Howard University remained the landlord of 23 residential properties<sup>1</sup> that were either bought or donated to the University for its use. For the most part these houses remained vacant for over 20 years as the health care system and university values changed. Howard's decisions still affected the neighborhood as people looking to invest in a community, and not just in a structure, are rarely attracted to an area with a large percentage of vacant houses.

The real turning point in the demographic make-up of LeDroit Park came with the launch of the LeDroit Park Initiative, a multi-pronged reinvestment strategy led by Howard University beginning in 1998. This initiative combined funding from the Fannie Mae Foundation, Verizon, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Department of Transportation (DOT) to not only restore or rebuild the university-owned houses, but to install a state-of-the-art internet service

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<sup>1</sup> The number of properties owned by Howard University grew to 45 by the 1990s at the time of the LeDroit Park Initiative.

cable in the neighborhood, and complete streetscaping measures like brick sidewalks, speed humps, historically compatible streetlights, and street trees. The project also assisted several community organizations in rehabilitating or constructing low to middle-income condominiums and houses that added to the housing choices in a small geographic area.

The resulting demographic change—populating previously vacant apartment buildings, houses, and vacant lots—brought many new residents to the area who were more diverse in age and race than the established residents. Tensions around certain community values have arisen, in particular new residents lack of customary greeting on the streets, which has created frustration for long-term residents. Friction between neighbors has also surfaced around the issue of dog ownership. Although there were dog owners in LeDroit Park before the influx of new residents, the perception of a large increase in the dog population and also the practice of some dog owners not cleaning up after their pets has challenged overall community harmony. The creation of a dog park for the explicit use of dog owners was intended to ease this tension, but has created other issues as one particularly outspoken informant feels that the destruction of an elementary school building that made way for the play area, community garden, and dog park was racially motivated. In essence, they feel that pets are being valued more than humans. Therefore, the questions of race and identity are never far from the surface in LeDroit Park. Started as a segregated European American community, and later evolving into an African American enclave, the community is now experiencing growing pains as new subcultures, both generational and racial, are shaping the historic neighborhood.

## *Literature Review and Theoretical Framework*

The literature that examines questions about social change and the built environment is vast, and is drawn from many disciplines including theoretical place studies, sociology, political science, cultural studies, architecture, and economics. This body of literature grounds my questions about how the designation of local historic districts impacts the relationships between neighbors. My work contributes to this body of scholarship by explicitly examining structures of power and identity, such as race, age, gender, and socio-economic status, that change when a neighborhood is recognized as historic.

### Sense of Place and Identity

The basis for much of my focus on the social dynamics of local historic districts is rooted in scholarship that theorizes about the importance of place in the formation of individual identity. Foremost in shaping my approach is the work of Tim Cresswell, a Welsh geographer, whose seminal work, *Place: a Short Introduction* distills the idea of place as a way of “seeing, knowing, and understanding the world.”<sup>2</sup> Place is a fundamental concept for how humans navigate and make sense of the seemingly endless stream of stimuli around us. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan builds on Cresswell’s work, describing places as simultaneously representing security and freedom. Freedom is a key concept in historic districts, as residents often perceive historic designation as impinging on their property rights and the freedom to change their property as they see fit. Freedom and security are important in racial enclaves like LeDroit Park, where residents created an

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<sup>2</sup> Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 2.

atmosphere of safety from segregation and a sense of relative freedom from racially-based social exclusion. Attachments to places, such as your home or the neighborhood in which is it located, are feelings that are shaped by this duality of perception.

Place is both a literal and figurative grid that helps people organize the activities of life. When this grid is disrupted, particularly when that change is not within the control of those affected, feelings range from discomfort to mourning. As Dr. Mindy Fullilove provocatively describes in her psychological study of African American people caught up in the large forces of urban renewal policies, *Root Shock*, these feelings can accompany the physical displacement from place.<sup>3</sup> Thus my research is grounded in the ideas that place is a significant element of human identity formation. When the process of local historic districting is employed to manage change of physical places, that process can impact and change the creation of emotional and intellectual places. For example, when LeDroit Park was designated a historic district, the association of the neighborhood with generations of accomplished African Americans was made explicit, and this narrative, coupled with infrastructure improvements, attracted new residents and continues to be a point of pride for current residents.

#### Spatial Analysis of Urban Design and Form

Because space and place are intimately related, scholarly theory on the physical planning and shaping of space is also essential to research on the creation of historic districts. Kevin Lynch's seminal *Image of the City* captures this relationship

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<sup>3</sup> Fullilove. *Root Shock*.

when he describes his notion that people are an integral part of the city, and not occupants of the physical environment. The text describes his thesis that each person in a city understands the city differently, based on his or her own organizing principles and use. Lynch sorts these principles into five groups of physical elements commonly used to organize experiences of the city: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. These general categories, while detailed in this slim volume, still allow readers or city explorers to define each element for themselves. This interpretation that humans continually shape the city emotionally and intellectually through their understanding of the built environment is the essence of my questions about group and individual identity in historic districts<sup>4</sup>. The initial design of LeDroit Park was inwardly focused, and was surrounded by a fence as both a symbolic and actual barrier to outsiders. I use Edward Blakely and Mary Sneider's work on contemporary gated communities, *Fortress America*, to investigate how the initial residents viewed the fence and how subsequent generations utilized the urban design. I contend that in LeDroit Park, the physical seclusion designed into the neighborhood in the 1870s has been used by generations of residents, both black and white, to shape identity.

Although LeDroit Park has been part of the city of Washington since the 1890s, it was originally designed as a suburban retreat, and thus I used the work of John Stilgoe, *Borderland*, and Sam Bass Warner, *Street Car Suburbs*, to interrogate the structural and street design<sup>5</sup> of LeDroit Park, questioning how the setback, street grid, and both interior and surrounding fencing<sup>6</sup> were used to create a sense of safety

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<sup>4</sup> Lynch. *Image of the City*.

<sup>5</sup> Stilgoe. *Borderland*.

<sup>6</sup> Warner. *Street Car Suburbs*.

and security, a characteristic that is still noted by current residents over a century after the initial plan was created.

#### Cultural Analysis

Many scholars exploring the cultural changes that accompany physical change in cities have influenced my research approach. Peter Williams, a cultural geographer, examines broad cultural ideas that influence demographic change in cities. He focuses his analysis on the shift toward commoditization of history. Beginning with Colonial Williamsburg in the 1930s and reaching a crescendo at the Bicentennial in 1976, American history, particularly local history, was repackaged and used as a synecdoche for values such as patriotism. Making history a commercial enterprise meant that it also had an economic value as a marketing tool for real estate. In his view, marketing was used to convince middle and upper income people to buy property that was deemed to have history, and “reclaim” these areas from the urban poor who were presumably allowing neighborhoods to physically disintegrate, destroying culture with buildings<sup>7</sup>. While Williams makes the connection to historic preservation implicit, there is no distinction between areas that have been formally preserved and ones that are just older.

In 2010 Sharon Zukin, a cultural geographer, broadened the definition of commodification beyond history to include all cultural attributes of a neighborhood, both within the physical environment and the intangible attributes as well. Thus Zukin sees the process of place-based identity construction as the impetus for social

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, “Class constitution through spatial reconstruction?” 55-77.

and economic change, a theory that shapes my view of change in residential historic districts.<sup>8</sup>

Other scholars were looking at linguistics as a part of neighborhood identity construction. Using the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Washington, DC, linguist Gabriella Modan found that the neighborhood, though not yet designated as a historic district, defined its identity based on outdated perceptions of bilingualism and diverse socio-economic population that had mostly vanished by the time of her study. Thus my research examines not only the demographic realities, but also focuses on marketing ideas and identity construction process in historic districts. One particularly poignant marketing symbol in LeDroit Park is the arched gateway at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Street, T Street, and Florida Avenue [Figure 21] which many new residents cited as their first introduction to the neighborhood.

Japonica Brown-Saracino an ethnographer who studied four communities, two rural and two urban, provides a provocative theoretical framework of the varying motivations among gentrifiers in places like LeDroit Park. In her terminology, *pioneers* see their new neighborhood as something to be tamed, and are critical of current residents. These new residents also see renovations as a mid-or long-term economic investment. *Social homesteaders* view the indigenous culture as authentic, but only want it preserved in small amounts as symbolic of the past<sup>9</sup>. For example, in LeDroit Park the circle at 3<sup>rd</sup> and T Streets is named Anna Julia Cooper Circle for the famed educator who lived a block away. Naming the circle in her honor highlights the value that many past residents placed on education, but is contradicted by the

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<sup>8</sup> Zukin. *Naked City*.

<sup>9</sup> Brown-Saracino, *A Neighborhood that Never Changes*.

friction between residents and students of nearby Howard University. *Social preservationists*, by contrast, move into an area and want to preserve the culture and the people they deem authentic, and are self-conscious about their contribution to any change. For example, one resident in LeDroit Park launched the “Hi! Campaign” to introduce new residents to the culture of greeting neighbors when she noticed that new residents were not only not aware of the custom, but that established residents were offended by their lack of greeting. Thus it is important not only to understand demographic changes in race and socio-economic status within historic districts, but it is equally important to question the motivations for investment, both social and economic, among new and long-term residents LeDroit Park.

Noted historian David Lowenthal, in one of his many essays on the process of creation and preservation of historical narrative, addresses the conundrum of preservation of working class neighborhoods, where the focus on material conservation becomes more of a burden than a boon. In his assessment, folkways are more important in identity construction for people of moderate means, perhaps because they had little agency in the creation of their built environment and material world, and thus preservation of intangible heritage through memory and narrative is more valuable.<sup>10</sup> Thus in assessing social change in LeDroit Park, it is necessary to question not only who has occupied the structures in the recent past, but to research the relationship between the initial residents, the builders and the resident population as it has evolved.

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<sup>10</sup> Lowenthal. “The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions”

In his empirical analysis of the impact of historic preservation, Ned Kauffman asserts that amenity upgrades in general cause a rise in property costs.<sup>11</sup> For example, the creation of a park or opening of high-end commercial spaces, as has happened recently in LeDroit Park, typically make property values rise, and thus displace people who are priced out of that area by rising rents or property taxes. His theory rests on the idea that preservation is considered an amenity in the housing market. By contrast, much of the historic preservation literature addresses residents' concern that designation lowers property values because of the perceived loss of freedom that comes with historic commission oversight. Thus I asked my informants, particularly long-term residents who were present before and after the historic district was created, about the perceived value they placed on residing in a historic district.

In historian Daniel Bluestone's recently released collection of preservation case studies he revisits the well-known case of the Mecca apartment building in Chicago, a technological wonder at the time of construction in the 1890s, built as a hotel for middle class white visitors to the Chicago World's Fair. By the 1960s the apartments were occupied by African American migrants to the industrial city, part of a tight-knit social structure on the city's South Side. After national attention, the apartment building was razed to make way for the IIT Architecture School. Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the building is arguably one of the masterpieces of new Bauhaus design. Bluestone asserts that preservation could have prevented displacement if the residents had more cultural capital; but the associative and intangible history of the site, significant to the African American community, was not enough to prevent redevelopment by an entity, the university, that was presumed to

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<sup>11</sup> Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*.

bring prestige and economic resources to that part of the city.<sup>12</sup> While the preservation of LeDroit Park involves both an African American community and a university expansion, the outcome was different in part because of the political and social influence of the supporters of the historic district. This case study was particularly influential on my methodology, and resulted in a more critical evaluation of multiple data sources including archives, interviews and historic demographics to interrogate imbalances of social capital and influence.

#### Political Analysis:

My thinking on the political aspects of neighborhood change has been particularly shaped by the seminal work on New York gentrification by Neil Smith, whose 1986 edited collection *Gentrification of the City* provides a simple and coherent definition of gentrification: the replacement of population groups by successively more wealthy people. Beginning with the middle class displacing poor residents, who are in turn replaced by the elite, Smith asserts that the spatial, economic, and social restructuring that accompanies displacement is a process of corporatizing the city, producing increasingly homogeneous enclaves of politically influential residents.<sup>13</sup>

Also in *Gentrification of the City*, Robert Beauregard looks at the reasons behind gentrification in New York. He argues that the physical results of gentrification, restored buildings, are only the visible evidence of a correction to a market imbalance rather than an effort to homogenize the city. Using epistemological

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<sup>12</sup> Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation*.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, "Gentrification, the frontier, and the restructuring of urban space."

methods, Beauregard posits an economic causality for gentrification, thus older buildings, being devalued, are merely the focus of reinvestment and not tools used to exclude people with lower incomes. His research only examines the motivations of individual people and the impact of changes in individual structures, and does not look at the cumulative effect that change could have within a neighborhood, as in a designated historic district.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously building on these two works, Sharon Zukin sees gentrifiers as economically rational actors, and while not trying to displace residents, are looking for art and culture, something she finds particularly compelling for the elite in an advanced service economy. Thus, she makes a brief connection between preserved buildings and gentrification, stating that areas that are preserved for their architectural character attract gentrifiers because of the aesthetic connection to culture.<sup>15</sup> She critiques contemporary gentrification literature as being at a stalemate, calling for integrated cultural and economic analysis, a type of examination that is difficult to find in the literature even 25 years later. My research on LeDroit Park explores both the social and economic changes in the neighborhood, and begins to look at the relationship between these changes.

Other political and planning scholars have shaped my thinking about how historic preservation may contribute to social change in neighborhoods. Urbanists Elvin Wyly and Daniel Hammel empirically found that gentrification was on the rise in cities, using Washington, DC, as a case study. They concluded that aesthetics, historic character and density, were being used to justify the destruction of public housing in the HOPE VI program, which not only displaced low income residents,

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<sup>14</sup> Beauregard, "The Chaos and Complexity of Gentrification."

<sup>15</sup> Zukin, "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core."

but enticed middle-class residents into new mixed-income developments. Urban planner Kathe Newman looks more broadly at housing policy in the 1990s and 2000s to demonstrate that cities viewed gentrification as a tool for economic sustainability, and actively encouraged higher income residents to move to the city in order to increase the tax base; the marketing of historic districts was just one of many amenities used to lure new residents.<sup>16</sup> Though LeDroit Park was not specifically mentioned in marketing strategies, beginning in the 1970s with the election of Marion Barry as mayor, Washington, DC, has had a long history of policies to encourage higher income residents to invest.

Urban Planner Lance Freeman provides the most balanced and insightful analysis of the impact of these neoliberal policies in two historically African American neighborhoods in New York City, Harlem and Clinton Hill. Through extensive interviewing, Freeman delves into the social consequences of gentrification and displacement. Freeman acknowledges positive impacts of higher income residents on indigenous residents, including increased access to shops and goods, as well as better funded schools and increased police protection, but also delves into the racial component of gentrification and examines the divisive consequences of these positive outcomes when residents attribute the changes to change in racial composition of the neighborhood; white residents are perceived by black residents, particularly in Harlem, as having more social and political capital, and thus able to get the level of services they want. This situation creates resentment, as the longer-term residents wonder why it took a change in racial composition to get increases in

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<sup>16</sup> Newman, "Newark, Decline and Avoidance, Renaissance and Desire: From Disinvestment to Reinvestment."

services. But Freeman also finds that in Clinton Hill, where many more residents owned their property (often as co-ops) there was a sense of community cohesiveness and residents were able to demand more input in the process of neighborhood change, eventually gaining some restitution in the form of TIF vouchers and other affordable housing programs. Despite Freeman's thorough analysis of gentrification and cultural capital, he only addresses the connection to historic preservation once in the book, where he infers that historic districts send signals that encourage gentrification because of the implied political clout of residents.<sup>17</sup> Though political influence was certainly important in the designation of the historic district in LeDroit Park in 1974, there were other factors such as infrastructure investment that were the immediate catalysts for gentrification.

#### Economic Analysis:

Because of the economic investment that bricks and mortar historic preservation represents, by the 1990s preservation scholars were investigating ways to analyze and understand the balance between costs and benefits. In the early part of the decade, preservation consultant Melinda Matthews explored the secondary impact of a tourist economy on the local housing market. Her case study focused on Key West, Florida, where preserving the local vernacular architecture had at first provided jobs for the preservation process and then provided jobs for people working in the burgeoning tourist industry created in part by the preserved architecture. But because Key West is an island and housing is a very limited resource, the lack of affordable housing (for those working in the tourist trade) had become a crisis. With revenue-

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<sup>17</sup> Freeman, *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*.

earning buildings, such as hotels and restaurants, filling any available land, and housing values rising precipitously with the economy, workers were increasingly pushed off the island.<sup>18</sup> Matthews provides important insights on the connection between the limited supply of housing in a historic area and gentrification.

Economist Roger Stough applied macroeconomic theory to examine the outcomes of historic preservation, concluding that there are three ways preservation can contribute to the economy: as an economic base, which will develop the local economy; as a growth pole, which will spark development around the preserved buildings; and as soft infrastructure, where preservation is part of the knowledge economy that encourages higher paid employees to move to a location.<sup>19</sup> The last principle is of course one of the driving forces behind displacement, but Stough does not address any of the social impact questions nor any of the economic consequences of preservation.

Preservationist Donovan Rypkema is perhaps the most well-known and prolific author on the economics of historic preservation. With numerous articles and extensive studies to his name, the fundamental principles that he has advocated over a 15-year period are the same. In a 1995 article in *Forum Journal*, a publication of the National Trust geared towards scholars and practitioners, Rypkema exposed the myth that historic preservation drives down property values.<sup>20</sup> This is an essential piece of scholarship because there are two contradictory beliefs in the general public about historic preservation: first, due to property restrictions on buildings within a designated historic district the value will always drop, and second that preservation

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<sup>18</sup> Matthews, "Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation."

<sup>19</sup> Stough, "Economic Development Theory and Practice: Heritage Based Development."

<sup>20</sup> Rypkema, "Economics and Historic Preservation."

always causes property taxes to go up (which of course is not likely if the first premise is true and property value always go down) thus causing displacement of residents. Rypkema often uses economic theory and policy analysis to advocate for economic integration of communities, thus addressing the lack of housing available to wide range of people. In another *Forum Journal* article published in 2003, Rypkema articulated multiple ways to measure the economic impact of historic preservation, and focused on the affordable housing crisis as the reason that people are displaced from historic homes.<sup>21</sup> Rypkema developed his ideas more fully in a 2004 article and advocated for using historic preservation as a way to prevent displacement, because if the housing that is designated as historic is relatively small scale, and there is local market pressure for larger properties, preservation restrictions will prevent tear-downs that would ultimately drive property taxes higher.<sup>22</sup> Of course, this scenario addresses a specific set of market circumstances that is not present everywhere. I have utilized Rypkema's analysis when considering what role the limited supply of housing has played in the gentrification of LeDroit Park.

Preservationist Randall Mason weighs in on the debate of historic preservation economics by arguing that the theory of valuing historic preservation based on property values is only one of the ways to measure economic impact.<sup>23</sup> Other methods include measuring the cost of labor and materials for preservation versus new construction. Of course, his research is heavily informed by an advocacy agenda, providing support for the argument that historic preservation is good for the local economy. Harkening back to Stough's theoretical analysis, Mason is arguing

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<sup>21</sup> Rypkema, "Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing: The Missed Connection."

<sup>22</sup> Rypkema, "The Oversimplification of Gentrification."

<sup>23</sup> Mason, "Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-Centered Preservation."

for preservation as an economic base while not exploring the development it could inspire as an economic spark. In LeDroit Park, historic preservation did not encourage economic development as most of the commercial spaces are outside of the historic district; instead, an overall increase in density and socio-economic status has brought new restaurants close to the residential district, increasing the desirability of the neighborhood to higher-income buyers.

#### Feminist Spatial Analysis

My understanding of both placemaking and gentrification has been very influenced by writers employing feminist methodologies to the analysis of space such as geographer Doreen Massey and architect Dolores Hayden. These writers are particularly interested in analyzing power structures as they are expressed in the built environment, often focused through the lens of gender. This work has been exceptionally helpful in considering the multiple levels of power that are involved not only in the creation of a local historic district, but also in the daily lives within the buildings that comprise such neighborhoods. For a historical perspective, Dolores Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution* provides an in-depth analysis of how women, and feminists in particular, helped shape the designs of domestic spaces—houses, apartments, and neighborhoods—for mostly middle-class white families in the United States beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> Covering a breadth of living environments, from utopian communities to settlement houses, Hayden explores the physical results of the design process and how influential women impacted and shaped housing, in turn creating very gendered spaces. Similarly, architectural

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<sup>24</sup> Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*.

historian Gwendolyn Wright examined thirteen model types of housing in the United States built over the course of three centuries in her collection of essays, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. Wright uses traditional documentary research as well as analysis of the material culture of existing buildings and neighborhoods to discern how a multitude of neighborhoods turn into places and shape identities.<sup>25</sup> Wright does not examine gender explicitly, but does explore the role of women in shaping the social aspects and networks in housing. Urban planner Daphne Spain expands on this historical perspective in *Gendered Spaces* using both textual and spatial analysis to explore what she calls the interrelationship between gender and space. As an example, Spain looks at educational spaces that were designed for women, and examines how these segregated spaces may have shaped the users' behavior.<sup>26</sup>

Dolores Hayden's most influential book, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes in Public History*, is both an exploration of the process of how buildings and neighborhoods shape identity, as well as a meditation on how highlighting elements of history that are not necessarily visually apparent can have a deep impact on shaping community identity and place-making in the present.<sup>27</sup> Hayden describes several case studies where she acts as both a designer and coordinator of a team of collaborators, including visual artists and historians, to investigate, fabricate, and install artistic interpretations of history. Hayden's critique of traditional historic preservation practice, emphasizing the relative lack of historical narratives featuring

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*.

<sup>26</sup> Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 141-168.

<sup>27</sup> Hayden, *The Power of Place*.

women or people from minority ethnic groups, is particularly poignant and still relevant fifteen years after its publication.

Intersections and Gaps: Room for more scholarship

As this overview of multidisciplinary literature demonstrates, there is considerable scholarship regarding the process of residential displacement, which has some relationship to historic preservation but remains largely unexplored. Both gentrification scholarship and historic preservation scholarship are interdisciplinary approaches and both rely heavily on policy and varying forms of cultural analysis to look at the phenomenon of displacement. While gentrification scholars often make passing reference to historic preservation as a factor in this process, there has been no real examination of how that relationship works. Instead, there is an ubiquitous assumption that preservation causes gentrification without consideration of local market conditions. Historic preservation scholarship also bases much of the literature related to the phenomenon of gentrification on the presumption that there is a direct causal relationship. Preservation scholars are particularly attuned to the fact that there are unique local conditions that cause outcomes, but rely on a limited number of case study locations and lack in-depth analysis to examine these phenomena. There is also an undercurrent of advocacy in preservation scholarship, and thus most of the literature is based on the idea that preservation is overall a positive intervention and that many minor negative effects can be easily addressed. Neither body of scholarship examines the full dynamics of the relationship between historic preservation and residential displacement. My research on LeDroit Park provides depth of analysis in addressing the multiple factors that create neighborhood change

and residential displacement while also investigating the ongoing process of placemaking.

The present study contributes to gentrification and historic preservation literature in two ways. First, it provides extensive investigation of the economic and urban design history of a single case study to answer questions about how initial design intent, which may be influenced by corporate, institutional, or individual clients and users, continues to influence contemporary residents. Using an interdisciplinary lens, my research examines how the physical form shapes the long-term economic value of the neighborhood, and how this original form has impacted social adaptability over time. In LeDroit Park much of the housing stock has served multiple levels of density over time due to its sturdy materials and interior spatial flexibility. Thus the planning of this neighborhood as well as its history of additions and adaptations speak to the value of heterogeneity of design that will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow.

The second contribution of this research is insight into circumstances and customs that are particular to sites that highlight African American stories, as these are still underrepresented on the National Register. One interesting aspect of identity that surfaced in this research was the use of the name Washingtonian. While it is used in mainstream media, and most visibly in the monthly newsstand magazine of that name, to denote any person who lives in the Washington Metropolitan Area, I found that African American informants used the term very specifically to denote people with long family roots exclusively within the city of Washington itself. And it was clear that this designation had value, as many informants wanted to make clear

that they did not claim to be a Washingtonian because they had lived in Maryland for a while. This was in stark contrast to the European Americans who seemed to embrace the designation regardless of the length of time they had lived in the city or even its surrounding areas. This seemingly small distinction speaks volumes about the value placed on long-term investment in place as a signifier of identity in the African American community in DC and is a concept to explore within other African American communities around the country. It is clearly an important part of the intangible heritage of LeDroit Park, and with more research it may prove to be part of a larger cultural value as well.

### **Research Methodology**

In order to research the changes in demographics and neighborhood identity in LeDroit Park, the methods used were by necessity transdisciplinary, combining multiple approaches to understanding space and place. Beginning with historical and archival investigation of LeDroit Park and its surrounding context, investigation progressed to the social history of African American society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly professionals in the city of Washington, a place seen as having many more employment and social opportunities for African Americans than other cities, particularly in the South. Simultaneous examination of existing physical space and material attributes of buildings led to ethnographic interviews with current residents to delve into the emotional and intellectual processes that create social networks, transforming spaces into places.

## Types of Data

The research process began with extensive historical and archival investigation to understand the events that have shaped LeDroit Park physically as well as socially over the 140-year history of the neighborhood. This historical research involved both primary resources such as interviews, oral histories, and first-person essays, such as Mary Church Terrell's *A Colored Woman in a White World*<sup>28</sup>, as well as secondary resources such as newspaper articles, books, and scholarly articles analyzing the history of Washington, DC, housing policy, politics and urban planning.

Understanding social change in the city of Washington, DC as well as within the neighborhood of LeDroit Park required extensive research into the demographic changes that have occurred over time. Because there is so much written in current newspaper articles about the phenomenon of gentrification in Washington, DC, as a whole, and within African American neighborhoods such as Shaw, U Street, and Anacostia in particular, comparative analysis of the population within LeDroit Park and its immediate surroundings over time is put in context with contemporary accounts and interviews.

Another form of data collection is visual analysis and archival investigation of the built environment in LeDroit Park, both as it exists today as well as the stages of evolution and change over the history of the neighborhood. Using maps created by the DC Office of Planning that delineate various aspects of the historic district such as date of construction and architect of record, this research explores the impact of the physical evolution on the changing demographics of residents. Of particular

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<sup>28</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*.

importance is the lack of major commuter or commercial thoroughfares within the neighborhood, which provide a sense of security within the larger urban environment. Overall the physical investigation has been a process of looking for patterns and then investigating the influence these have on the people within this environment, beginning to dissect the complex process of placemaking.

The least formal data set comes from participant-observation within the dynamics of the neighborhood. Because of my positionality within the community as both an outsider and an insider who has resided here since 1997, these observations are invariably biased and have been scrutinized to understand the role my perspective plays on these insights. Through active membership on committees such as the parks committee, I have gained an understanding of the sheer effort that residents have put into the improvement of the physical and social dimensions of community over many generations; I have seen first-hand the value that is placed on participation, and the need to earn respect from the other residents through effort and openness of spirit. This data may be the hardest to quantify, but it has provided grounding for my conclusions on the formation of identity and placemaking in urban environments.

The final set of data came directly from residents and community leaders. Interviews were conducted with 43 key informants and stakeholders within the community [Appendix 2]. Because my research questions concern the intersection of physical space with the emotional and intellectual construction of place, I have performed ethnographic interviews and oral history with a sampling of residents, including thirteen residents who have lived in the neighborhood for at least ten years, six residents who have been in LeDroit Park for between five and ten years, and nine

residents who have lived in the neighborhood less than five years—both renters and property owners, civic leaders and politicians, business owners, and key informants such as the community liaison to Howard University, Maybelle Taylor Bennett, and others who may not reside in the neighborhood but have a great deal of insight into the community. My sampling was gathered by asking for volunteers, and then following up on suggestions for additional informants based on those interviews. Interestingly, there were two long-term residents who initially volunteered to be interviewed, but when I contacted them to schedule a convenient time, they became hesitant to participate. While I was not able to discern why their interest level changed, I got the sense that they were reluctant to share their observations for fear of offending either me or other community members. Placemaking is both an individual and a group process, and so I observed, participated, and interacted on many levels with the community to gather data.

Feminist theorists influenced my approach to interviewing, as I continually analyzed the power structures and imbalances in the informant relationship with the interviewer as well as the larger LeDroit Park community. This process of integral reflexivity led me to not only listen closely to what is said, but through a discursive process, to also listen to silences, as described by gender scholar Patricia Lina Leavey in *Feminist Research Practice*. While her writing is particularly focused on how gender roles can shape what and how stories are told, and thus also what is not being said, I was particularly conscious of how racial identity may have impacted the storytelling process significantly.<sup>29</sup> Race has played an influential role in the choices many people had for housing over the past century in the United States, and thus

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<sup>29</sup> Leavey, *Feminist Research Practice*.

some of my informants were conscious of how their own racial identity may have influenced their decision to move to LeDroit Park. Some European American informants were particularly uncomfortable with self-identifying as a gentrifier, and yet voluntarily explored what that label meant to them. Many African American informants openly discussed not only how race has shaped LeDroit Park continuously throughout its history, but why they feel that race is an essential aspect of the story that is not explored enough in official histories.

### **Chapter Overviews**

The chapters that form the body of the research findings are organized chronologically, divided into time periods ranging from 17-26 years. Each period is bound by a significant event that has shaped the neighborhood and often the city of Washington as well [Figures 9-10]. Woven within the historical narrative and physical descriptions are comments from contemporary residents that relate to the developments in LeDroit Park in this era. Chapter Two covers the years from the founding of the planned development in 1873 through 1893 when the neighborhood was racially integrated by Octavius Williams III, a Black barber at the U.S. Capitol who bought a house in the neighborhood. This chapter relies heavily on spatial analysis of the existing buildings, roads, transportation lines and connectivity to the larger city. Because the overall scale and architectural character of the neighborhood is mainly shaped during this time period, much discussion is devoted to physical attributes including building style, typology, materials, and how these factors influenced the social development. Informants share their perceptions of the spatial

qualities of the neighborhood, focusing particularly on the housing stock and the overall feel of the architecture.

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Date range</b>	<b>Time frame</b>	<b>Beginning and ending events</b>
2	1873-1892	19 years	1873 Neighborhood established 1892 Last year of white enclave
3	1893-1919	26 years	1893 Racial integration of neighborhood 1919 riots for fair compensation for black WWI veterans
4	1920-1944	25 years	Period of Flourishing of black intelligentsia
5	1945-1968	23 years	1945 End of WWII and return of veterans 1968 Riots after MLK assassination
6	1968-1997	19 years	Period of slow physical deterioration and disinvestment
7	1998-present	17 years	1998 LeDroit Park Initiative Period of reinvestment and gentrification

Figure 9: Outline of Chapters with bounding events.

## Select events impacting LeDroit Park, 1860–2010

See Appendix 3: LeDroit Park History Timeline

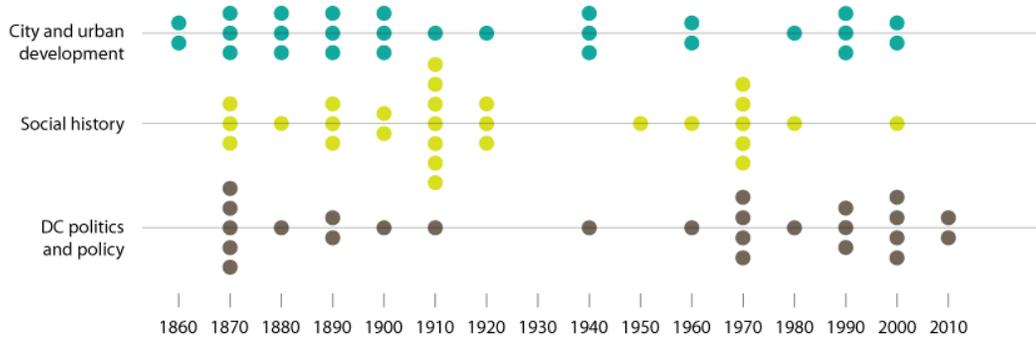


Figure 10: Cluster chart to illustrate cultural, social, and political influences on historic district. Each dot represents one major event that influenced LeDroit Park, as described in Appendix 3, a detailed timeline of events.

Chapter Three delves into the social history of Washington, DC, during an era when racial separation grew increasingly explicit, 1893-1919. With reliance on historical newspapers, including African American papers like the *Washington Bee* and the *Colored American*, as well as European American papers like the *Evening Star* and the *Washington Post*, this section begins with integration of the neighborhood and ends with the Red Summer of 1919, when black soldiers returning from World War I reacted with violence to their lack of acceptance and full citizenship. Spatially, LeDroit Park became a part of the city of Washington, with changes in road names and a densification of the overall plan of the neighborhood. But the most significant part of the spatial development is the continuation of the feeling of seclusion and security within the larger urban environment. Contemporary residents also react to this quality of place, providing insights into how it shaped their decision to move to or stay in LeDroit Park.

Chapter Four looks at the influence of Howard University under its first African American president, Mordecai Johnson, as part of the larger historical currents of a flourishing Black subculture in the United States. LeDroit Park from 1920-1944 is closely tied to the Harlem Renaissance and the era of the “New Negro”—a name coined in LeDroit Park resident and Howard University professor Alain Locke’s writings. The area nurtured intellectuals and artists such as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer and Duke Ellington. This research posits that the flowering of creativity and scholarship within a city of tightening racial lines was made possible, or at least enhanced, because of the physical attributes of the neighborhood. Informants, both long-term and newer, describe the role that these significant

historical figures play in their understanding of the emotional landscape of LeDroit Park.

Chapter Five spans the time period from the end of World War II in 1945 until the riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Characterized by civil unrest that erupted in demonstrations against racial disparities in the city of Washington and across the nation, this era witnessed little physical change in LeDroit Park but tremendous demographic and social change. The intellectuals and artists of the past generation nurtured organizers and protestors; LeDroit Park residents and leaders such as Mary Church Terrell and her husband Judge Robert Terrell worked tirelessly to change the laws and customs of racial segregation. Howard University was a crucible of change as well, graduating people like Thurgood Marshall from its law school who went on to challenge American apartheid. Some contemporary residents provide oral histories of these events, while others cite this history of notables as influential in their daily lives.

The Sixth chapter examines the social and physical changes that were brought on by desegregation and greater choice for the city and the country's African American population. Gradual decline and disrepair set in, as LeDroit Park was no longer the only neighborhood open to the city's elite Black community. From 1969-1997 warring factions sought control of the neighborhood; Howard University wanted to expand its hospital, and was gifted or purchased many homes with the intent of demolition. In response, neighbors researched and argued the case for historic district designation to prevent this character change; with official listing in 1974 it became the second primarily African American historic district on the National Register.

However, as the vacant houses decayed, the overall physical appearance of the neighborhood became one of disinvestment. There were still many residents passionately committed to the community, but the remaining vacancies invited criminal activity and drug use, common problems in many sections of contemporary DC. A few informants recalled a lively atmosphere and were not bothered by the criminal activity, yet some physical changes like the addition of security bars on many doors and windows suggest a loss of the feeling of sanctuary that LeDroit Park had once provided.

Chapter Seven explores the turning point, when in 1998 Howard University assembled a series of grants and other funding to reinvigorate and reinvest in the neighborhood. Acting as a catalyst for change, the “LeDroit Park Initiative” was both a cosmetic and a demographic make-over, bringing in new residents and commercial investment within and surrounding the neighborhood, ultimately making the neighborhood more vibrant and livable. Informants speak readily about the changes, and often put them in context with similar changes across the city. LeDroit Park is not unique in its changes as part of the movement of a large number of young people into urban life, but the brisk pace is unusual. This rapidity of change potentially excluded some of the long-term residents.

As Chapter Eight concludes, this transformation comes at a price. The social atmosphere in LeDroit Park has changed from one of friendly greetings to a lack of acknowledgement, and many established residents lament the transformation of their community. Conclusions in this section range from the influence of the physical design of roads and yards on the feeling of security and exclusivity to the importance

of diversity in housing stock to long-term neighborhood vitality and preservation. Other important themes are strategies for the preservation of the intangible culture of an area, and how integrating the history into everyday experience may encourage more positive social interaction. Ultimately the research on this neighborhood is deep and presents insights not only into the individual case study but is also generalizable to other neighborhoods with a strong connection to African American history during 20<sup>th</sup>-century segregation.

## Chapter 2: Planning of a Rural Retreat 1873-1892

### Introduction

This chapter explores the initial development of LeDroit Park as a rural suburb of Washington, DC, and investigates how the physical structures that were created in the 1870s impact experiences of current residents. The neighborhood was designated a historic district in 1974, mostly based on the strength of the architectural significance of the unified design, yet even in this document there were allusions to the importance of the rich cultural heritage that had developed within the unusual urban design. The political and social history of Washington, DC, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century also contributed significantly to the development of the neighborhood, and provides context for some of the issues of contemporary race relations.

In LeDroit Park, the built environment both reflects and shapes social organization. While some spaces, such as hospitals serve specific functions, domestic architecture—houses, streets, and neighborhoods—often serve multiple purposes and shelter various activities over the lifespan of residents. Because of the particularly intimate activities, from birth to death, that are associated with a domestic environment, strong bonds can be formed among people who share these spaces and community identity is often forged in the qualities of this place. In LeDroit Park, this feeling of intimacy with space had been enhanced because the community was separated from the broader fabric of the city of Washington as part of its design as a rural suburb in the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Figure 11]. The urban design was key to the neighborhood's historic district status in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as interviews with

LeDroit Park area, circa 1877–1892



Figure 11: Diagram of Washington City and Washington County, ca. 1877-1892.

current residents reveal, it has also been a crucial factor in population change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

LeDroit Park was developed in 1873 as a rural subdivision, just beyond the bustling city of Washington, DC, in what was then known as Washington County [Figure 12]. Based on A. J. Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* pattern book published in the 1850s, LeDroit Park had a mixture of eclectically-styled frame and brick houses set on large yards without intervening fences to create a feeling of spaciousness in contrast to the more restrictive L'Enfant City grid on its doorstep.<sup>30</sup> Though there were no racial covenants on property deeds, LeDroit Park was a community created exclusively for Euro-Americans, a policy that was enforced by the developers who sold each house or building lot. Importantly, the neighborhood was enclosed within a perimeter fence to reinforce both the social and physical separation from the city.

The developers of LeDroit Park and the new residents were part of a national trend in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to create semi-rural enclaves adjacent to urban centers. While this movement professed a belief in the moral superiority of rural spaces, as described by historian John Stilgoe in *Borderlands*, his book on the origin of U.S. suburbs, it also “masked the ever more powerful love of outdoor privacy, of visual separation from pointers and other strangers, of stepping back from views of factories and cities.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the move to the suburbs was driven as much by a fear of unfamiliar people and ideas as it was a love of nature.

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<sup>30</sup> Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*.

<sup>31</sup> Stilgoe, *Borderlands*, 206.



HAREWOOD AVENUE, LE DROIT PARK.

Figure 12: Engraving of LeDroit Park from architect's prospectus, *McGill Architectural Adviser*, 1879. Image courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

# District of Columbia population, by race, 1860–1890

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

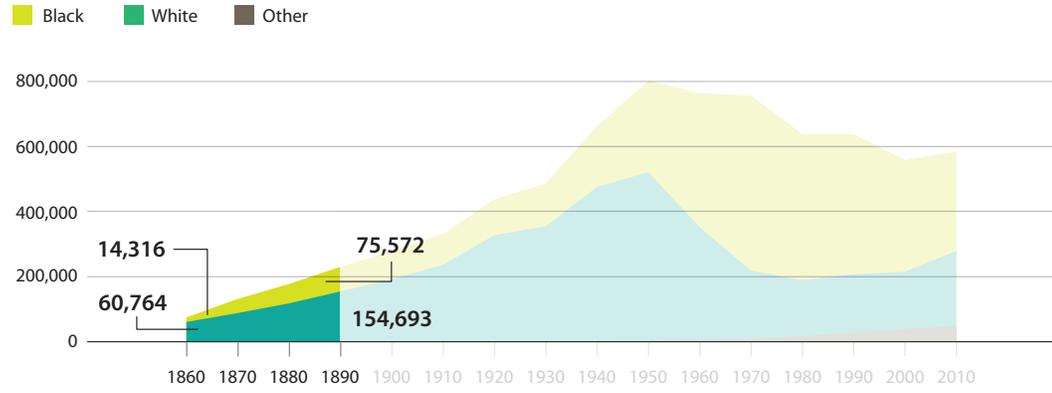


Figure 13: District of Columbia population by race 1860-1890.

Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the industry of Washington, DC, was government, and following the Civil War, the overall population doubled to fill the growing bureaucracy [Figure 13]. More significantly, the population of African Americans tripled during this time, many of whom were newly emancipated and new to urban life. Thus the developers and residents of LeDroit Park were trying to separate themselves from the perceived dangers of urbanity, namely the racially, culturally, and economically diverse people who were increasingly part of the life of Washington, DC. The gated community of LeDroit Park was an inward looking place, described as a world apart by its developers, where the luxuries of the city are close, but not too close: “’Tis town, yet country too.”<sup>32</sup> Though the fence was permanently removed in 1891, the sense of being an island of peace and security, close to amenities and yet not fully urban, has shaped generations of residents who have made LeDroit Park their home.

### **Physical Development**

According to the 1974 National Register Nomination Form [Appendix 4], LeDroit Park has two creation stories. While both agree that Amzi L. Barber was one of the founders of Howard University, sitting on its Board of Trustees from 1867 until he resigned in 1873, they depart in other significant details. According to the promotional brochure *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, (1877) the A. L. Barber Company purchased four pieces of property, formerly known as the Miller, Gilman, Prather, and McClelland properties between 1872 and 1873 to create the 55-acre tract that was to become LeDroit Park. Although unreferenced, the authors of the nomination form

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<sup>32</sup> Barber, *Le Droit Park Illustrated*, 13.

also describe a less sanguine counter narrative that is supported by land deed research performed by Beulah Melchor in 1945 for an unpublished masters thesis,<sup>33</sup> where Barber and his brother-in-law Andrew Langdon purchased the land as a single tract from Howard University in 1873, for \$115,000 at 7% interest and no down payment. In 1874, Howard University agreed to accept \$95,000 in full payment for the land to assist with the university's monetary difficulties, presumably brought on by the financial panic of 1873.<sup>34</sup> This connection to Howard University, the first university in the United States created for the coeducation of people of all races in all areas of study is not insignificant.<sup>35</sup> In fact, as one current resident Donna Morris resolutely states "...the history of Howard University... *is* the history of LeDroit Park." By carving the land for a segregated suburb out of a university dedicated to universal educational access, A.L. Barber and Company established a tension that shaped both the neighborhood and the university. The history of the two places is inextricably linked physically as well as emotionally.

Symbolically and strategically located on the site of both the Freedmen's Hospital and a contraband camp, the temporary home of people fleeing slavery in the South, the libertarian Howard University campus overlooks downtown Washington from a hilltop, and LeDroit Park, a gated white enclave, was carved out of this auspicious site. The land was located just north of Boundary Street, [Figure 14] an

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<sup>33</sup> Melchor, *Land Possessions of Howard University* masters thesis, 1945.

<sup>34</sup> National Register Form, LeDroit Park Historic District, February 1974, Section 8, Significance.

<sup>35</sup> Dyson, *Howard University Studies in History*, 10.



Figure 14: 1880 map of LeDroit Park, courtesy of Ghosts of DC.

ancient Potomac River bank,<sup>36</sup> which was the natural dividing line between the L'Enfant designed city grid, and Washington County, the once rural but developing part of the District.<sup>37</sup> The original purchase of 150 acres of land at \$1,000 an acre in 1867 was more than the university needed at the time, and left it cash poor. Over the next eight years, the university board sold parcels to various developers for housing in order to keep the school financially stable. The university was able to get such a deal on the land because according to Howard University historian Walter Dyson "...this section of the county [before it was annexed into the city of Washington] was a slum section—a cabaret section for white people. The American League baseball park of today [Griffith Stadium] was then a big amusement park and beer garden...it was for this reason, among others, that the property was sold for a 'n----' school."<sup>38</sup>

So it was within this relatively unregulated space among beer gardens, farmsteads, amusement parks, schools, and hospitals that A. L. Barber & Company decided to create an idyllic retreat that, according to the development prospectus "lies in the direct line of the natural growth of the city, and is the nearest, cheapest, and the best suburban property in the District of Columbia."<sup>39</sup> The developers waxed poetic about the location, describing the accessibility to the city as "only twelve squares from the Post Office, fifteen squares from the Capitol and seventeen squares from the Treasury—a twenty minutes' walk at a moderate pace."<sup>40</sup> A major selling point for A. L. Barber & Company was the feeling of both retreat and urbanity:

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<sup>36</sup> The elevation of LeDroit Park is currently 100-120 feet above sea level.

<sup>37</sup> Levy, *Washington, D.C. and the growth of its early suburbs*, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education*, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 2.

A residence that can be occupied by his family during the entire year by the merchant, professional man, or government clerk...located convenient enough to his place of business...[yet] far enough away from the noise and bustle of commercial activity to secure quiet and moderate seclusion yet near enough to enjoy the luxuries of city conveniences as well as the society of friendly neighbors.<sup>41</sup>

This dual personality of LeDroit Park has continued appeal for present-day residents.

Zeba Floyd, a homeowner since 2005, echoes some of the developer's original

intentions when considering what she liked about the neighborhood:

I like to step into the activity, but I like to step out of the activity.... And I did not want to pay a half million dollars for a condo. So I began looking for something that had better bones, a little more privacy, or at least the ability to be in your home and not be in public, and not be a step away from the restaurant corridor.<sup>42</sup>

Current day LeDroit Park is no longer either a gated or racially segregated neighborhood, but the feeling of retreat is still visceral and still has appeal to modern city dwellers looking for a quiet haven within a larger urban community.

#### Legacy of Suburban Design

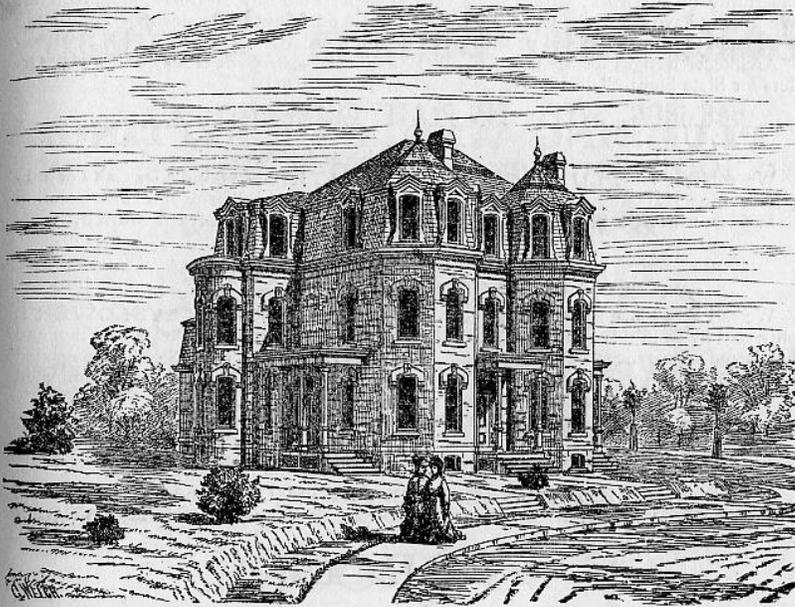
In 1873 the A. L Barber & Company created a master plan for the subdivision with private gravel streets and brick sidewalks, sewer and water service, all a few degrees off of the L'Enfant grid to reinforce the separation from the city.<sup>43</sup> As John

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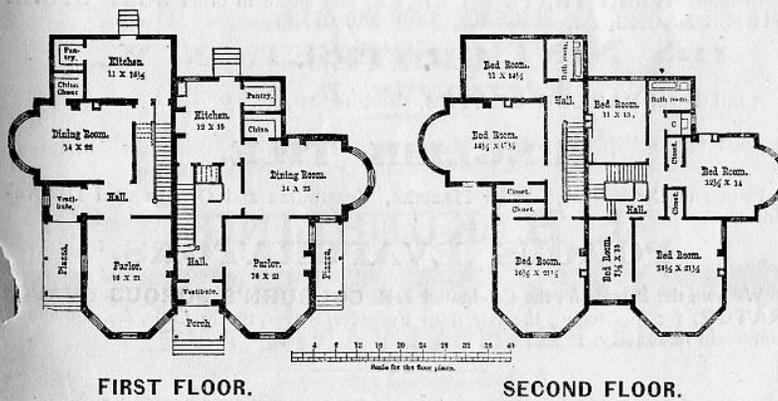
<sup>41</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Floyd, Zeba. Interview with author, June 26, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 7.



RESIDENCES OF GEN. WM. BIRNEY and MR. ARTHUR BIRNEY,  
LE DROIT PARK.

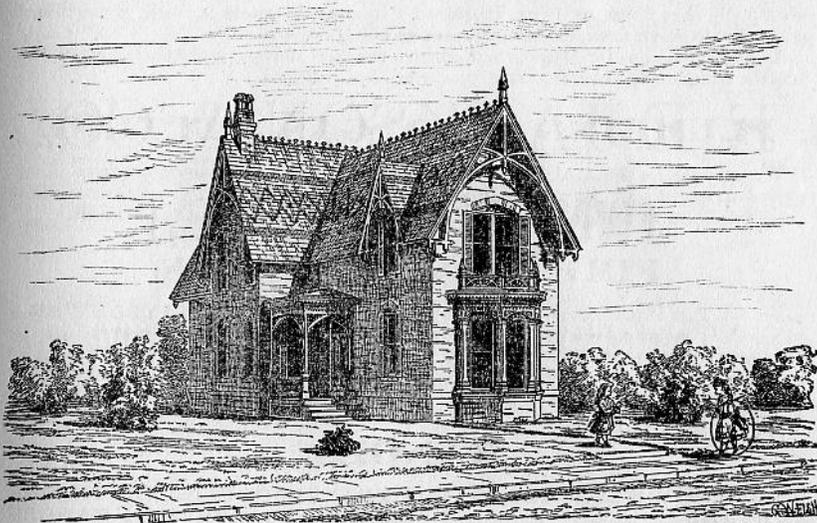


JAMES H. MCGILL, Architect, Le Droit Building, Washington, D. C., prepares preliminary sketches, scale and detail drawings, and specifications for all classes of public and private buildings, and superintends their erection. See page 3.

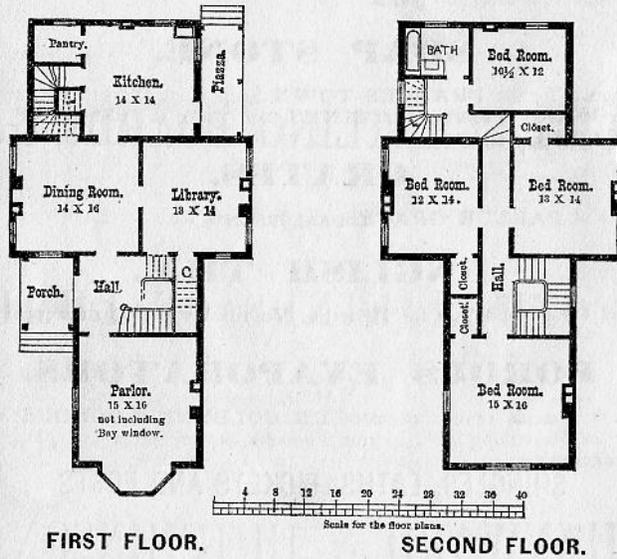
Figure 15: James McGill's *Architectural Adviser* (p. 17) showing a Second Empire duplex he designed for a prominent resident, General Birney and his brother, Arthur Birney, in LeDroit Park. Image courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.



Figure 16: Contemporary image of residences designed for General Birney and his brother, located at 1903 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Note proximity of rowhouses to the structure. Image by author.



RESIDENCE OF MR. JOSEPH B. MARVIN, LE DROIT PARK.



JAMES H. MCGILL, Architect, Le Droit Building, Washington, D. C., prepares preliminary sketches, scale and detail drawings, and specifications for all classes of public and private buildings, and superintends their erection. See page 3.

Figure 17: James McGill's *Architectural Adviser* (p. 19) showing a Gothic Revival cottage he designed for Mr. Joseph Marvin in LeDroit Park. Image courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.



Figure 18: Contemporary image of 517 T Street, designed for Mr. Joseph B. Marvin. Note density of urban fabric on block surrounding house. Image by author.

Stilgoe explains in *Borderlands*, “urbanity was equated with straight lines.”<sup>44</sup> So the streets of LeDroit Park were gently curved as well, and named for trees like Maple and Spruce, reflecting a common practice that underscored the rural ideal.<sup>45</sup> That design gesture still resonates with current resident Yayo Grassi who said about buying his house in 1989 that “I like the block, I like the beautiful curve, the very gentle curve of the street into [Anna Julia Cooper] circle.”<sup>46</sup> The developers hired local Georgetown architect, James McGill, to design a series of houses in the latest styles [Figures 15-18] with a cacophony of historic references and eclectic forms enhanced by contemporary luxuries, all with an eye towards market value:

All have open halls and stairways, liberal sized rooms, pantries, china closets, bedroom closets, bath rooms [sic], cellars, and are supplied with ranges, bells, gas, water and sewerage. Bay windows, piazzas, balconies, conservatories, are built on most of them, and all are tastefully finished alike on all sides, so that the outlook from each is cheerful and agreeable. No cheap structures will under any circumstances be permitted, and none will be encouraged but such as will enhance both the value of the adjoining property and the comfort of its occupants.<sup>47</sup>

This quality in materials is something that current residents also value. Derek

Younger, a resident for six years reflects:

[Historic architecture] is something that I have always respected and enjoyed, so it is a comfort to me to have very solid homes, lots of craftsmanship and things that people sometimes take for granted to me it’s even more important to have original hard wood floors than laminate floors. It’s what I grew up with and my grandparents had and it just gives me a sense of comfort and pride, and stability....but just a sense that something has lasted...stood the test of time and will continue because there was so much pride in the building of it and the materials used and...everything has a story.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Stilgoe, *Borderlands*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> Stilgoe, *Borderlands*, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Grassi, Yayo. Interview with author, July 9, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Younger, Derek. Interview with author, June 1, 2015.

Hence Barber & Company's insistence on quality of design and materials was a good investment, still paying returns 140 years later.

Both individually commissioned by notable residents like the developers themselves, as well as being designed on speculation, the frame and brick houses exuded a graciousness that nurtured the elite social atmosphere Barber & Co. were courting. By the late 1880s, LeDroit Park was regularly mentioned in the society pages of *The Washington Post* as the winner of city-wide lawn tennis and whist competitions. One particular reference from January 26, 1890, mentions that "Mrs. Charles Flint, LeDroit Park, was at home on Friday evening and received her friends in Japanese costume" assisted by her sisters in various Asian-inspired dress, reflecting not only the Victorian custom of calling on friends formally, but also of the lavish reception that some residents of LeDroit Park were capable.<sup>49</sup> Contemporary residents notice and appreciate the extraordinary architectural styles. Eric Fidler, a resident since 2009, noted after his first time visiting the neighborhood "the houses I had never seen in Washington before and I was pretty familiar with the architecture in DC and the standard Victorian row house. The architecture here was just so different."<sup>50</sup>

Another key feature of the landscape of LeDroit Park was the use of fencing, both inside and outside the neighborhood. The designers curated the rural atmosphere by placing each house on notably large lawns that seemed to blend into one another, eventually earning the neighborhood the appellation of the "flower

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<sup>49</sup> *Washington Post* Society Page, January 26, 1890

<sup>50</sup> Fidler, Eric. Interview with author, June 16, 2015.

garden of Washington.”<sup>51</sup> They highlighted their intention in the promotional brochure: “All the interior fences were removed and the lots thrown in together, affording a continuous green sward.”<sup>52</sup> This openness was in sharp contrast to the relationship created with the rest of the city, and in particular Howard University and an adjoining housing development called Howardtown, which housed a majority of the students at the university. Though the streets of LeDroit Park were the most direct route from the city to the university, all but residents were blocked from their use by a perimeter fence.

LeDroit Park was surrounded by a palisade, and the entrances to the private streets were manned by paid guards. “A handsome combination wood and iron fence was adopted and built along the entire front, and a high board fence along the rear,”<sup>53</sup> the developers boasted. As Blakely and Snyder describe when discussing contemporary gated communities, the residents of LeDroit Park were looking to create a sense of control and peace through the physical structure of their space:

...strangers of any description are an automatic inducement to fear and distrust. This is one reason that traffic is of equal or even greater concern to many neighborhoods that close themselves off; in the new equation of social mistrust, traffic is caused by strangers, strangers are bad, and bad means crime.<sup>54</sup>

This inward focus clearly reflected the ambiguity of elite Euro-American society at the time, which accepted the legal reality that African Americans were becoming citizens in the greater society, but did not necessarily embrace that concept in more personal matters, such as housing, schools, churches and marriage.<sup>55</sup> Education for

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<sup>51</sup> LeDroit Park-Bloomingdale Heritage Trail sign #1.

<sup>52</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Dyson, *Howard University: The Capstone of Negro Education*, 56.

African Americans was morally acceptable to Washington's elite class, but social interaction with Euro-American society, even in a public space such as a street, was cause for worry. It was reported in the *Evening Star* newspaper in a series of short articles published between 1887 and 1888 that there were concerns for the character of some of the people living in the "colored section" called Howardtown, described as "taken up with dwellings of a poor character, occupied by poor people."<sup>56</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Evening Star* signed by "a pastor," the writer felt the fence should be removed specifically because it sheltered city residents who gathered near the fence to gamble on the Sabbath.<sup>57</sup>

Just a few years after the initial platting of LeDroit Park, several changes impacted the design and feel of the built environment. First, in 1877 Washington prohibited wood frame dwellings within the city, and while LeDroit was still considered a suburb, this impacted the design decisions for new structures, and limited the number of romantic wood-frame cottages, in favor of brick and masonry houses. By 1880, after having built 41 houses,<sup>58</sup> Barber & Co. sold the remaining lots to another development corporation, and open lots were filled with more dense duplex and rowhouse structures, though open front yards were retained as a distinctive design feature within the neighborhood.<sup>59</sup> In 1888 the city passed the suburban subdivision regulation bill so that all new subdivision streets must conform to the L'Enfant Plan, and despite LeDroit Park's intentional defiance of these rules, in 1889 after many City Commission debates reported in the *Evening Star* newspaper,

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<sup>56</sup> *Evening Star*, December 11, 1886.

<sup>57</sup> *Evening Star*, February 10, 1887.

<sup>58</sup> National Register Form, LeDroit Park Historic District, February 1974, Section 8, Significance.

<sup>59</sup> 1888 Sanborn Maps for Washington, DC.

PL225 extended city road names and maintenance into the neighborhood. The following year, Boundary Street was renamed Florida Avenue, and the urban identity of LeDroit Park was completed.<sup>60</sup> Finally, in 1891 the large lot that had served as an amusement park on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, just north of Boundary Street adjacent to LeDroit Park and Howard University was developed as a wood frame baseball stadium. This re-established the area as an entertainment node, particularly since the stadium was one of the few public places that was nominally racially integrated, with sections that were informally designated (only enforced through custom)<sup>61</sup> for African American patrons.

### ***Political Development***

It is important to put the development of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Washington suburbs in historical and political context in order to understand the attraction of secluded enclaves like LeDroit Park both at the time of construction, and within the contemporary city. The expansion into Washington County was partly a response to the drastic increase in population of the city of Washington during the Civil War<sup>62</sup> and Reconstruction. In the 1860 U.S. Census [Figure 13], the total population of Washington was measured at 75,000 people, with over 5,000 of those people living in a rural environment (likely Washington County), 14,000 of whom were African American, and over 11,000 of whom were free people of color. By the 1870 U.S. Census, the total population of DC had nearly doubled to 131,000 residents, 43,000 of whom were African American. This huge population increase put incredible pressure

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<sup>60</sup> Levy, *Washington, D.C. and the growth of its early suburbs*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Snyder, *Beyond the Shadow of the Senators*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Hightower, *LeDroit Park: The Making of a Suburb, 1872-1888*, 4.

on the aging infrastructure and built environment of Washington. It also inspired questions of social equity, particularly concerning education and housing for African Americans, both newly freed and established families.

Over its history, the city of Washington often expanded when the country was at war, because of the pivotal role that the federal government plays in the administration of warfare. Census records show notable increases during the 1810s—when the US was involved in the War of 1812 with Britain—and during the 1850s—when the US was involved in a series of conflicts called collectively the Indian Wars—as the government workforce expanded. But the Era of Reconstruction, which depending on the historical account either began on January 1, 1863, with the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in the Confederate states, or on April 9, 1865, at the official end of the Civil War, and lasted through the Compromise of 1877, had the most significant impact on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century population of Washington. In part this was due to the scale of the conflict, but was also likely due to the pivotal role that the city played geographically and politically in the Civil War. Sitting on the dividing line between the states that had seceded and those fighting for the Union, Washington, DC, was a strategic target for embattled Confederates. But it was also the symbolic heart of a compromise dating to the founding of the nation. The capital city was created as a geographic bridge between Northern and Southern states that differed economically and culturally, and to capture or even damage the capital city would have meant a moral defeat for the Union. Thus, a series of garrison forts encircled the city, and supporters streamed to the capital to join the effort to save the



Figure 19: Statue commemorating Boss Shepherd located in front of the current DC City Council Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue. Photo by author.

United States. Freed slaves also fled to the capital, seeking work, housing, and citizenship after 1863.

The rapid expansion of Washington led to significant overcrowding, and city administrators sought to address the issues by building modern infrastructure, which ultimately led to the development of suburbs like LeDroit Park. Championed by the notorious Alexander Robey Shepherd [Figure 19], a native of Southwest Washington who worked his way up to from plumber's assistant to company owner and real estate investor, the District rapidly transformed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a chaotic backwater to a unified modern city.

In 1870 Shepherd, often referred to as Boss Shepherd, used his connections to get appointed to an influential agency, the Board of Public Works. Serving as the vice-chair of the five-person commission, in only two years time he oversaw the placement 157 miles of paved roads and sidewalks, 123 miles of sewers, 39 miles of gas mains, and 30 miles of water mains within the city.<sup>63</sup> He also advocated for the planting of 60,000 trees and the installation of streetlights and the refitting of railroad tracks to city-wide standards. And most significantly, he persuaded Congress to pass the Organic Act of 1871 which combined under one administration the City of Washington, the City of Georgetown, and Washington County, resulting in combined departments of policing like the Metropolitan Police, and a strong centralized government for the entire capital city.

With these sweeping changes also came the almost inevitable shadow of scandal, as citizens began to question how these civic improvements were being financed. Despite the city's financial woes of 1870 and the national financial panic of

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<sup>63</sup> Kennon and Striner, *Washington Past and Present*, 38.

1873, Shepherd seemed to spend as if his budget were unlimited. Originally citing costs of \$6 million, by 1874 the costs had run up to \$9 million. This triggered a petition to audit the process, and when the accounts were verified, the city was \$13 million in arrears, and declared bankruptcy. Boss Shepherd was accused of corruption so entrenched in accomplishing these civic feats, that Congress voted to rescind citizen control of the District of Columbia for nearly a century, with governance led by appointed commissioners from 1874-1967.<sup>64</sup> Although Shepherd was never convicted of any crime, he was fired and eventually left the city in disgrace.

The infrastructure improvements in the city and the united government of the three jurisdictions allowed Washington to modernize and enticed well-heeled members of society to stay in the District, if not in the city. While all of these improvements had far-reaching impacts on the development of suburban neighborhoods like LeDroit Park, the most direct impact came with the establishment of the city's first public transportation system, a horse-drawn streetcar called an omnibus, which was eventually replaced by mechanized cars on the same rails. One of these rail lines traveled north up 7<sup>th</sup> Street from the city center, terminating at 7<sup>th</sup> and Boundary Street, one block from the western edge of LeDroit Park [Figure 20]. These streetcar lines allowed citizens with means to move beyond the crowded city, and sort themselves into enclaves along racial and economic lines.<sup>65</sup> This process continues today unabated, but the direction of this movement has reversed geographically. In contemporary Washington, generally people with economic

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<sup>64</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 112.

<sup>65</sup> Levy, *Washington, D.C. and the growth of its early suburbs*, 26.



Figure 20: Streetcar traveling on 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW toward Brightwood (north of LeDroit Park) c. 1890. Image courtesy of DDOT Library and Archives.

resources are moving closer into the city centers again, though they are still tied to transportation lines like the Metro system. LeDroit Park is a mere three blocks from the Shaw/Howard University station on the Green Line, and has access to Metro Bus lines that run both North/South and East West. Betty Pair, a real estate agent in Washington, DC, for 38 years said:

People look in places like LeDroit because they are interested in a particular kind of architecture, or a particular kind of neighborhood. And LeDroit has a vibrant neighborhood. And lots of trees and green. That's of interest. Proximity to the Metro. Good bus line. Cute little shops like the Big Bear Market and that new restaurant that's on the corner of Rhode Island and First... that's why most people select a particular [neighborhood], its first price, then what they want in terms of a house, then what they want in terms of services, transportation.

Thus city politics shaped 19<sup>th</sup>-century transportation, leading to the growth of suburban developments like LeDroit Park. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, renewed interest in the architecture and modern mass-transit in the form of Metro Rail and bus service has made the oldest suburbs, now considered part of the city center, highly-desirable locations again.

### **Social Development and Race Relations**

LeDroit Park was built as a retreat both from the congestion and dirt of urban life as well as freedom from the questions of African American citizenship at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a gated white community, LeDroit Park residents could avoid interaction with anyone outside of their social and ethnic group, thus avoiding increasingly vexing social problems of racial integration. Petra Gardner\*, a relatively new and active resident of LeDroit Park, summed up the importance of race in both the history and modern character of the neighborhood:

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\* a pseudonym

You know the question of race is so central to our neighborhood, and it is not really a question...I think it's at the heart of so many of the things that this neighborhood faces and I think it's not addressed as such all the time, even though everyone knows it. So one of the things that I continue to think about is how do we have these conversations about race, about affordable housing, gentrification, crime, all of these things have it as a significant part of it. So to talk about LeDroit without talking about the history of race is...since I think is the history of LeDroit *is* the history of race, as well as class changes, but also what that looks like right now, and how that plays into the lived experience of every single person here.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps the most poignant and visible symbol of race relations in LeDroit Park was the perimeter fence constructed by Barber & Co., which was in place from the neighborhood's inception in 1873 through 1891 (with a few episodes of protest and demolition). The developers described it in their prospectus as one of a series of improvements undertaken to make the environment more livable, on par with landscaping and architectural design. Barber and Langdon seemed to think that the creation of an elite enclave needed not only verbal declarations of its distinctiveness and visual confirmation in the form of high-style houses, but it needed a physical barrier around the perimeter that reminded both those inside and those outside of the exclusivity of this planned community. The fence was also a reflection of an increasing Euro-American uneasiness with the population of African Americans in the city who were seeking inclusion in all forms of society. The fence was a means of preventing African Americans from using the private streets to access downtown Washington directly from their homes in the segregated neighborhood of Howardtown to the north of LeDroit Park.<sup>67</sup> The fence was also a symbolic means of expressing their dislike of the idea of racial integration, representing a sense of security and freedom from the unknown.

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<sup>66</sup> Gardner, Petra. Interview with author, June 23, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson, *From Romantic Suburb to Rural Enclave*, 265.

This was a time period when African Americans were simultaneously gaining and losing ground toward equality, though not being included in the more privileged parts of Washington.<sup>68</sup> In 1862 Congress established mandatory school for all school-aged children in the District, and created a Board of Trustees to oversee the Colored Schools. In 1870 the M Street School was created, opening classical education (which was the only path of college preparation) to African Americans for the first time. By 1892 the M Street School had a purpose-built structure and was the jewel in the Colored School system, assisting many aspiring African Americans in their quest for higher education, if not acceptance.<sup>69</sup> African Americans who were free people in Washington before the Civil War formed a social elite of their own, and thought that they would be freely accepted by their white counterparts during the era of Reconstruction. “The black elite family in Washington was a line of defense against society, and its values and strategies ensured that family status would continue through succeeding generations.”<sup>70</sup> But customary separation before the war hardened into de jure segregation a generation later.<sup>71</sup>

At first the fence was a mute testimony to the racism that newly freed people found when they entered Washington, but eventually it was a lightning rod for protest by both black and white citizens. The residents of Howardtown saw the streets of LeDroit Park as a clear and direct means to access the amenities of the city of Washington, something that Barber and Langdon extolled in their promotional materials, and as a symbol of their exclusion from use as a public amenity. Many

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<sup>68</sup> Green, *Secret City*, vii.

<sup>69</sup> Steward, *First Class*, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 5.

residents, and in particular property owners in LeDroit Park, sought city maintenance of their streets and sewer system to lessen their financial burden. Lobbying the City Commissioners for such oversight and investment brought unwanted attention to the limited access to their thoroughfares. But there was a significant minority of property owners who wanted to open the streets to all people, because they saw the potential to increase the real estate development,<sup>72</sup> and were at least ambivalent about the racial background of their buyers.

Alternate views about access and restriction led to a series of conflicts, as reported in both of the city newspapers of the time, the *Evening Star* and the *Washington Post*. Beginning in November 1886, short articles describe not only the City Commission meetings where LeDroit Park's streets and sewers were discussed, but also chronicled several times when the fence was physically removed by protestors and replaced by residents, only to be torn down again. Eventually the fence was permanently removed in 1891, setting the stage for racial integration in the neighborhood.

The shadow of this conflict still leaves its imprint on current residents. Though there are no surviving images and only a few narrative descriptions, nearly every person interviewed for this research noted that the community was formed as a gated or fenced, segregated white community. Some informants mentioned it matter-of-factly, but many were incredulous. Donna Morris reflects:

Like I said, I was astonished to know about that fence that came across Florida Avenue, because in Pittsburgh, there was racism yes, because that is what it was about in the day, but we were still a community. But we had never experienced anything physical, like a fence...to have to live through that, and to live like I live now, that oh my god, I got all the freedoms of the free, I got

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *From Romantic Suburb to Rural Enclave*, 266.

all the freedoms of the free. I wouldn't even entertain a thought of living somewhere where there was a fence that said I couldn't go.<sup>73</sup>

Even more intriguing, the fence controversy resurfaced in the early 2000s as part of a major reinvestment strategy led by Howard University. Streetscaping was an integral part of this multi-pronged initiative, and one signature piece was signage that announced the name of the neighborhood at the entrance of Florida Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. As resident Kevin Coy, who was new to the neighborhood at the time, describes, emotions ran high when the design was revealed:

Shortly after I first moved into the neighborhood I went to a civic association meeting where there was a discussion of what to do to mark the entrance in terms of the welcoming mechanism. The initial proposal was to put in a marker, the granite square marker, "Welcome to LeDroit Park." It wasn't particularly big, seemed fine to me. But there were two classes of objection to it.

As you know, one was a very practical objection from a couple of the guys that lived right there where it would be in terms of, that would create a hiding place where criminal activity or more specifically drug activity could take place, not good, don't want that in front of our house. Very practical. But there was also the historic objection that many of the neighbors had as to that is reminiscent of the wall, the fence, that was originally around the Park, and I was new to the neighborhood, I knew the history; I had a little trouble with...I didn't immediately appreciate the...it was just a single marker, were not talking about fencing it off. But there was a great deal of concern about that, and objection from many quarters. And ultimately, that idea was put aside and the arch that's there now was put in, and it was more welcoming and more reflective of the history of the neighborhood. Which is very interesting. Didn't personally affect me much, one way or the other, and didn't initially appreciate the concern it was causing, because it was not about fencing the neighborhood. It was just what form would this marker take, but it stayed with me as an indication of how the history of the neighborhood can still have an impact.

But interestingly, newer residents don't see the connection to the historic barrier. Jee Hye Kim mentions the iron arch [Figure 19] specifically when describing her discovery of the neighborhood:

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<sup>73</sup> Morris, Donna. Interview with author. July 25, 2015.

I think the only thing that gave me the sense that it [the neighborhood] is historic or something, there's significance to it, is the gate, on Florida Avenue. And there's that year that is put on there. Seeing that, I'm like "Ok, there must be some sort of significance in this year or something in this neighborhood."<sup>74</sup>

Another newer resident, Brian Footer, describes his first encounter with the gate:

I came down here [to look at an apartment while living in New York] and I literally fell in love. And it was the arch. I walked through that arch and... oh it just felt symbolic, it's so true. I walked through that arch it was exactly what I was looking for. It was the trees, it was the historic feel, it was very inviting, the architecture was unique, and there was a story to be told, and you really felt like it was...the camaraderie was palatable, and I loved that.<sup>75</sup>

Though the arch is beloved by many new community members, it is also a reminder to longer-term residents of the long shadow of racism in LeDroit Park and Washington. When LeDroit Park was platted in 1873, the social structures of Washington were changing rapidly, as the population of both white and black residents was escalating. The fence around the community was part of a land planning strategy to create a feeling of security and freedom for wealthy Euro-Americans, removed from the social changes in Washington city. Despite the fact that the physical fence was removed in 1891, the symbolism of that fence is still visceral for some members of the community today.

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<sup>74</sup> Kim, JeeHye. Interview with author, June 18, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Footer, Brian. Interview with author. July 5, 2015.



Figure 21: Iron arch marking the entrance to the neighborhood at 6<sup>th</sup> and Florida Avenue. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress (LOC) digital collections, Carol Highsmith photographer, 2010.

## Conclusion

LeDroit Park is a neighborhood with a 140-year history that has experienced many demographic and physical changes over time. Through interviews with contemporary residents of varying length of tenancy, it is clear that the initial design of the streets and houses within the larger urban context had a profound impact on their experience and connection to the community, and was key in the communal process of placemaking over time.

Created as an elite suburb based on the romantic rural ideals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, LeDroit Park was made a historic district in 1974. With eclectically styled houses set on large lots on gently curved streets, the physical structure of the neighborhood was designed to feel like an escape from the perceived ills of the overcrowding and social diversity in the city. It was originally designed as a segregated white community, a restriction enforced not by covenants as would become prevalent in later developments, but through the careful screening of buyers by the developers. Resting in the shadow of Howard University, an idealistic institution that opened higher education to a broad spectrum of people, including newly freed slaves, LeDroit Park maintained its exclusivity not only through social means, but through the erection of a physical fence that encircled the entire area, preventing through traffic on its privately maintained streets. Yet over 120 years after the fence was finally torn down, the feeling of an enclave remains, as do the scars of racism that the fence represents.

The fence was erected to prevent the use of LeDroit Park's private streets by African Americans wanting to access Howard University and the city center. Even

without the fence, the area lacks many through streets; hence car commuters mostly use the roads that form the neighborhood edges, maintaining a sense of relative seclusion. Current resident Pete Morelewicz reflected on the day he first saw the diverse architecture in LeDroit Park:

“Where was this treasure? Why have I never seen this before?” and I had been all over the city on my bike and driven around, but just never came here. So that was the first specific memory about the aesthetics of the neighborhood. And it was great. I remember thinking “where has this place been my whole life?” Meanwhile it was right under my nose.<sup>76</sup>

Barber & Co. promoted this “gem” of a neighborhood based on its proximity to transportation routes such as the newly electrified streetcars that terminated two blocks from the borders of the development, as well as its accessibility to the amenities of downtown. After renewed infrastructure investment in mass-transit in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, these qualities are again extolled by current residents. James Campbell\*, a long-term resident, describes the value of this location combined with the houses:

I looked at the carriage house and before I even walked into the house [I said] “well, I’ll take it.” And he [the real estate agent] said you haven’t even seen the inside. I said “I don’t have to.” With this kind of house, this close to metro and downtown, this is a perfect location, I don’t have to commute or I don’t have to do any of that...with being so close to the Green Line. Anyone who wants to live in a city, you want to be near a metro station, not a bus stop, but a metro station.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to the feeling of being tucked away, close to the city but not urban, the original developers established an area that was filled with a variety of housing sizes, styles, and materials that is markedly different from other neighborhoods in DC. This

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<sup>76</sup> Morelewicz, Pete. Interview with author. May 31, 2015.

\* pseudonym

<sup>77</sup> Campbell, James. Interview with author. July 2, 2015.

heterogeneity is attractive to new residents. Doug Newcomb, a 6-year resident, considers the variety:

I think that one thing that really attracted me once I got to know it better was the beauty of the yards and spaces and the diversity of architecture. I love the number of double family homes or duplexes. I love that there are large ones, small ones. I like the fact that, I think it is Elm [Street] that has the tighter row houses that go right up to the street. It reminds me very much of England. And on this street here [T Street] it is more like an English countryside, maybe. [laughs] So I really like the historic quality, the open space, it is lovely to walk around.<sup>78</sup>

Though the neighborhood was designed as a rural suburb in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been absorbed fully into the booming 21<sup>st</sup>-century city of Washington, DC.

Physical qualities that were attractive to the initial buyers, such as the relative lack of connection to the street grid, large inter-connected green spaces, and housing variety remain attractive to a new generation of residents. The social atmosphere has changed drastically, from one that excluded African Americans to a racially integrated community, but as the following chapters will describe, between those two end points the neighborhood was an elite African American community which developed a rich cultural heritage that long-term residents fear is being lost.

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<sup>78</sup> Newcomb, Doug. Interview with author. June 1, 2015.

## Chapter 3: Creation of an “Africanized” Enclave 1893-1919

### Introduction

This chapter examines the creation of an “Africanized” enclave during the twenty-six year period between the initial racial integration of LeDroit Park, and the 1919 Red Summer riots when it was seen as the home of the powerful black elite of Washington.<sup>79</sup> In this period dominated by social change, the neighborhood became both a center of African American community and culture, and a connector between segregated and semi-segregated public spaces such as McMillan Reservoir Park and the U Street corridor known as Black Broadway. Physical changes during this period were limited with increasing density in the neighborhood as infill houses were built between the original McGill designed houses [Figure 22]. Notable change occurred as many houses were adapted for educational and philanthropic use in response to increasing segregation in the city at large. The narrative of a concentration of black intelligentsia is powerful, influencing the contemporary emotional construct of space in the LeDroit Park historic district.

Octavius Williams ushered in a new era in LeDroit Park when in 1893 he became the first African American homeowner in the neighborhood. Employed as a barber at the U.S. Capitol, Williams often told the story of the particularly hostile reception he received from one of his new neighbors, when during the family’s first

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<sup>79</sup> Cooper, Edward Elder, editor. *The Colored American*. September 22, 1900.

LeDroit Park, circa 1893–1919



Figure 22: Diagram of of LeDroit Park and surrounding city, 1893-1919. LeDroit Park is the fulcrum between many communities including the U Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street entertainment districts, Howard University, Howard Theater, and Griffith Stadium.

to descendants, Williams hung a picture over the bullet and would reveal it to his children as a reminder of the social atmosphere in Washington.<sup>80</sup>

Over the next decade a small but elite group of black Washingtonians created a community in the neighborhood, and the area's demographic profile shifted from completely white to racially integrated. By the time that the U.S. entered World War I, LeDroit Park had become exclusively African American. Nestled between the landmarks of Howard University, exemplifying culture and higher education for the African American community, and the burgeoning U Street Corridor, a lively entertainment district filled with music, bars, and restaurants that catered to an integrated working class community, LeDroit Park nurtured a black elite of professionals, educators, lawyers, and artists who accepted the "rhetoric of racial solidarity as a reflection of reality."<sup>81</sup> They trained for careers that would help the black community achieve independence from white society."<sup>82</sup>

While the population was shifting racially, if not socio-economically, the physical environment continued to evolve without major changes in the overall feel of the area. Small developers bought available building lots, and rowhouses and duplexes were added to the landscape, gradually increasing the population density and also expanding the choices of massing, materials, and design in housing in this secluded district. [Figures 23 and 24] Major thoroughfares remained just outside of LeDroit Park, and though a fence no longer impeded foot traffic, the area remained just beyond the hustle and bustle of the growing city. The small neighborhood with

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<sup>80</sup> Johnson, "From Romantic Suburb to Racial Enclave," 266.

<sup>81</sup> Ruble, *Washington's U Street: A Biography*.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 6.



Figure 23: DC Office of Planning map of LeDroit Park Historic District with building eras.



Figure 24: Image of south side of 300 block of T Street showing several eras of infill. Photo by author.

limited connections to the larger city nurtured the leadership of black Washington, often called the Four Hundred.<sup>83</sup>

### **Social Development and Race Relations**

In 1891 the infamous fence that surrounded LeDroit Park was finally and permanently torn down, after several skirmishes between residents and citizens of nearby neighborhoods wishing access to the streets. Not long after, the racial exclusivity that A. L. Barber & Company had maintained through individual selection of buyers was challenged. In 1893, Octavius Williams, an African American man, bought a house for his family designed by McGill in the 300 block of U Street. Though certainly met with open hostility by at least one neighbor, the Williams family mostly faced indifference and exclusion from social activities in the neighborhood.<sup>84</sup> The family received a cold shoulder that reflected the harsh realities of Washington society as most Euro-Americans were not interested in racial integration. Only a year later, Robert Terrell and his wife Mary Church Terrell tried to buy a house in LeDroit Park. As Ms. Terrell writes in her autobiography, they were challenged every step of the way:

We looked with longing eyes upon many a dear little house which was just exactly what we wanted in every respect, but we were frankly told we could not buy it, because we were colored...Finally I selected one, only one house removed from Howard Town, which was almost exclusively inhabited by colored people...Although the house was near the settlement occupied by colored people, it was located in LeDroit Park, a section in which nobody but white people lived excepting one colored family.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Snyder, *Beyond the Shadow of the Senators*, 50.

<sup>84</sup> Johnson, "From Romantic Suburb to Racial Enclave," 266

<sup>85</sup> Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 113.

When the seller learned that they were an African American couple, she refused to sell, and the Terrells resorted to using an Euro-American family friend to act as a straw buyer to purchase the house and immediately sell it to them.<sup>86</sup> Buying a house was important for the Terrells not just to find shelter, but as a way to build on their social and financial capital. As historian Jacqueline Moore explains “most elite blacks found investment in real estate the only sure way to increase their financial resources.”<sup>87</sup> The early integration process in LeDroit Park would be paralleled and repeated for over a half-century, as generations of African Americans struggled with barriers to homeownership, understood to be the foundation of wealth-building and class mobility in the U.S.

The gradual but steady process of integration in LeDroit Park did not go unnoticed by the city at large, and was of particular interest in the black Washingtonian community that was coalescing in the nation’s capital. The *Colored American* newspaper ran a regular column, somewhat tongue-in-cheek in tone, titled “It is Rumored” that featured a range of observations and announcements, some editorial and some merely intriguing. In 1900 the editor included on his list “That LeDroit Park is being rapidly Africanized,” implying that the population change was old news.<sup>88</sup> Also at this time, both the *Colored American* and the *Washington Bee*, at one time considered the most influential black newspaper in the country, ran regular editorials and advertisements for housing rentals in LeDroit Park that specifically targeted African Americans:

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<sup>86</sup> Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 114

<sup>87</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 159

<sup>88</sup> Cooper, Edward Elder, editor. *The Colored American*. September 22, 1900.

LeDroit Park has become a pleasant part of Washington in which to reside and these beautiful flats are a happy addition to the residences there. Mr. Bane has spared no pains in making these flats comfortable and inviting and already applications are being made for rentals thereof. Colored people with first class reference who desire a beautiful part of the city in which to live, and at the same time occupy comfortable and improved apartments without renting a whole house, and paying high rent, can find a happy medium in these flats.<sup>89</sup>

As historian Ronald Johnson describes in his article on the transformation of LeDroit Park into a racial enclave, the neighborhood was part of a larger demographic trend at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that witnessed African Americans moving into Northwest Washington, concentrated around Howard University:

The earlier conflict between Howardtown and LeDroit Park residents, followed by the gradual buildup of black homeowners among the latter, reflected a major shift in the District's residential patterns. The concentration of black population in the Northwest quadrant constituted a break with the long-standing tradition in Washington of black alley-way dwellings... The development of black residential areas, social institutions, and businesses in Northwest Washington presented a new alternative to life in the alley communities. Incorporating residents who moved out of the alley dwellings and those who gave up their ties in older black neighborhoods in Georgetown and the Southwest quadrant, a new focus for black Washington emerged after 1900 which was centered around the meeting of U Street, 7th Street, Boundary Avenue, and Georgia Avenue, which was located just a block west of LeDroit Park.<sup>90</sup>

The convergence of population led to the establishment of notable African American institutions in the area. In 1910 the Howard Theater [Figure 25] located in the 600 block of T Street just beyond the boundaries of LeDroit Park, opened and was

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<sup>89</sup> Cooper, Edward Elder, editor. *The Colored American*. January 5, 1901.

<sup>90</sup> Johnson, "From Romantic Suburb to Racial Enclave," 266-7.

\*pseudonym



Figure 22: Historic image of façade of Howard Theater, c. 1910. Text reads “Howard Theater, Washington, DC, Largest Colored Theater in the World. The House Beautiful. Andrew J. Thomas, manager. Image courtesy of howardtheater.org.

eventually part of the celebrated circuit of theaters including the Apollo in New York and the Royal in Baltimore known as the Chitlin' Circuit, that supported African American performers during legalized segregation. As Jacqueline Moore asserts, "Washington's black community reacted to cultural exclusion, as to exclusion in most other areas, by turning to themselves for the creation of cultural institutions."<sup>91</sup> It was also in 1900 that Andrew Hilyer created the Union League Directory of black businesses to take stock of racial progress in the city and to encourage black residents to patronize black-owned businesses.<sup>92</sup> Because of the developing black community, LeDroit Park was a natural place to cultivate this concept of activist consumerism. The *Bee* as well as the *Afro-American* and *Washington Sun* (all African American papers) were all preaching the same approach to racial solidarity:

...buy colored, support colored charities, and colored civic enterprise, take pride in Negro achievements, and don't be 'Jim Crowed' by patronizing places where Negroes are segregated. The eight or nine hundred colored families that had managed to rent or buy houses in the one-time exclusively white homeowners' cooperative in LeDroit Park could enjoy a similar freedom by giving their custom to the Negro-owned grocery store there.<sup>93</sup>

This sense that the African American community must form alliances, both for mutual support and as a bulwark against open racial discrimination, is still a deeply held value. Contemporary LeDroit Park resident Heather Samuelson\* spoke about the issues in helping new generations find jobs when the community composition is changing rapidly:

There was a time where my son spent one full-year combing Georgia Avenue, looking for employment. You know, the barbershops, the restaurants,

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<sup>91</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 52.

<sup>92</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 152.

<sup>93</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 178.

\* pseudonym

everything, “I will sweep up the hair.” If the black-owned businesses, and there are very few [left], probably count on one hand or two, didn’t really have the resources or even the willingness to hire, just imagine the ones coming in. They are preparing for their children coming up, to leave something behind for their children, so I would like to see more... opportunities for our young people to develop skills and ... to build a life for themselves.<sup>94</sup>

Among the many notable residents of LeDroit Park during the period of racial integration was Paul Laurence Dunbar, the poet for whom the M Street School was eventually re-named. Dunbar moved to Washington, DC, in the early 1890s to attend Howard University, and eventually settled in LeDroit Park with his new wife in the late 1890s. He was both a gifted poet and an insightful essayist, often writing about the racial climate at the turn of the century. In a piece that originally appeared in 1900 in the *Baltimore News*, Dunbar succinctly describes the paradox of the black community in DC, particularly as it applied to government clerks and other professionals striving to build wealth and become assimilated into mainstream white society. “But, taking it all in all and after all, Negro life in Washington is a promise rather than a fulfillment. But it is worthy of note for the really excellent things which are promised.”<sup>95</sup>

Laurence also addressed the paradox of black citizenship in his most famous poem “Sympathy,” familiar because Maya Angelou used the refrain as the title to her autobiography published in 1969.

“Sympathy” by Paul Laurence Dunbar, published in *Lyrics of the Hearthside*, 1899

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!  
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;

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<sup>94</sup> Samuelson, Heather. Interview with author, July 7, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Dubar, *In His Own Voice* (edited by Martin and Primeau), 116.

When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
When the first bird sings and the first bud opens,  
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals –  
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing  
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;  
For he must fly back to his perch and cling  
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;  
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars  
And they pulse again with a keener sting –  
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,  
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, –  
When he beats his bars and he would be free;  
It is not a carol of joy or glee,  
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,  
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings –  
I know why the caged bird sings!

The poem was written while Dunbar was an employee of the Library of Congress and a resident of LeDroit Park, from 1897-98. His wife, Alice M. Dunbar-Nelson, also a poet, reflected that her late husband's poem was referring to the metal security grates on the doors at the Library of Congress when he talked about a cage.<sup>96</sup> She described how he felt that the position he was allowed to hold at the Library (as proscribed by unwritten rules of racial propriety) was limiting socially and intellectually, and his frustration is almost palpable in the verse. Another level of meaning is surely linked to his anger at being essentially type-cast as a “dialect” writer by his white publishers, and his yearning for artistic freedom. Earlier in his career, Dunbar had national success with a collection of poems titled *Majors and Minors* (1895) where the “major” poems, the bulk of the book, were written in

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<sup>96</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, reprinted 1996.

standard English and the “minor” poems, were written in dialect. The minor poems garnered the most public attention and positive criticism from the mainstream white press. So the poem “Sympathy” reflects a feeling of being strangled by success because white society did not want to read works that did not reflect their notions of black culture. A final interpretation for this poem is as a metaphor for both the neighborhood and the black community in Washington. The sheltered environment in LeDroit Park nurtured the black elite, but the social strictures could also be intense and confining. Thus the sheltered neighborhood of LeDroit Park provided security from Washington’s white society that was intent on excluding African Americans, and a place to develop self-reliance and a distinct black subculture.

#### Women’s Role in City Building

Often called the Four Hundred, the black elite of Washington exemplified W.E.B. Dubois’ description of the Talented Tenth, leaders of the race who were educated classically and active in social causes. These elites tried to “distinguish themselves from the black masses through refinement and by avoiding conspicuous consumption.”<sup>97</sup> Women in this community were particularly proscribed in their roles, as even the teaching profession was usually closed to them once married, but managing a family was socially obligatory. Females who were considered part of the Four Hundred were encouraged to be college educated, and then pursue charitable works in addition to their domestic duties to help newly arrived African Americans achieve social and financial stability. Historian Jacqueline Moore summarizes this unspoken contract in which “black elite women believed they had a special mission to

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<sup>97</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 13.

uplift the race.”<sup>98</sup> Anna Julia Cooper [Figure 26], a prominent educator and resident of LeDroit Park wrote about this particular variant of the Victorian cult of womanhood:

A stream cannot rise higher than its source. The atmosphere of homes is no rarer and purer and sweeter than are the mothers in those homes. A race is but a total of families. The nation is the aggregate of its homes. As the whole is sum of all its parts, so the character of the parts will determine the characteristics of the whole.<sup>99</sup>

Dr. Cooper was one of many African American residents of LeDroit Park who played a prominent role in education. She served as a principal of the venerable M Street School, and held courses for the Frelinghuysen University, a night school for African American laborers, on her porch.

One of the primary paths to social uplift was through Black women’s clubs. Mary Church Terrell [Figure 27], who had risen to community leadership positions shortly after she moved into LeDroit Park, formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 as a parallel to the all-white General Federation of Women’s Clubs, which was founded in 1892 and excluded black women’s clubs from membership. As part of this effort, Ms. Terrell was instrumental in forming the first YWCA for “colored women” in 1905 in temporary quarters to assist new arrivals adjust to city. With no permanent site, another club woman, Emma Merritt, purchased a house in 1910 for that purpose. Located in LeDroit Park, the large single-family structure on the 400 block of T Street was named the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA. It became an important node of black society in the neighborhood, strengthening ties among neighbors who assisted with the programs and also

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<sup>98</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 175.

<sup>99</sup> Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 29.



Figure 26: Portrait of Anna Julia Cooper in her house in LeDroit Park. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Figure 27: Portrait of Mary Church Terrell. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

cementing the reputation of the area as nurturer of the black intelligentsia. The next two years were spent raising \$4,300 to pay off the mortgage and expand its programs, which included classes and services similar to those offered at settlement houses such as sewing, traveler's aid for new southern migrants, and temporary housing.<sup>100</sup>

Historian Elizabeth Clarke-Lewis writes about the social dynamic succinctly

The migrants' arrival was considered the reason for exploitative housing costs and deterioration of property values in Washington, DC's segregated communities. They [southern migrants] were considered educationally inferior, and urban African Americans thought them crude and 'country' in their social graces. Even African American businesses would not initially employ college-educated migrants because they were 'poorly educated by northern urban Washington, DC, Negro standards.'<sup>101</sup>

And thus the club women assisted new city residents to learn skills, both social and domestic, that they would need to adapt to their new environment. This was done in domestic spaces modified into spaces of education, what geographer Daphne Spain calls redemptive spaces, or places that "[constitute] a 'voluntary vernacular,' they were neither completely private nor totally public; rather they occupied a 'liminal' or threshold space in which marginal populations (like single women looking for work) made the transition from rural roots to city soil."<sup>102</sup>

Another organization that got its start at this time in LeDroit Park was also connected to Mrs. Terrell. Omega Psi Phi, the first black fraternity was started on the campus of Howard University in 1911, and the Terrells allowed the fraternity brothers to use their home, located at 326 T Street, as their first meeting space. Dr. Ernest Everett Just, a pioneering biologist who also lived in LeDroit Park, was the

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<sup>100</sup> Moore, *Leading the Race*, 175-176.

<sup>101</sup> Clarke-Lewis, *Living In, Living out*, 92-3.

<sup>102</sup> Spain, *Gendering the City*, 105-106.

faculty advisor. Omega Psi Phi developed into a powerhouse over the following several decades, helping individuals grow into leaders in scholarship and service, and assisting in national efforts to improve health, civil rights, and housing for African Americans. Therefore LeDroit Park was not only the residence of many important African Americans at the turn of the century, but it literally nurtured many new generations of leaders in the community.

The legacy of these visionary men and women is still strong in LeDroit Park today. Dr. James Hill, a retired Howard University professor and long-time resident, describes the influence of this history on his decision to live in the neighborhood:

I knew about LeDroit Park through researching and studying and acquiring knowledge on African American history [in school—he describes attending segregated schools in South Carolina]. And I knew about the scholars and outstanding black persons who lived here long before I came to Washington.... I was very familiar with it [the history]. So moving here was just like moving in the middle of the pot, where everything I knew about had also occurred. And I knew of many of those great black people.<sup>103</sup>

Leaders like Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper not only played a key role in the education of their contemporaries, but also helped shape the current residents of the neighborhood. Thus the history of LeDroit Park and the notable people who have lived in the neighborhood is a significant factor in the emotional construct of place for many contemporary residents. The historic district is not just bricks and mortar, but is constructed from the perceptions and understanding of history that residents bring to the neighborhood, a history which many feel may be lost with the demographic shift of the past decade.

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<sup>103</sup> Hill, James K. Interview with author, July 1, 2015.

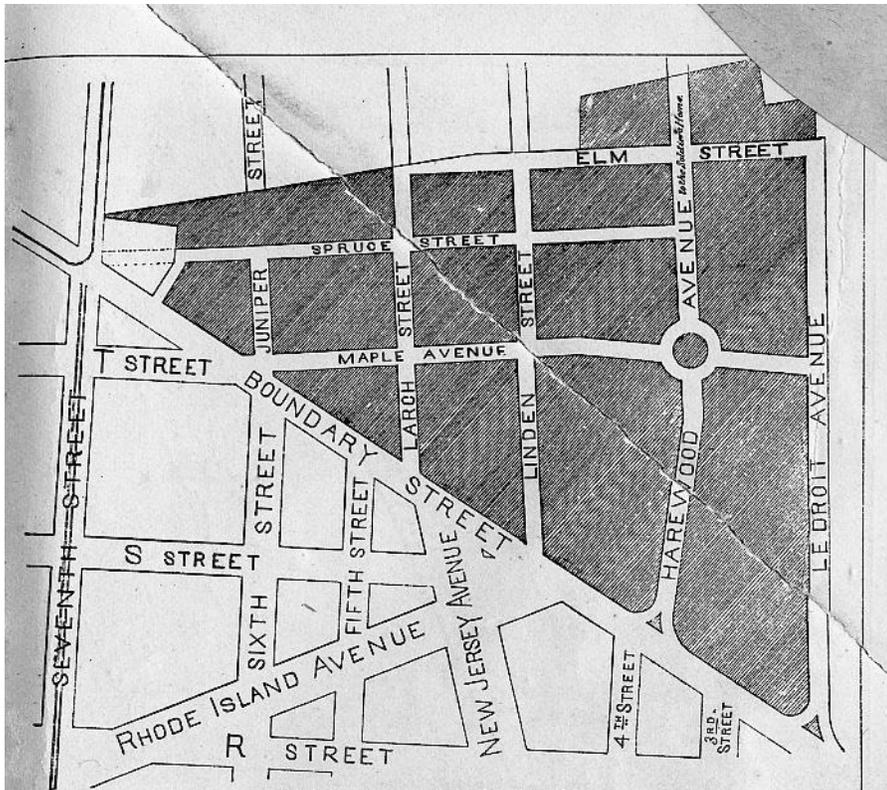
### *Physical Development of Neighborhood and City*

Although the physical appearance of LeDroit Park did not change drastically in this era, the neighborhood continued to densify within the established street grid set up by the developers. [Figure 28] While A.L. Barber & Co. described their vision as a mixture of housing sizes to serve a variety of upper middle class Washingtonians, “best suited for the merchant, professional man, or government clerk,”<sup>104</sup> but they misjudged the market for such large houses on expansive lots, and by the 1880s had begun to sell lots to individual builders who subdivided the land and constructed smaller structures, both attached duplexes and rowhouses, as well as smaller single-family houses.

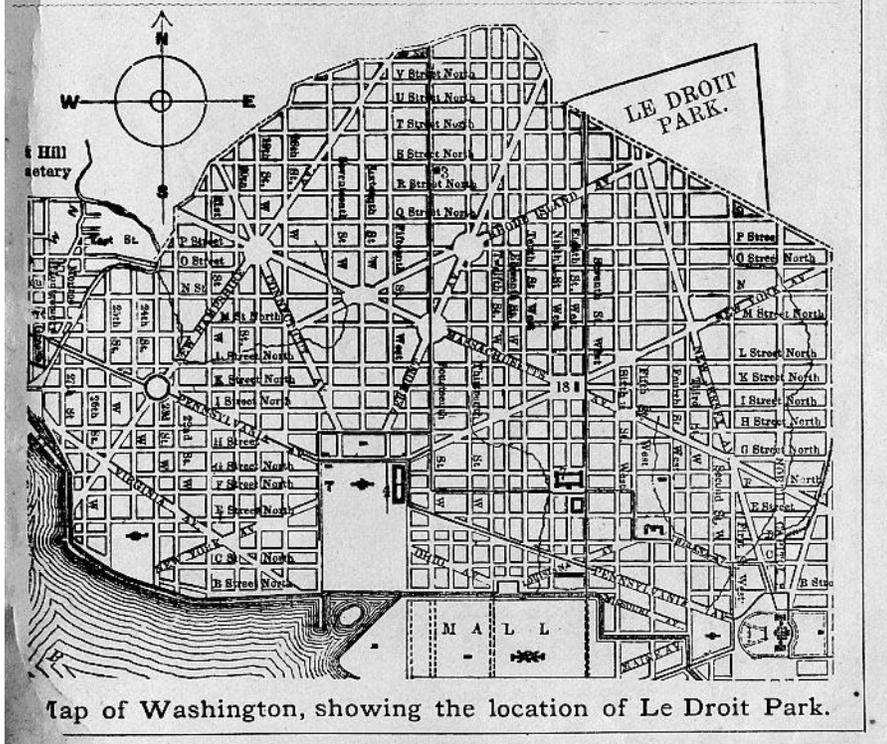
In analyzing the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps [Figures 29-30] for Washington that were drawn in 1903 and revised in 1916, the contrasting land use with adjoining neighborhoods becomes clear. Even in the subdivided lots, many of the rowhouses and duplexes are wider than the standard Washington rowhouses that were built just a block south on Florida Avenue. Not only are the houses and lots more generously proportioned, but many of the new structures retain a setback from the street that emphasized the spaciousness of the lots [Figure 31]. Though not a continuous green space, as described by Barber et al., individual gardens and lawns visually form a connected open space that made the streets feel wider and lent an air of graciousness to the neighborhood. Many houses also have large porches facing the street, providing a liminal space for the residents—a semi-public area to enjoy the outdoors and the fresh air, where social interaction is encouraged on an intimate level.

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<sup>104</sup> Barber, *LeDroit Park Illustrated*, 3.



Map of Le Droit Park.



Map of Washington, showing the location of Le Droit Park.

Figure 28: Image of map of LeDroit Park from James McGill's *Architectural Adviser*. Image courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

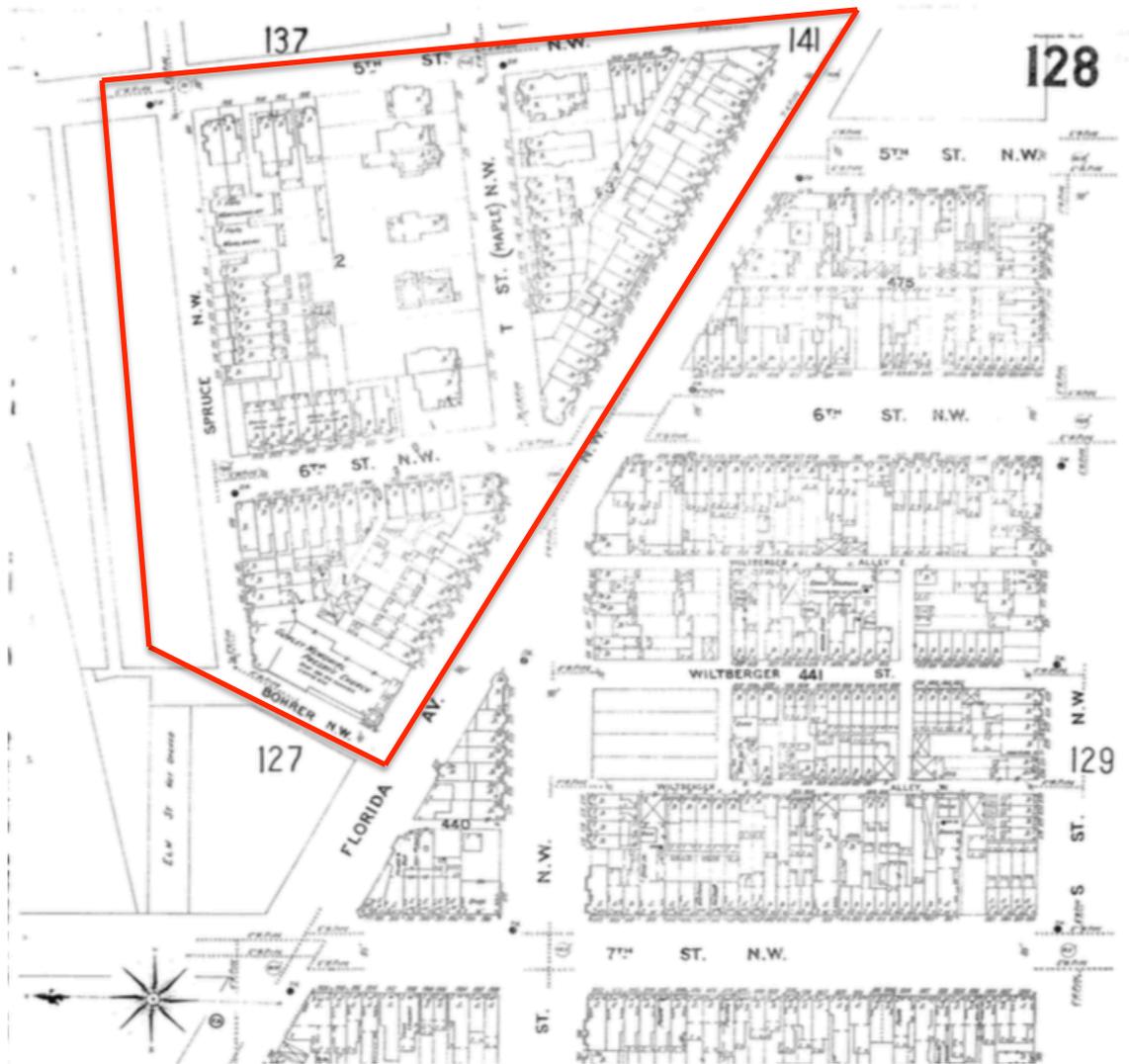


Figure 29: Sanborn Map of Washington 1903-1916 page 128. The portion of LeDroit Park depicted on this page is outlined in red.



Figure 30: Sanborn Map of Washington 1903-1916 page 141 The portion of LeDroit Park depicted on this page is outlined in red.



Figure 31: View of 400 block of T Street (Historic Maple Avenue) with connected gardens and lawns. Photo by author.

Over time the porches have become integral to the culture of the neighborhood residents. As contemporary resident Doug Newcomb explains:

I think in LeDroit Park there is definitely, I want to call it the “porch culture.” People enjoy their porches and outdoor spaces and you get to say hello to your neighbors and that is one thing, if you are living in a condo or a densely populated area you don’t have those personal outside spaces where you can easily interact with neighbors.<sup>105</sup>

His partner, Derek Younger elaborates on this idea:

I’ve been really surprised at the number of people who will stop and talk to you. And talk about your garden, talk about your house, talk about the people they used to know who lived in your home who lived in the area, who lived on the street. Tell you about a plant that is growing, or a tree that’s growing.<sup>106</sup>

The exterior spaces, lot coverage, and massing of the houses within LeDroit Park has encouraged a certain type of interaction among residents and visitors alike. Based on oral histories and recollections from many established residents, this porch culture is a long-standing tradition in LeDroit Park, and an integral part of the intangible heritage of the neighborhood that connects the past with the present.

#### A Landscape Divided by Race

Within walking distance of these generous porches and green spaces is one of the largest open spaces in Washington, McMillan Reservoir and Park. The reservoir was built in 1883 as part of the Army Corps of Engineers system of aqueducts and man-made lakes to bring fresh water to city residents. In 1902 the reservoir site became a focal point of the McMillan Plan for Washington, the result of a high-powered presidentially-appointed commission including designers Daniel Burnham,

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<sup>105</sup> Newcomb, Doug. Interview with author, June 1, 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Younger, Derek. Interview with author, June 1, 2015.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Charles McKim, and Augustus St. Gaudens, that was charged with creating a unified park system in commemoration of the city's centennial. Inspired by the City Beautiful Movement, the commission carefully integrated green spaces while preserving the Baroque city plan of L'Enfant. Though the most dramatic results of the plan were seen in the removal of railroads from what would become the lawn on the National Mall, other areas of the city were also transformed. Just north of LeDroit Park the reservoir was expanded to include a state-of-the-art sand filtration water treatment facility and a recreation space designed by Olmsted [Figures 32-34].

When completed in 1911, the 170-acre site included a promenade walkway along the perimeter of the reservoir and the edges of the filtration plant, and a formal park with a fountain of the three graces as its visual nexus. There were no racial restrictions in the park, and its de facto integration status meant it was a node of activity for residents from all over the city, and a particularly beloved meeting place for people living in the Northwest quadrant. In oral histories, LeDroit Park residents reminisce about using the site for everything from organized touch-football games and church picnics to informal places to sleep outside in the oppressive Washington summer heat. Retired Mayor Walter Washington recounted in an oral history recorded in 2003 that the “greatest point of relaxation [in the highly segregated city] was the reservoir...you could walk around with a girl all the way around. But when you got back around, you better get on back in the dormitory.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Washington, Walter E. Video oral history recorded for the National Visionary Leadership Project and archived at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center. <http://www.visionaryproject.org/washingtonwalter/>



Figure 32: McMillan Reservoir c. 1910. Image courtesy of [friendsofmcmillan.org](http://friendsofmcmillan.org).



Figure 33: Workers constructing sand filtration towers at McMillan Reservoir  
Image courtesy of [friendsofmcmillan.org](http://friendsofmcmillan.org).



Figure 34: Fountain of Three Graces at McMillan Reservoir. Image courtesy of American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America.

Citing national security concerns, the reservoir was fenced off prior to World War II, and remains closed to the present day. In the 1980s the Army Corps of Engineers built a modern filtration system, and sold the obsolete eastern part of the site to the DC government. This section is now undergoing a process to sell the space to a private developer for a mixed-use housing, commercial and recreational development. Although the current plans would not retain much of the historic fabric, it would reinstate some of the recreation space that has been inaccessible for decades.

Another node of city activity adjacent to LeDroit Park was the National League baseball stadium located between Georgia Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street near the intersection with Florida Avenue.<sup>108</sup> Beginning in 1892, this 6,500 seat wooden stadium was the home to the Washington Senators team. Bordering both majority black and majority white neighborhoods, the stadium was another site of relative racial integration. While there were some customary sections where black fans usually sat, such as the right field pavilion, there was no posted or enforced segregated seating as at the contemporary stadium in St. Louis. Historian Brad Snyder writes that:

Griffith Stadium was one of the few outdoor places in segregated Washington where blacks could enjoy themselves *with* whites. The ballpark, located at Seventh Street and Florida Avenue in northwest Washington, stood in the heart of a thriving black residential and commercial district...the educational opportunities at Howard and the job opportunities in the federal government had lured many of the country's best and brightest black residents to the nation's capital. Many of them lived near the ballpark in neighborhoods such as LeDroit Park, which was just beyond Griffith Stadium's right-field wall.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is the current name, but at the time it was Brightwood Avenue, and extended north directly from 7<sup>th</sup> Street; it was renamed Georgia Avenue in 1908 after 3 years of wrangling in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

<sup>109</sup> Snyder, *In the Shadow of the Senators*, xi.

During spring training in 1911 the old stadium burned to the ground, demolishing the original Freedman’s Hospital building on the grounds of Howard University at the same time. Though the hospital was symbolic to the African American community as the site of a refugee community during the Civil War, it was not rebuilt after the fire. The stadium however, was rebuilt with astonishing speed. In just three weeks a modern concrete and steel structure was erected, complete enough to host opening day on April 12, 1911.<sup>110</sup> In both size and shape, it was an usual baseball field: 407’ from home plate down left-field line; 421’ to center field, and 320 ‘ down right-field line, and a 30’ concrete wall in right field that kept balls in play.<sup>111</sup> But the most distinct part of the National League stadium was the center-field wall that detoured around five houses in LeDroit Park<sup>112</sup>—the stadium was literally knit into the fabric of the community. [Figure 35]

This community fabric also included the entertainment district called U Street NW [Figures 36-37], now celebrated as the “Black Broadway,” home of multiple jazz venues and supper clubs made famous by Duke Ellington, Pearl Bailey, and a constellation of other performers. Florida Avenue, the southern boundary of LeDroit Park, turns into U Street at the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, a point at which the rural ideal of Barber & Company awkwardly meets the L’Enfant grid. This intersection is marked by the subdued neoclassical façade of the Howard Theater, an anchor of the music and entertainment boulevard that extends west to 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Almost a century later, current resident Von Robinson remarked that the proximity to such music venues was significant to him in moving into LeDroit Park:

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<sup>110</sup> Ritter, *Lost Ballparks*, 81-91.

<sup>111</sup> Ritter, *Lost Ballparks*, 82.

<sup>112</sup> Snyder, *In the Shadow of the Senators*, 3.



Figure 35: National League Baseball Stadium, (later renamed Griffith Stadium) unknown date. Image courtesy of [healthsciences.howard.edu](http://healthsciences.howard.edu).

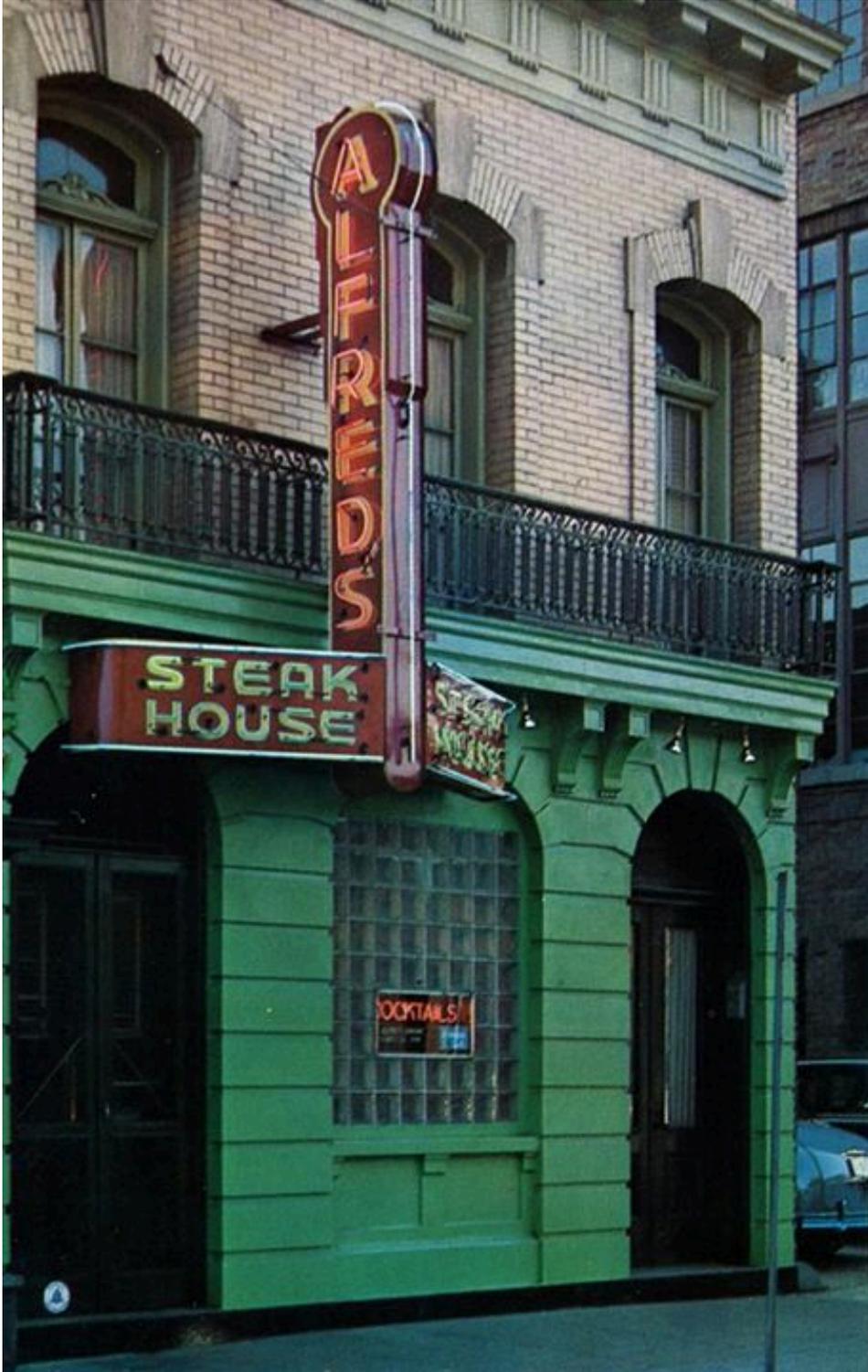


Figure 36: Alfred's Steak House, 1610 U Street NW (currently Stetson's). Alfred's customers included Duke Ellington, Pearl Bailey, Nat King Cole, Count Basie, and Sarah Vaughn. Photo courtesy of John Ferrari.



Figure 37: Image of unknown dancers at a club on U Street captured by the Scurlock Studio, photographers who captured generations of African American life in DC. Image courtesy of Scurlock Collection, Smithsonian.

I learned that... this was part of a music scene at one point. The Howard Theater goes back, way back. You don't get that in a lot of places, right? Where you feel tucked away, you have a backyard, and you feel like you are out in the suburbs somewhere. So that's great. Yeah, its just a wonderful place.<sup>113</sup>

What is also significant is the more complex role that U Street played in the dynamics of the city as a whole. Blair Ruble, Director of the Urban Sustainability Laboratory at the Wilson Center, writes in his book about the history of U Street:

...[it]remained more interracial in reality than its image might suggest. It has constantly been an unwelcome zone of contact “unprotected” from racial propinquity by formal legal constraints...[and] U Street has been important precisely because it has always served as a zone of contact among the divergent racial, cultural, and economic communities that define Washington as a city. Class along with race have long been defining cleavages running through the heart of U Street.<sup>114</sup>

Although LeDroit Park has been known as an enclave for a single racial group throughout much of its history, its narrative is entwined with many spaces in Washington that were meeting places for all types of people [Figure 22]. As the community evolved in its second generation, the introverted planning of the LeDroit Park neighborhood allowed residents to maintain the feeling of being apart from the city. While the original developers wanted to create an elite enclave for wealthy Euro-Americans escaping the dirt and disease of the expanding city, the new African American residents used this same inward-looking design to create a world of relative freedom, separated from the growing racial restrictions in the greater society. That said, LeDroit Park was not hidden, in that many powerful residents transformed it into a fulcrum around which much of Washington's racial politics orbited. Sitting at the nexus of entertainment on U Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and Griffith Stadium, adjacent to

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<sup>113</sup> Robinson, Von. Interview with author, June 24, 2015.

<sup>114</sup> Ruble, *U Street: A Biography*, 10.

education centers such as Howard University, M Street School, and Frelinghuysen University, and in close proximity to recreation spaces like McMillian Reservoir, LeDroit Park connected important nodes of activity for the entire city.

### **Political Climate in Washington**

As the seat of the federal government, Washington, DC, attracted many people seeking work at the turn of the century. Between 1890 and 1910 the overall population of the city increased nearly 20% each decade [Figure 38], and the percentage of African Americans in the city hovered between 28-33% over that period. As discussed previously, although many of the migrants came to the city from rural environments and worked in the service industry, many others came to work in clerical jobs for the government. Writing in 1900, Paul Laurence Dunbar sums up the reality that all migrants faced: “Washington is the city where the big men of little towns come to be disillusioned. Whether black or white...in Washington he is apt to come to a realization of his true worth to the world.”<sup>115</sup> And African Americans in particular were apt to face harsher realities than most. Although at the beginning of this era, President Cleveland managed to suppress movements to segregate black and white government workers, by the end of the era, President Wilson had reversed this policy.<sup>116</sup> Encouraged by Mrs. Wilson and the prevailing mores of the South, President Wilson’s decision to isolate black federal workers was part of a series of indignities that eventually led to major upheaval.

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<sup>115</sup> Dunbar, *Negro Life in Washington*, 188.

<sup>116</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 172.

## District of Columbia population, by race, 1890–1920

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

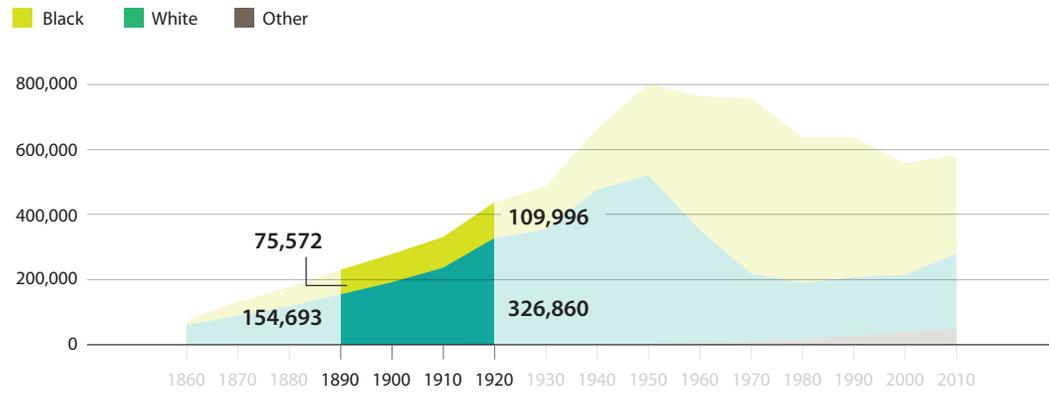


Figure 38: Chart of DC population by race, 1890-1920.

The transformation of LeDroit Park from white rural suburb to elite black enclave also coincides with a larger social and political transformation of American society, named the Progressive Era by historians. Characterized by idealistic movements that ultimately wrought sweeping change, Progressives championed such causes as anti-trust laws, prison reform, women's suffrage, and challenged governmental corruption, hunger, and poverty. Paradoxically it was also a time of increasing formal and informal racial segregation, exemplified by Jim Crow laws in the South and de facto segregation in the North. As discussed, Washington, DC, literally and figurative walked the line between these two approaches, with spaces like McMillan Park and the National League baseball stadium nominally integrated, but other spaces like restaurants and government offices increasingly separated. Despite the Reconstruction-era law that required non-discrimination in public accommodations, food service was segregated in the District. As local historian John DeFerrari describes the situation "Over the next several decades, black-owned businesses, including restaurants, cafes, and lunchrooms, grew and thrived in the face of restrictions that kept them [black patrons] out of white communities."<sup>117</sup>

Both the economic opportunities and the social realities of segregation had far-reaching impact on the cultural and financial life of Washington's African American community for generations. Richard Myers, contemporary LeDroit Park resident reflects on DC's position as the dividing line between formal and informal segregation:

And see, Washington, is a strange city. Because it is well below the Mason-Dixon line, however, Black people in this, from my era, that I am familiar with, know about, from the '60s, did not consider Washington South, you

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<sup>117</sup> DeFerrari, *Historic Restaurants of Washington*, DC. 103.

know because it was always... part of Washington was always sort of integrated, sort of quasi-integrated, even if you go back to Lincoln's time. You know, there were free blacks here, and when they left the South they came and then the Emancipation Proclamation, that was, that just like freed up all of Washington. So then people just began to have government jobs and houses, then they never considered themselves South.<sup>118</sup>

This feeling of opportunity and an identity grounded in freedoms was particularly strong as the United States prepared to enter World War I in 1917. According to Howard University history professor Walter Dyson, the university prepared its students to fight for the ideals of their country.

Suddenly the campus became a camp; the curriculum became a course in war... Soldiers were quartered in the dormitories and in other buildings. When these were filled, four barracks were hastily thrown up. Mess halls were built; trenches were dug; sentinels stood around; guards were at the gates. All came and went by pass. At sunrise we hear the reveille; at sunset the bugle call. It was war.<sup>119</sup>

However, when the soldiers returned to the States in 1918, they were sorely disappointed by their reception and by July of that year, resorted to violence, the epicenter of which was at the edge of LeDroit Park:

In Washington colored people, convinced that the time for meekness had passed, fought back. Guns brought from Baltimore and distributed at 7<sup>th</sup> and T Streets provided weapons for men trained to their use by war service. Colored men then and later believed that it was the killing of whites by Negroes that brought the riot to an end within five days.<sup>120</sup>

Reflecting on the consequences of the unrest, Howard University historian Rayford

W. Logan writes:

The red scare coincided with the "Red Summer" of 1919, the apt term used by the distinguished teacher, poet, and writer James Weldon Johnson, to describe the inter-racial strife which included some twenty-five riots. One of the worst of these riots occurred in Washington, DC. ...The Washington Riot ended

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<sup>118</sup> Myers, Richard. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 192.

after three days, partly because Negroes killed as many whites as whites killed Negroes. The fighting back by Negroes in Washington and elsewhere resulted in large measure from their conviction that, since they had risked their lives to make the world 'safe for democracy' in Europe, they might just as well risk their lives to gain some democracy at home.<sup>121</sup>

This was clearly a turning point for the African American community in Washington, if not for the greater city. As historian Constance Green writes, the riots

nevertheless had long-lasting consequences; it gradually reinforced white prejudices, deepened the obliviousness of much of white Washington to the needs of a biracial city, and for nearly two decades defeated the attempts of an enlightened minority to collaborate with Negro citizens.<sup>122</sup>

The campus of Howard University, the city of Washington, and the neighborhood of LeDroit Park were all intimately involved in the protests of that summer, and all would be transformed through their participation.

### **Conclusion**

LeDroit Park in the Progressive Era was transformed demographically from an all-white gated community into an elite black community. It was less dramatically transformed in this era from a rural suburban enclave into an urban retreat. Filled with housing of various sizes and styles, steps from the ever-expanding city but intentionally quiet and green, LeDroit Park cultivated a reputation for sheltering the leaders of the African American community who actively reached out to new migrants and black-owned businesses alike as a way to strengthen the community and shelter residents from the harshest racial exclusions. While the political atmosphere in Washington challenged many social injustices, race relations continued to

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<sup>121</sup> Logan, *Howard University: the First Hundred Years*, 189.

<sup>122</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 197.

deteriorate. The neighborhood could only be an island in the storm of unrest that followed the return of soldiers in the “Red Summer.” All these experiences eventually led to a flourishing of African American culture and intellect, cultivated and nurtured in porches and parlors of LeDroit Park.

## Chapter 4: 1920-1944 Home of the Talented Tenth

### Introduction

The next distinct era in the evolution of LeDroit Park began after the “Red Summer” of racial unrest that followed World War I and ended with the culmination of U.S. involvement in World War II. Though there were only a few changes in the physical environment of LeDroit Park during this interwar period, there were many social changes both locally and nationally that altered the interpretation and understanding of those spaces. During this time a more distinct African American subculture developed, partly due to increasing racial strictures and discriminatory laws such as covenants on deeds that restricted the sale of property by race and religion. But it was not all reactionary; the flowering of art, music, and culture that was eventually called the Harlem Renaissance was an outgrowth of the evolution of institutions such as Howard University and the M Street School in Washington, DC, which fostered leadership and scholarship as well as African American identity.

LeDroit Park’s setting adjacent to Howard University and the U Street corridor placed it at the center of art and intellect for Washington’s Black community [Figure 39]. Contemporaries described it as both a haven that allowed African Americans to grow and flourish and an elitist enclave that dismissed expressions of culture that were seen as unrefined. Many scholars and activists were attracted to the neighborhood’s location and gracious spaces, creating a concentration of individuals that was likened to W.E.B. DuBois’ Talented Tenth, functioning as public

LeDroit Park, circa 1920–1944

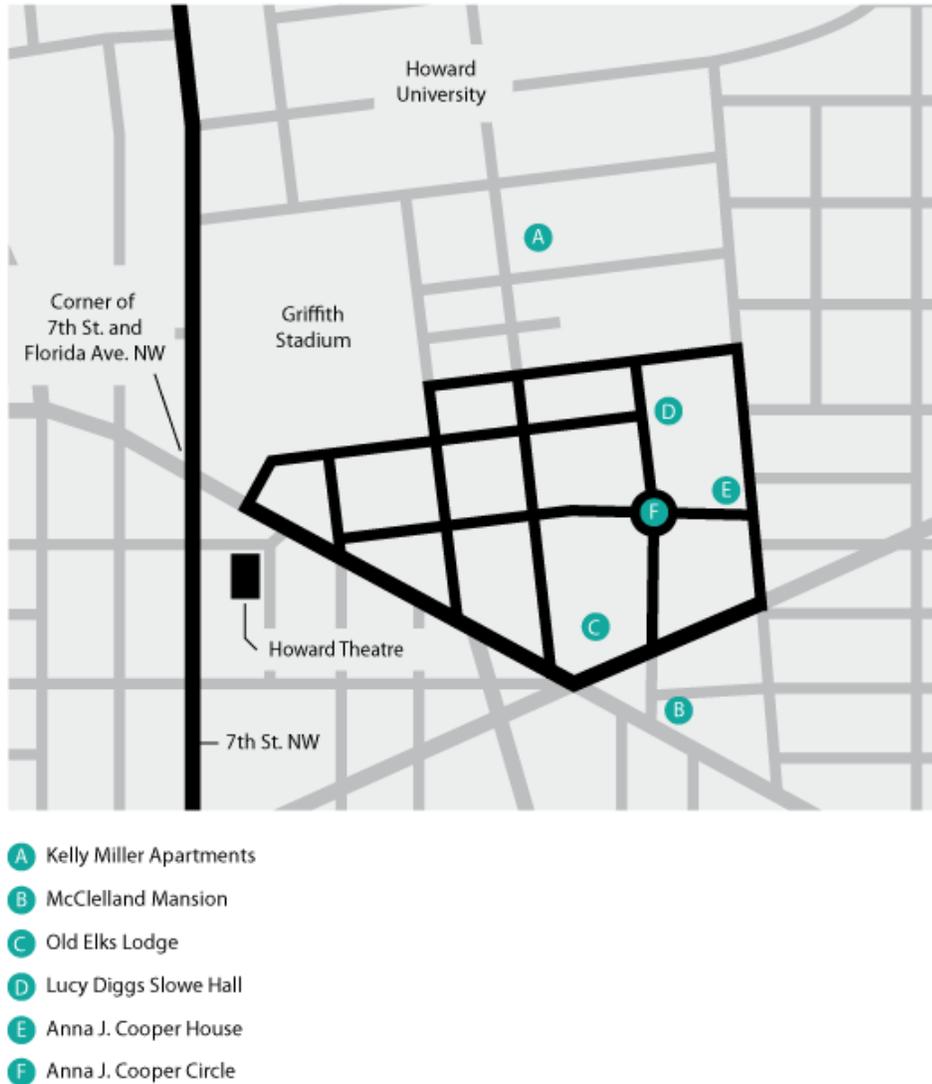


Figure 39: Diagram of LeDroit Park c. 1920-1944 with addition of two new multi-family complexes including Kelly Miller for families, and Lucy Diggs Slowe Hall for female government workers.

social change.<sup>123</sup> While several prominent artists like Langston Hughes challenged the perceived cliquishness of the residents, others like Hilda Wilkinson Brown intellectuals to lead celebrated the rich culture and environment of the neighborhood. Thus in the span of a few decades LeDroit Park's place in the overall city of Washington had evolved from an area where white businessmen and clerks could retreat from the challenges and ills of urban life to a vibrant yet secluded area that fostered African American leadership and social change. Ultimately the cloistered atmosphere that was part of the initial design of LeDroit Park served newer residents in ways unanticipated by the developers.

Understanding this period of vibrant culture and black leadership provides important context for the disinvestment that followed the 1968 riots and for the formation of the historic district in 1974. While the practice of historic preservation at the time favored material, principally architectural, preservation over cultural preservation, the LeDroit Park historic district was significant both for its architecture and for its associative history. The history of elite black Washington was embedded in fabric of LeDroit Park, and preserving that narrative continues to influence contemporary placemaking.

### ***Changing Sense of Place***

Throughout this twenty-five year period, the spatial qualities of LeDroit Park and the urban fabric immediately surrounding the neighborhood changed only incrementally. The exception to this were two large construction projects: one designed to meet the needs of the city as it nearly quadrupled its civilian workforce at

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<sup>123</sup> Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth*, 1.

the dawn of World War II and the other to relieve some of the pressure on lower-income city residents to find modern housing [Figure 39].<sup>124</sup> There were however some significant changes in ownership and management that transformed how spaces were used, and ultimately impacted neighborhood identity. While increasingly stringent racial segregation laws during the interwar period were not the only reason for these changes in LeDroit Park, the legal underpinning of racism definitely shaped the neighborhood physically and socially.

#### Transformation of Legal Landscape

Jim Crow laws, as they became known in the American South, were the legal basis for racial segregation in all areas of society. The first such laws were enacted just after the period of Reconstruction, when in 1877 the U.S. government was pressured to remove federal troops from former Confederate states and allow them to oversee their own administrations. Congress made a last-ditch effort to prevent the legal maneuvering by states that resulted in Jim Crow laws bypassing the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which guaranteed equal treatment for all citizens in public accommodations like restaurants, hotels, and transportation. The Supreme Court nullified this act in 1883 with a series of five cases, collectively called *109 US 3*, that were brought by African American citizens against various companies who denied them public services. The majority opinion ruled that the federal government could not enforce the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment that assured equal protection by states in these cases because it was private individuals and not governments who were setting the regulations and denying services. In a legal loophole, the Supreme Court decision did

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<sup>124</sup> Rosenfeld, “Government Girls’: World War II’s Army of the Potomac,” A1.

not repeal the Civil Rights Act of 1875 in the territories, including Washington, DC, but a combination of customs and regulations still resulted in segregation in the city. As historian Constance Green describes it, “Whatever the reason, whites chose to build an invisible wall about all colored Washington and then strove to forget about what a contributor to *Crisis* called the ‘Secret City.’”<sup>125</sup> In the South, this decision set the stage for the multitude of laws designed to segregate African Americans, laws that were reinforced through the terrorism of lynching.

The increasingly oppressive social atmosphere in the rural South combined with the possibility of jobs in Northern industry led to a mass exodus of African Americans from the South to the North, in what is now known as the Great Migration. Demographers point to the year 1910 as the starting point for this mass movement that resulted in the relocation of 1.6 million African Americans in the first 20 years. Though not an industrial manufacturing center like Pittsburgh or Detroit, the city of Washington’s black population rose from 94,500 in 1910 to 132,000 in 1930 [Figure 40] in response to the opportunities for government jobs. Despite President Wilson’s policy to segregate federal offices and explicitly discriminate against applicants by requiring pictures of job candidates, Washington was still seen as an oasis where educated African Americans could hold office jobs and live a middle class life.

One of the consequences of the demographic shift in the northern states was a system that was eventually called *de facto* segregation. Through a mixture of covenants on deeds to properties reinforced by social custom, African American migrants were channeled into distinct areas of cities, and discriminated against

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<sup>125</sup> Green, *The Secret City*, 202.

## District of Columbia population, by race, 1920–1940

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

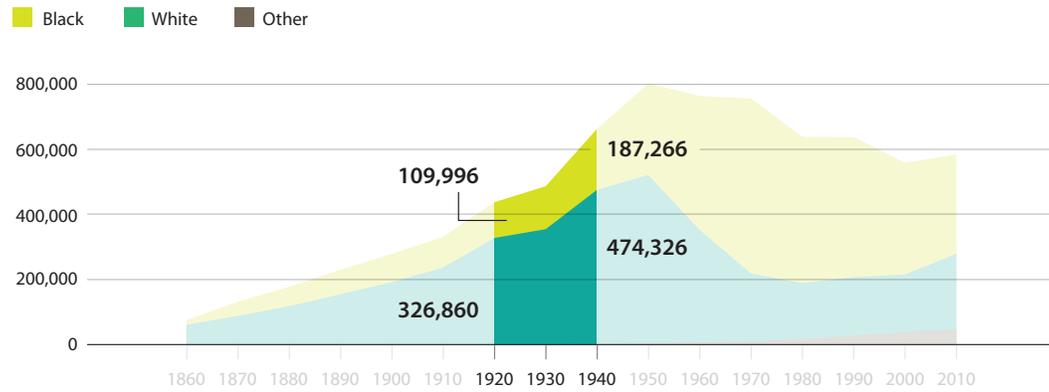


Figure 40: Chart of DC population by race, 1920-1940.

through the lack of support for services such as schools, restaurants, and other public accommodations. The system of racial covenants, or the appending of racial restrictions on the sale of property particularly for housing, was challenged in the Supreme Court case *Corrigan v. Buckley*<sup>126</sup> in 1926. The plaintiffs argued that racial covenants were discriminatory and prohibited under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The court refused to hear the case, based on the same logic used to overturn the Civil Rights Act of 1875, where the court determined it could not regulate the actions of individuals, only states, and since deeds were not state laws, they had no authority to overturn racial covenants. This tacit approval of segregation through deed covenants was not legally challenged again until 1948 in *Shelley v. Kramer*.<sup>127</sup>

Washington, DC, was sited on the Potomac River in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a way to bridge the cultural and geographic divide that existed between the northern and southern states. The culture of the city has maintained a hybrid quality in terms of segregation, exhibiting some aspects of the Southern Jim Crow laws and other aspects that are more reminiscent of the northern approach of de facto segregation through property rights, restrictions, and customs. LeDroit Park was developed before the era of racial covenants on deeds, but used a system of customs to ensure that the first generation of residents were Euro-Americans. The neighborhood changed demographically in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and again mostly through custom became a majority African American enclave.

The larger pattern of residential segregation across the country was reinforced during the New Deal when the 1934 Housing Act was passed. The legislation was

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<sup>126</sup> *Corrigan v Buckley*, 271 U.S. 323 (1926).

<sup>127</sup> *Shelley v. Kramer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

created to stop the number of mortgagees who were defaulting on loans, and ultimately to make homeownership more accessible and thus jumpstart this part of the U.S. economy during the Depression. The law created a new federal agency, the Federal Housing Administration, to oversee rules and regulations aimed at encouraging banks to loan to potential homeowners again. One of the major initiatives was a set of color-coded maps that defined risk for loans based on physical condition of houses, and the race, ethnicity, and income of residents, rather than on their ability to repay a loan. As a result, large sections of cities were “redlined” or determined high risk, preventing banks from getting federal support for lending in these areas and essentially eliminating the possibility of neighborhood reinvestment as well as reinforcing ideas that racially integrated neighborhoods were poor investments.

In LeDroit Park, as in many traditionally African American neighborhoods in Washington, this meant that home buying became even more difficult [Figure 41] than the experiences recalled by Mary Church Terrell, where she and her husband were denied a sale based on their race and had to use a straw buyer to purchase their first home. As a result, many families passed on their houses to family members rather than selling them on the open market as a way to preserve the investment in family wealth. One contemporary resident, Mechelle Baylor, who is the third generation of her family to live in her house recalls this kind of family support:

My grandfather, this is him [points to portrait on wall] he got this house in 1929. My mom was born 1931. She was born in here. She got married, 1950, standing right there [points to front window of living room]. I was born in 1952. And we all lived here: my grandparents, my mom, my daddy, and myself. So, and in 1964, my grandfather moved to the Gold Coast, up by Walter Reed [not uncommon in the neighborhood, after legal desegregation

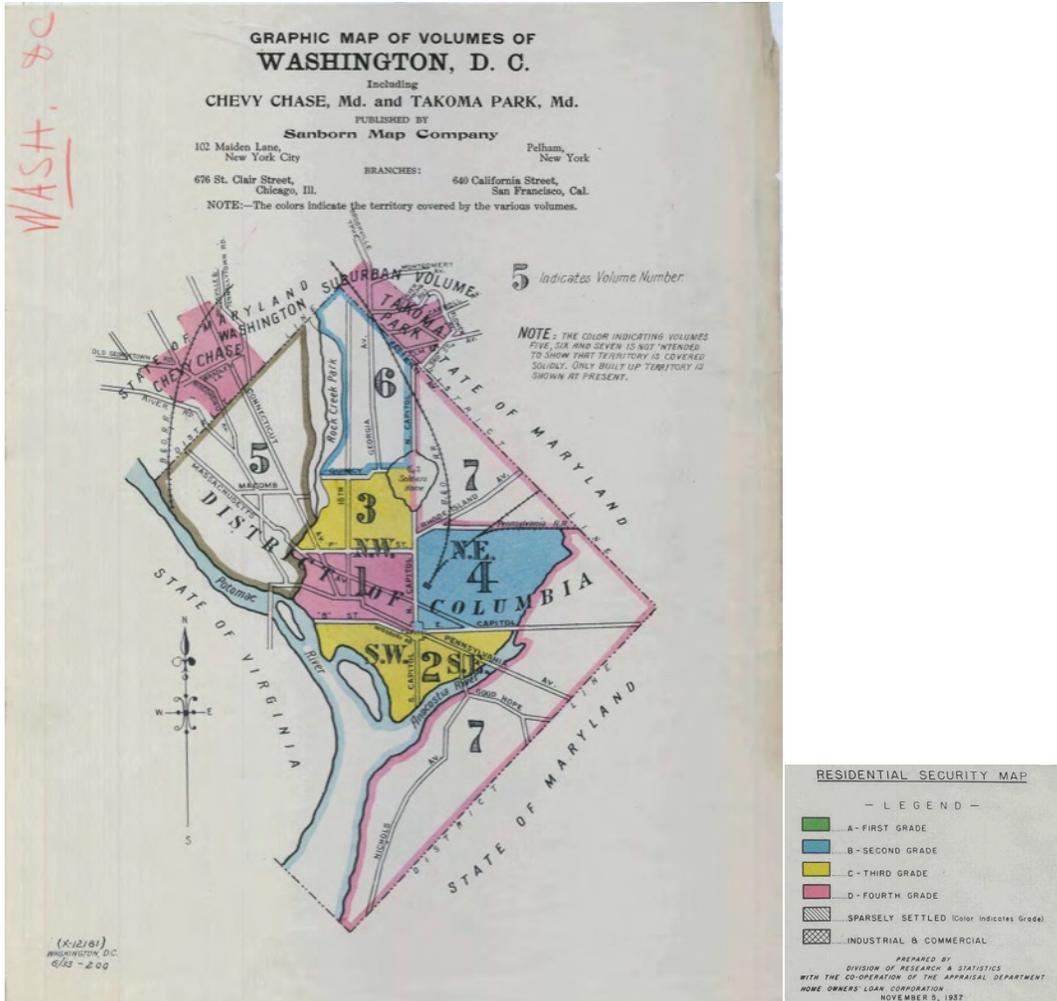


Figure 41: HOLC Map of DC indicating that LeDroit Park (section 3) is in a high-risk area for loans (in yellow). Image courtesy of Library of Congress.

was underway, many residents moved to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhoods which had larger houses and lawns] and gave my mother and father and me this house and my mom never lived no where else. I never left home. She never left home. She never left home. She got married here, brought her husband here, had her child here, so you know... and I never left, and I'm not going anywhere.<sup>128</sup>

Mechelle's adult son lives with her in the house, and he intends to continue the family legacy in LeDroit Park.

Another major piece of New Deal legislation to affect neighborhoods was the Housing Act of 1937, sometimes referred to as the Wagner-Steagall Act for the Congressional champions of the law. Among the most influential of the law's provisions was the system of federal subsidies given to local agencies to provide housing for low-income residents. Because the laws gave local authorities a lot of power in the oversight and implementation of the Act, housing built during this era reinforced patterns of racial and class segregation, which are still evident today. In the northern part of LeDroit Park the Kelly Miller Apartments were built in 1941 as low-income housing for families [Figure 39]. The apartments are separated physically from the single-family houses by a large park—at one time an elementary school—which acts as both a mediator between the communities and a barrier to communication.

#### Adaptation and Modification

The first change in the LeDroit Park environment occurred shortly after the unrest of the summer of 1919, when the Washington Nationals Baseball stadium was renamed for Clark Griffith, a retired player and the current manager and owner of the

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<sup>128</sup> Baylor, Mechelle. Interview with author, June 17, 2015.

team. The Nationals were not a superstar team, but hosted three World Series at the stadium in 1924, 1925, and 1933. As discussed previously, the stadium was not a legally segregated space, and attracted both white and black fans to the games. But the fissures in this façade of interracial harmony were evident.

In particular, Griffith became a major proponent of continued segregation of major league baseball teams in the 1930s and 1940s. This stance was curious given his clear support of the Negro League, giving the Homestead Grays, a team headquartered in Pittsburgh, a second home in Washington at the stadium when the Senators played on the road. Griffith was even quoted as saying that the Gray's Josh Gibson, known as the "Black Babe Ruth," had hit more home runs in Griffith Stadium than all of the American League combined.<sup>129</sup> But Griffith was at heart a capitalist, and as historian Brad Snyder assesses the situation

Griffith's opposition to integration was rooted in both prejudice and greed. Griffith believed he could make more money renting this stadium to black baseball teams than he could by increasing attendance from signing black players. Before 1945, he encouraged black baseball to build up its own leagues, helped owners such as Posey promote their businesses, and lavished praise on star players such as Paige, Gibson, and Leonard. After 1945, he defended the Negro Leagues as an economic entity and blasted Rickey for raiding black teams without compensating them. Griffith wanted the Negro leagues to survive because he wanted to keep profiting off them.<sup>130</sup>

Clark Griffith intentionally invited the African American community to the stadium for all sorts of events that were not connected directly to baseball, including a mass-baptism for Elder Michaux's Church of God in 1930, a ceremony that included shipping in thousands of gallons of water from the Potomac River. Whether only

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<sup>129</sup> Ritter, *Lost Ballparks*, 86.

<sup>130</sup> Snyder, *Beyond the Shadow of the Senators*, 183.

motivated by profit or out of a sense of giving back to the community, Griffith made the stadium a node of activity recognized around the city:

For Lacy and many other black residents, Griffith Stadium was an oasis. Despite the subtle segregation, Senators owner Clark Griffith made blacks feel welcome inside his ballpark. Griffith opened his stadium to the black public schools and regularly rented the ballpark for black sporting and other community events. 'Griffith Stadium was sort of like outdoor theater for the black community,' recalled local historian Henry Whitehead, who has lived in Washington since the late 1940s. 'It was important to the black community that we had that venue in our neighborhood.'<sup>131</sup>

And thus, although the physical stadium did not change during this period, its use as both a symbol of racial integration and segregation had long-lasting impact on how the space was viewed in the neighborhood, and eventually how the space was reused in the 1970s when it became the site of Howard University Hospital.

Another small but not insignificant change in the neighborhood environment happened in 1925 when the Columbia Lodge #85 of the IBPOEW, a Black social and benevolent society founded in 1906, bought the former home of David McClelland, a McGill designed house on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to use as its headquarters. This purchase added to the illustrious list of African American institutions that were anchored in formerly residential structures and further solidified the social leadership contained within these few urban blocks. The house was located on an elevated site at the crux of Florida and Rhode Island avenues, with clear views of the Capitol and downtown. Though the Elks eventually sold the mansion site to Safeway Corporation to build a grocery store and used the proceeds to construct a purpose-built lodge on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the transformation of this prominent mansion was a very visible reminder to the rest of the city of the elevated status of the African American community in LeDroit Park.

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<sup>131</sup> Snyder, *Beyond the Shadow of the Senators*, 11.

## Physical Change and Community Evolution

During the interwar years there were only sporadic efforts to build individual houses within the established boundaries of LeDroit Park because available building lots had been largely filled in the previous two decades. Mostly consisting of buildings that replaced existing structures, including at least two buildings that were damaged by fire, modern construction was congruent with the overall massing, materials and style of the neighborhood, such as the three rowhouses on the 1800 block of 5<sup>th</sup> Street [Figures 42].

However, there were a few large multi-family structures built during this time, changing the overall density of the area. The first large construction project was a direct consequence of the war effort, and the massive increase in Washington's civilian population after 1940 [Figure 40]. Housing was deeply segregated in Washington, and so with the influx of workers of all races came distinct facilities for African Americans. Lucy Diggs Slowe Hall [Figure 43], now a dormitory for Howard University, was originally constructed as segregated "government girl" housing for female war workers. Designed by DC architect and housing advocate Louis Justement, the building consists of two long double-loaded corridors connected by three double-loaded corridors enclosing two large courtyards, making a "B" in plan. The single-occupancy rooms with shared shower and kitchen facilities were easily adapted to dormitory space after the war. One notable amenity given the housing crisis and emphasis on economy during wartime construction is the abundance of communal space. Justement included not only outdoor courtyards, but several large indoor spaces on the first floor and basement intended for visitors and social



Figure 42: 1800 block of 5<sup>th</sup> Street with infill housing built in the late 1920s. Photo by author.



Figure 40: Lucy Diggs Slow Hall, Howard University c. 1949, image courtesy of Historic American Building Survey (HABS).

activities. Thoroughly ensconced within the residential neighborhood, the off-campus dormitory adds age diversity and density to the residential mix as it did during the war years.

Another addition to the neighborhood during this period was the Kelly Miller Dwellings, briefly mentioned in the previous section. Built in 1941 as a response to the dire need for housing for lower-income residents and new migrants coming for defense-related jobs, the spare brick buildings were designed by municipal architect Nathan C. Wyeth [Figure 44]. This apartment complex consists of 160 walk-up and low-rise buildings, with units ranging from studios to three-bedrooms. The design details hint at Art Moderne styling, and bear a striking resemblance the housing units built a short distance away in Greenbelt, Maryland, just five years earlier. This visual connection underscores not only the modernity of the project, but also its connection to federally-supported public housing across the country.

Named for Howard University sociology professor Kelly Miller, who was also known as the “Bard of the Potomac” for his cogent essays and assistance with the editorship of *The Crisis*, the apartments form a visual and symbolic bridge between the single-family houses in the historic district and the high-rise dormitories on the campus of Howard University. Unfortunately, that bridge does not make a social connection. Contemporary resident, Elizabeth Floyd, pondering the future of the community explains that:

I would love to see a little more community between our community and the adjacent communities. It seems there’s still kind of a divide there. I was thinking it [the Park at LeDroit] would eventually bridge the neighborhoods, but I am not sure it really has. I think it just exposes some of the challenges...<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Floyd, Elizabeth. Interview with author. June 26, 2015.



Figure 44: Kelly Miller Dwellings, LeDroit Park, built 1941.

Maybelle Taylor Bennett, the Director of the Howard University Community Association for nearly two decades has worked with all of the residents around the university to develop strong and mutually beneficial relationships that improve the quality of life for everyone. When reflecting on changes she would like to see, she echoed Ms. Floyd's thoughts:

...the homeowners are the overwhelming members of the LeDroit Park Civic Association, and when we talk about community engagement, there's a dichotomy between the residents of the LeDroit Park seniors building, Kelly Miller, and LeDroit Park family group, versus the homeowners group...[The apartment residents] don't know that they have a...they don't have a sense that they belong, or have a voice.<sup>133</sup>

It is unclear how much of this divide is due to underlying tensions around recent racial and economic changes in the neighborhood, and how much is a result of historic tensions based on class divides between the sections of the neighborhood. Whether considering the gated all white community of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the all black community that followed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the single-family section of LeDroit Park has had a long-standing reputation as an elite and relatively wealthy area with a tendency to be exclusive.

Poet and essayist Langston Hughes found this out first hand while living in LeDroit Park in 1924. Working for Carter G. Woodson as a researcher on his Black History projects, Hughes lived with relatives, including his mother, brother and some cousins, whose house was next to a "famous colored heart surgeon, Dr. Carson."<sup>134</sup> He writes about their discomfort with his "shabby appearance," upon arrival from an extended trip to Europe and Africa in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, in the section titled "Washington Society." Later in that section, he describes his reaction to finding

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<sup>133</sup> Bennett, Maybelle Taylor. Interview with author. July 20, 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 163

Washington society to be very segregated, exemplifying the Jim Crow South in all but trolley seating. He also expresses his exasperation at the class divide he witnessed in DC, based not only on wealth, but as he saw it, also on skin color, education, and job position. His writings provide a clear sense of his reaction to the class and race divisions in LeDroit Park:

Negro life in Washington is definitely a ghetto life and only in the Negro sections of the city may colored people attend theaters, eat a meal, or drink a Coca-Cola. Strangely undemocratic doings take place in the shadow of "the world's greatest democracy."

I asked some of the leading Washington Negroes about this, and they loftily said that they had their own society and their own culture -- so I looked around to see what that was like.

To me it did not seem good, for the "better class" Washington colored people, as they called themselves, drew rigid class and color lines within the race against Negroes who worked with their hands, or who were dark in complexion and had no degrees from colleges. These upper class colored people consisted largely of government workers, professors and teachers, doctors, lawyers, and resident politicians. They were on the whole as unbearable and snobbish a group of people as I have ever come in contact with anywhere. They lived in comfortable homes, had fine cars, played bridge, drank Scotch, gave exclusive "formal" parties, and dressed well, but seemed to be altogether lacking in real culture, kindness, or good common sense.<sup>135</sup>

While the race of the residents in LeDroit Park had changed, the beliefs and cultural norms remained upper class. The urban design of the neighborhood created a feeling of being sheltered, and this safety was cherished and protected by residents, at first by a fence and then through social means. Long-time resident Laurretta Jackson described her first exposure to the rules of propriety in an oral history from 2009. When a newlywed she moved into her husband's family house, and was lonely during the day while he was at work. So she moved her ironing board to the bay window that overlooked the street so that she could watch while she worked. She was kindly but

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<sup>135</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 164-5.

firmly told by a neighbor that people in LeDroit Park did not iron in the front room. Later in the interview, she states that the wealth that people in LeDroit Park had was not necessarily monetary, but was in how they carried themselves, their education, and the social works that they performed.<sup>136</sup>

### **Social and Cultural Changes in Washington**

Due partially to its proximity to Howard University, whose reputation as an institution of higher learning was growing immensely, and also partially due to the gracious houses with large gardens on tree-lined streets that were not readily available to African Americans in other parts of the city, artists, intellectuals, and businessmen were attracted to LeDroit Park. The built environment of LeDroit Park contributed a sense of traditional security and stability, embodying in many ways Booker T. Washington's conservative approach to progress through vocational education and incremental social advancement. Eventually a critical mass of accomplished men and women moved into the area, and forged a reputation for the neighborhood as the home of the African American elite in Washington. Within the physical space, the social environment in LeDroit Park cultivated freedom of choice through formal academic education, exemplifying W.E.B. DuBois' approach to advancement of the race. These talented men and women, as Judge and Mrs. Terrell stated, worked tirelessly to "advance the race" through the creation of charitable organizations and

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<sup>136</sup> Jackson, Laurreta. November 21, 2009. Oral History Interview, Part 1 of 3, DC Humanities Council.

educational institutions, major contributions to science and the humanities, and eventually through protests for social justice and civil rights.<sup>137</sup>

#### Flowering of Black Intelligentsia

Education was of primary importance to the African American elite of LeDroit Park. Trying to live up to the promise of W.E.B. DuBois' description of the Talented Tenth as public intellectuals whose "thought and work influence, define, and transform those issues in the public sphere," among other service to the community, residents worked as both teachers and principals of the M Street School, the only high school in the Colored School division in Washington to offer the college preparatory course.<sup>138</sup> Because of segregation and often-limited job opportunities for well-educated African Americans, even in DC where it was thought that there was greater occasion for advancement, the M Street School boasted many teachers with PhDs in their field of study. And this incredible faculty assisted "[c]lass after class of well-educated Negroes [to build] the economic foundation for a self-sustaining black middle class in DC."<sup>139</sup>

One particularly distinguished faculty member and principal was Anna Julia Cooper, scholar, writer, and activist who has been honored in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with a quote in the current U.S. Passport pages "The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class – it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity." She was also honored with the renaming of the small circle at 3<sup>rd</sup> and T Streets in the heart of LeDroit Park [Figures 39 and 45]. This traffic circle was

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<sup>137</sup> Stewart, *First Class*, 41.

<sup>138</sup> Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth*, 1.

<sup>139</sup> Stewart, *First Class*, 98.



Figure 45: Ornamental Circle at 3<sup>rd</sup> and T streets NW, restored in 1982 and again in 1998. Photo by author.



Figure 46: Anna Julia Cooper's House at 2<sup>nd</sup> and T streets NW, where she taught classes for the Frelinghuysen University. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

created by Barber & Company as a focal point for the rural landscape; streets gently curved as they approached the landscaped area, complete with fountain and picturesque plantings. Though in the 1960s it was paved over to make way for commuter traffic, as long-time resident Mechelle Baylor remembers, it was Mayor Marion Barry who rededicated it as Anna Julia Cooper Circle and restored its prominence in the landscape with grass and trees. Born into slavery, Dr. Cooper was only the fourth African American to receive her PhD, which she completed when she was 65 years old. She not only taught mathematics at the M Street School and later served as principal, she also helped start the Frelinghuysen University, a night school for adult learners, which she eventually hosted on her porch at 2<sup>nd</sup> and T Streets in LeDroit Park one half block from the circle that now bears her name [Figure 46].

Another prominent scholar and philosopher who made LeDroit Park his home was Alain Locke. While a member of the faculty of Howard University, Locke edited the collection of essays called “The New Negro”; the title is derived from one of his five contributions to the book, which describes his philosophy that African Americans are no longer willing or able to comply with the unreasonable expectations of Euro-Americans for subservience and inequality. Instead, African Americans were described as having a new self-pride and assurance that they needed to assert through political and personal action in order to enforce the new social order. This work was seminal in the writings of many authors of the Harlem Renaissance, who cultivated pride in their heritage and artistic talents.

Another aspect of the growing movement toward a self-conscious and proud African American subculture in the United States rested with the ascendance of

Howard University, whose institutional history is intimately entwined with that of LeDroit Park. It was the appointment of Mordecai Johnson, the first Black president to lead the university, in 1926 that solidified the connection with Locke's "New Negro." Known for his stubborn commitment to his personal vision as well as his almost messianic dedication to the university's improvement, President Johnson was and remains a controversial figure.<sup>140</sup> His administration lasted 34 years, from 1926-1960, and was characterized by intellectual freedom for faculty, bolstered by Johnson's fearless critique of modern American democracy, in particular racial inequities of the times.<sup>141</sup>

Prominent business people also made LeDroit Park their home, further bolstering the reputation of the area as the cradle of the elite. Among them, at least two generations of the Mitchell family, founders of Industrial Bank, a Black-owned bank on U Street established in 1906 as the Laborer's Building and Loan Association to help working-class African Americans buy homes in the city. As a follow-up to the Freeman's Savings Bank that failed during Reconstruction, Industrial Bank was a symbol of independence and self-sufficiency. "The bank's historical significance loomed large in the minds of black entrepreneurs who remembered the pride that having a black-owned bank had brought their community."<sup>142</sup> Because of their history of conservative lending and investments, which included personal management of all home loans, "Industrial is believed to be the only black bank in the nation that opened during the Great Depression."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Logan, *Howard University the First Hundred Years*, 250-251.

<sup>141</sup> Logan, *Howard University the First Hundred Years*, 251.

<sup>142</sup> Mitchell, Mitchell, and Page, *Industrial Bank*, 10.

<sup>143</sup> Mitchell, Mitchell, and Page, *Industrial Bank*, 11.

Though only a partial list of the prominent African American residents in the neighborhood during this time, it is important to reiterate that this is not a paean to the notable scholars and activists, but an exploration of how the physical environment of LeDroit Park, its urban design and location, attracted people who valued education and service for African Americans as a cherished privilege and duty, distilled by another neighborhood resident Mary Church Terrell in the motto for the National Association of Colored Women “Lifting as we Climb.”<sup>144</sup> Contemporary resident Eric Fidler who also volunteers to give historic walking tours of the neighborhood describes the significance of the neighborhood:

...the more I read about the history and the importance in Black History of U Street, Washington DC, LeDroit Park, Howard University, Dunbar High School, and several other institutions that are around here, I realized that we were actually living in a very sort of different place. Its importance in Black History was shaped very heavily by segregation and I start off my tour, noting that, saying if you were black and you wanted to go get a college degree, or teach at a college, right here was one of the few places in America you could actually do that. If you were black and wanted to perform at a theater, the Howard Theater was one of the few places you could do that. If you came to Washington and were black and wanted to stay in a hotel, there were very few hotels that would let you stay, but there was one on U Street. If you wanted to borrow money from a bank, the Industrial Bank would lend you money. If you want to send you child to the best public school, the best public high school in the United States that would accept black students, it was right around here.<sup>145</sup>

While the urban environment did not create these leaders of the black community, it did contribute to the close-knit social fabric where they could interact on a daily basis, sharing ideas and passions, philosophies and approaches for community improvement. Senator Edward Brooke, who was raised in LeDroit Park in the 1920s and 1930s, reflects in an oral history from 2009 that “The community I grew up in, it

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<sup>144</sup> Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women” pamphlet, 15.

<sup>145</sup> Fidler, Eric. Interview with author, June 16, 2015.

was not exceptional for a black person to be a professional... We did not vote, because we had nothing to vote for, so I had no aspirations for politics... [but] We were protected by our parents and we stayed in our cocoon... We thought we had what we needed in our cocoon.”<sup>146</sup> Thus the urban design allowed a measure of intellectual freedom through seclusion from the larger city.

Art and Literature also Blossom in the “Garden of the City”

LeDroit Park is not only located immediately south of Howard University, a prominent center of higher education, but is also at the eastern end of the U Street Corridor, a seven-block long strip chock-a-block with entertainment venues from small supper clubs to the venerable Howard Theater, anchor of the famous Chitlin’ Circuit. Running perpendicular to U Street is 7<sup>th</sup> Street, known for more raucous clubs with a down-home flair, reflecting the rural entertainment culture of many of the new migrants to the city. These two streets, though different in tone and clientele, were the undisputed center of Washington’s Black culture between the wars.

B. Doyle Mitchell and Patricia Mitchell, descendants of the founders of Industrial Bank note the prominent position of U Street, also headquarters for the bank:

As America celebrated the excesses of the Roaring Twenties, black Washingtonians came to U Street to splurge. It was their ‘Black Broadway’ said entertainer Pearl Bailey. It was their cultural center, their place in the world. It was where their money was as good as anybody else’s. Where they did not have to enter through the side or the back or up the rickety stairs. It was where they could dress in their Sunday finery, exuding pride and sophistication.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Brooke, Edward. 2009. Oral history for the National Visionary Leadership Project, archived at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center.

<sup>147</sup> Mitchell, Mitchell, and Page, *Industrial Bank*, 10.

Located at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> and T Street, the Howard Theater was opened in 1910 as the “largest colored theater in the world.” It was home to big name performers such as Duke Ellington and Pearl Bailey, as well as talent nights that launched the careers of musicians like Ella Fitzgerald and Billy Eckstein;<sup>148</sup> the theater served as a hot spot for high level entertainers well into the 1970s. Its proximity to LeDroit Park meant that during the time of segregated hotels, many households hosted performers and were treated to after-hours jam sessions.<sup>149</sup>

Novelist Jean Toomer, a native of Washington, wrote a unique mélange of poetry and prose inspired by this entertainment district. His most famous work was *Cane*, published in 1923. Partially set in Washington, within that work is his jazz-poem “Seventh Street” that captures most viscerally his experiences in that vibrant area: “Seventh Street is a bastard of Prohibition and the War. A crude-boned, soft-skinned wedge of nigger life breathing its loafer air, jazz songs and love, thrusting unconscious rhythms, black reddish blood into the white and whitewashed wood of Washington.”<sup>150</sup> Toomer was connected to other Harlem Renaissance writers and artists through his melding of art forms like jazz and poetry, but he rejected the idea of the “New Negro” and a proud African American subculture and replaced it with his own views on race and identity shaped by his multi-ethnic heritage:

I wrote a poem called ‘The First American,’ the idea of which was that here in America we are in the process of forming a new race, that I was one of the first conscious members of this race...I had seen the divisions, the separatisms and antagonisms...[yet] a new type of man was arising in this country—not European, not African, not Asiatic—but American. And in this American I saw the divisions mended, the differences reconciled—saw that (1) we would

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<sup>148</sup> African American Heritage Trail, DC <http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/portal/howard-theatre-african-american-heritage-trail#.VhG0RXtL5eE>.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas, “Reflections on LeDroit Park,” 52.

<sup>150</sup> Toomer, “Seventh Street” in *Cane*, 53.

in truth be a united people existing in the United States, saw that (2) we would in truth be once again members of a united human race.<sup>151</sup>

Author Langston Hughes, celebrated for his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, also spent a great deal of his time on 7<sup>th</sup> Street while he was living in Washington from 1924-1926 and was inspired by the rhythms of the music and culture. He wrote in his autobiography about his poems like “Weary Blues” written during that time:

I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street -- gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes. But, gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. Their songs -- those of Seventh Street -- had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going.

Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day -- night, day -- night, day -- forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power.

*I'm goin' down to de railroad, baby, Lay ma head on de track. I'm goin' down to de railroad, babe, Lay ma head on de track -- But if I see de train a-comin', I'm gonna jerk it back.*

I liked the barrel houses of Seventh Street, the shouting churches, and the songs. They were warm and kind and didn't care whether you had an overcoat or not.<sup>152</sup>

African American artistic expression was not only inspired by the joyous atmosphere on the Black Broadway, but also in the quiet and secluded streets of LeDroit Park. Painter Hilda Wilkinson Brown moved to the neighborhood in 1934 with her new husband so that he could establish his medical office, and she could be closer to Miner Teachers College at Howard University where she was studying. Her body of work consists of mostly abstracted gouache compositions of scenes from her

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<sup>151</sup> Jones, “Jean Toomer’s Life and Career.”

<sup>152</sup> Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 167.



Figure 47: A painting showing the southern entrance to the LeDroit Park Neighborhood titled “Third and Rhode Island” by Hilda Wilkinson Brown, image courtesy of Smithsonian Museum of American Art.

environment [Figure 47], including Griffith Stadium, the neighborhood rooftops, and even a portrait of Langston Hughes. The forms are made of large blocks of muted color, with a watercolor consistency, revealing a sophisticated and subtle handling of light and shadow. Artist Lilian Burwell Thomas reflects on her great aunt's artistic vision: "We see some record of her reaction to her surroundings because she painted the familiar and what she loved. Her work therefore reflects the people and places of a particular Washington neighborhood."<sup>153</sup> The paintings are so evocative of the neighborhood, that they have been reproduced for modern brochures and local PBS neighborhood interludes. Thus LeDroit Park not only attracted scholars and leaders to the neighborhood, but also artists reacting to and against the upper-middle class values of the area.

### **Conclusion**

The LeDroit Park neighborhood in the interwar years was both an oasis from the increasingly strict legal and social segregation in Washington, as well as an increasingly formal and restrictive enclave of its own. Providing a sense of security from a hostile city and a feeling of security within the boundaries of the neighborhood, a vibrant community of educators, intellectuals, artists, and scientists flourished. Close to venues with city-wide draw like the clubs on U Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Griffith Stadium, as well as the venerable M Street School and Howard University, the neighborhood was at the crux of many cultures. Residents moved in to the single-family houses for their gracious details and generous yards, amenities often denied African Americans in other neighborhoods through legal and customary

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas, "Reflections on LeDroit Park," 61.

restrictions. Yet the only major changes in the built environment at this time were at the outskirts of the planned streets, with the addition of a dormitory for defense workers, or “government girls” and a public housing project for low-income families. Community leaders and activists shared the streets, and formed a critical mass that would eventually lead to major upheaval across the city and the nation. The emotional landscape of LeDroit Park as a venerable address was cemented in this time, and would prove critical not only for establishing the historic district three decades later, but for the renaissance of the neighborhood at the turn of the twenty-first century.

## Chapter 5: Waves of Change 1945-1968

### Introduction

This chapter explores the twenty-three years between the return of World War II veterans and the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. These two major events shaped generations of Americans and drastically altered the physical and social structure of our cities and surrounding metropolitan areas. Though LeDroit Park evolved physically during this time, the area was not drastically altered by the successive waves of cultural change. However, lending policies that were launched during the Depression continued to bear down on the black community. Through the process of denying federally-secured mortgages, a practice known as redlining, many urban neighborhoods like LeDroit Park were not able to obtain financing for home purchasing and maintenance, and thus began a slow process of physical deterioration. The events explored in this chapter shaped the community and established social, economic, and political climates that eventually lead to demographic changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is important to explore these phenomena because historic districting is often seen as the sole cause of gentrification and displacement, but this investigation shows that while the history may contribute to some of the market demand for properties in LeDroit Park, rapid demographic change was driven by a multiplicity of social, cultural and economic factors particular to Washington, DC.

Despite the decline in financial investment, LeDroit Park remained a community nexus, with important relationships to various sectors of the city [Figure

48]. Connections with Howard University endured through the many faculty members and students who continued to live in the neighborhood. Personal networks with entertainment venues on U Street persisted as performers continued to be welcomed into private homes for food and lodging in a racially segregated city. However when Griffith Stadium was demolished in the mid-1960s to make way for the new Howard University Hospital, an area that was once a site of relaxed segregation and some interracial interaction was transformed into a beacon for the black community with its programs for broad health services.

Most significantly during these decades the critical mass of active African American leaders in LeDroit Park, who in past generations worked to educate and assist new migrants to the city, became more active and visible in challenging the legal framework of segregation. Not confining their vision to Washington, DC, many black leaders in LeDroit Park were confronting racism on the national stage, and using the court system to push forward social change. The tight-knit community, nurtured by the relative isolation of the neighborhood, exchanged ideas, organized protests, and ultimately contributed to the watershed Civil Rights laws that would change the country. By the end of the 1960s, community members also bore witness to the riots that tore apart Washington physically and socially, events that would resonate for generations.

LeDroit Park, circa 1945–1968



Figure 48: Diagram of LeDroit Park 1945-1968, highlighting the connections to the surrounding neighborhood including the new hospital and one of the flashpoints for the 1968 riots.

### **Physical Evolution of the Neighborhood, City, and Region**

By the end of World War II, nearly 12 million American citizens had participated in military roles at home and abroad.<sup>154</sup> With casualties of over one-half million, there were nearly 11.5 million veterans returning to civilian life across the country, putting pressure on already overcrowded towns and cities for housing.<sup>155</sup> The building industry had drastically slowed production during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and by the end of that decade the U.S. economy was focused on wartime industries, with little effort to expand housing options. Though some temporary housing was built in Washington for wartime workers, in general, demand well exceeded supply.

Pent up demand was met in part with several government programs to assist building and settlement of newly developed suburbs outside of cities, including low-cost mortgage programs through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (known informally as the GI Bill) and the development of the interstate highway system that enabled new homeowners in the suburbs to access jobs in the city center. But these policies did not assist city dwellers wishing to stay in the city because guaranteed mortgages were only for new construction, mostly happening outside of the city. African Americans were excluded from these benefits both through a lack of protections against customary discrimination and explicitly through continued redlining policies by banks that prevented financing loans in places like LeDroit Park due to the age of the structures and the racial character of the neighborhood.

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<sup>154</sup> Va.gov/vetdata retrieved on August 18, 2015.

<sup>155</sup> Statistics on service members retrieved from <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-numbers/us-military.html> on August 18, 2015.

These push-pull factors contributed to the phenomenon known as “white flight” where city populations became increasingly African American as Euro-Americans moved to newly developed areas outside of urban centers. The Washington, DC, area exemplified these trends: in 1940 at the beginning of the war there were over 663,000 residents in the city, 28% of whom were black. By 1950, the city’s population peaked at 802,000 with 35% black residents, but by 1960 the population had dropped to 763,000, with the majority (54%) of residents identified as black. [Figure 49] At the same time, the Washington region grew from 800,000 in 1940, with 82% living in the District, to 1.9 million in 1960 with just 40% living in the city. The population of Census Tract 34, which includes all of LeDroit Park and some of the surrounding Bloomingdale neighborhood and Howard University, was over 95% black throughout this time period.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the need for wartime housing in LeDroit Park was met in part through the construction of dormitories for “government girls” and low-cost public housing. It was also met informally through a combination of taking in boarders, creating accessory apartments in large houses, and “doubling up” or having more than one family unit in a house. Though the census record does not document which of these processes dominated, data from investigating City Directories, assessing the overall population spike in Tract 34, and gathering oral histories from residents, makes it clear that LeDroit Park became a much more densely populated neighborhood in these years, peaking in 1950 with 8,500 residents. In contrast, in both 1940 and 1960 the total population for the census tract was approximately 6,800.

## District of Columbia population, by race, 1940–1960

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

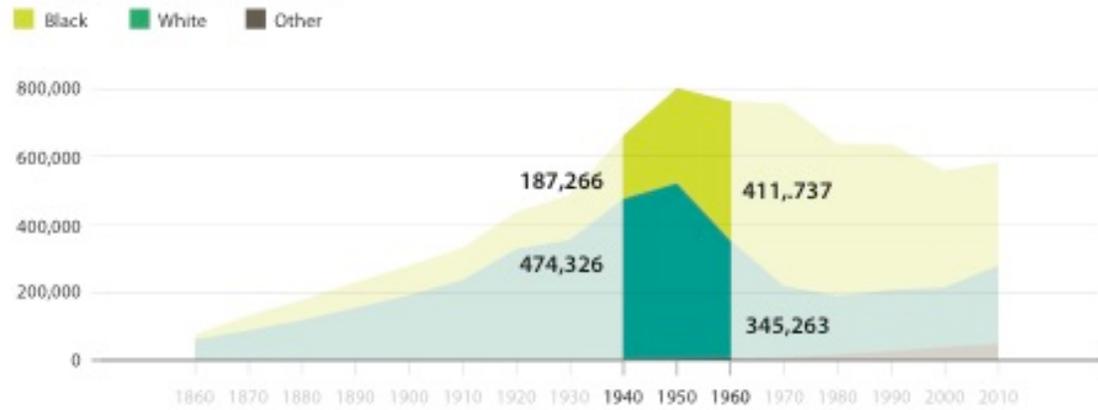


Figure 49: Chart of DC population by race, 1940-1960.

Overall there was little construction or demolition activity in LeDroit Park until the middle of the 1960s; in 1965 additional low-income housing, LeDroit Apartments, was built. Located at 2125 4<sup>th</sup> Street [Figure 48] on the north side of the neighborhood, across V Street from the Howard University campus, the complex was composed of a 6-story mid-rise structure and a series of 3-story walk-up apartments with a total of 124 units for disabled and elderly residents. This complex joined the Kelly Miller apartments in providing affordable housing options in the area, but also created a divide between two elite enclaves in the city, the Howard University campus and the single-family attached and detached houses in the south part of the LeDroit Park neighborhood.

This sense that the neighborhood had been split in half has shaped dialogue about the community for decades. For example, in the 1985 byline to an oral history about living in LeDroit Park in the 1950s, the “District Weekly” section of *The Washington Post* describes the social dynamic: “Though a small neighborhood, it was divided into two worlds that seldom met. North of Elm Street, the community's dividing line, was public housing. South of Elm were distinctive turn-of-the-century Victorian houses that once were the best addresses for blacks in the city.”<sup>156</sup> According to Loretta Brown, who shared her childhood experiences in that *Washington Post* essay, there was limited interaction between the Kelly Miller apartments where she lived and the university students. “Many Howard University students used our play area as a shortcut to and from classes. I got to know some of

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<sup>156</sup> Brown, Loretta. “Growing up in LeDroit Park in the 1950’s.” *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1985.

them who since have made names for themselves.”<sup>157</sup> Though there were occasional friendly interactions, the outcome of grouping all of the public housing in one area was a neighborhood stratified by income.

Also in 1965 Griffith Stadium was demolished. Despite its storied history as the home of the Washington Nationals and the Homestead Grays baseball teams, the aging stadium was replaced with a modern structure on East Capitol Street NE in 1961, removing one of the eastern nodes from the magnetic pull of U Street NW. The vacant stadium was eventually sold to Howard University, who demolished the structure in order to construct a modern 400-bed hospital complex [Figure 50] that replaced the aging Freedmen’s Hospital building on campus, constructed in 1909. Griffith Stadium had been a social and cultural hub for the entire city, and was described as a place of relative freedom from racial restrictions. The loss of that symbolic gathering spot was profound for both the neighborhood and city, though the state-of-the-art teaching hospital was seen as a positive move forward in health care for the local community.

The final physical change in LeDroit Park came in 1967 when the former McClelland Mansion, one of the original large-scale cottage-style single family houses which had been turned into the venerable Columbia Elks Lodge Hall in 1925, was sold to the Safeway Corporation for the construction of a new supermarket to serve all of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Elks were able to keep a portion of

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<sup>157</sup> Brown, Loretta. “Growing up in LeDroit Park in the 1950’s.” *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1985.



Figure 50: Howard University Hospital. Photo by author.



Figure 51: Elks Lodge built in 1967, located at 1844 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Photo by author.

the site and build a modern, purpose-built structure on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street<sup>158</sup> [Figure 51], and continued to function as an integral institution in the community, a center of social and service activities, until tensions around its use began to rise in the early 2000s.

The new Safeway store built on the site of the mansion was one of the businesses heavily damaged during the April 1968 riots following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. In *Washington Post* reporter Ben Gilbert's affecting account published only four months after the events, he writes that Safeway was a business that was intentionally targeted because of its perceived discriminatory business model. Only 40 of the 141 Safeway stores in the Washington region were in black neighborhoods, and many of those stores were smaller and older.<sup>159</sup> Over the four-day protest, thirteen Safeway stores were damaged enough to delay opening, seven sustained fire damage, and two were completely destroyed by fire. By contrast, a local grocery competitor, Giant Foods, had only minimal damage to four of its stores in the city, and there were no fires.<sup>160</sup> Lifelong LeDroit Park resident Mechelle Baylor, who was sixteen in 1968, reflected on what impact the riots had on the neighborhood:

It affected it a lot. Because we had a Safeway around the corner from us, where UPO is. And they looted it. They were looted terrible... you didn't worry about robberies back then... We used to keep our front door open. We had no fear, because we had no fan, no air conditioning, we slept on the porch.<sup>161</sup>

Though repaired and restocked, the Safeway store on the southern edge of LeDroit Park was one of many buildings that remained a symbol of ongoing racial disparity

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<sup>158</sup> "Lauretta Jackson, "Oral History of LeDroit Park, Part 3 of 3" 5:53 minutes.

<sup>159</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 187.

<sup>160</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 186.

<sup>161</sup> Mechelle Baylor, interview with author, June 17, 2015.

and unrest in Washington, DC. As Ms. Baylor's comments indicate, the riots also signaled an end to the feeling of security in the LeDroit Park neighborhood.

### **Investment in the Neighborhood**

Despite the institutional changes, the overall character of the LeDroit Park neighborhood remained residential. With structures ranging from large Victorian single-family houses dating back to the beginning of the neighborhood to smaller rowhouses built as infill in the 1910s, most of the housing stock had served many generations and though maintained with care, began to show its age. As mentioned in the previous chapter, reinvestment in these structures was severely hindered by federal mortgage policies begun in 1934 with the creation of the Federal Housing Administration and its system of determining risk codified in Residential Security maps. Through explicit rules given to underwriters creating these maps, such as "older properties in a neighborhood have a tendency to accelerate the transition to lower class occupancy," urban neighborhoods like LeDroit Park were determined to be poor investments.<sup>162</sup> As historian Kenneth Jackson states "For perhaps the first time, the federal government embraced the discriminatory attitudes of the marketplace. Previously, prejudices were personalized and individualized; FHA exhorted segregation and enshrined it as public policy."<sup>163</sup>

This latest blow to the black community was met with the self-reliance cultivated in enclaves like LeDroit Park that encouraged African Americans, as early as the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to patronize black-owned businesses. During

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<sup>162</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 207.

<sup>163</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 213.

the Depression, the banking crisis in 1933 led President Roosevelt to declare a 4-day bank holiday to stop the run on deposits, and required banks to petition to reopen based on assets. In response, Jesse Homer Mitchell, Howard University educated lawyer, realtor and LeDroit Park resident, together with a few other black entrepreneurs organized the community and established a new bank in the building once occupied by Industrial Savings on U Street that failed in 1932. Requiring an act of Congress, these men received approval for a grass-roots plan to sell \$50,000 in stock to finance the bank in \$10 increments, bought by black churches, social clubs, businesses and private individuals. They accomplished this impressive feat on August 13, 1934, when Industrial Bank received a certificate of incorporation from U.S. Treasury Department. “Industrial is believed to be the only black bank in the nation that opened during the Great Depression.”<sup>164</sup>

This resourcefulness enabled the survival of neighborhoods like LeDroit Park. Bank President Jesse Mitchell was directly involved in mortgage loans to the black community. Sitting at a desk near the front entrance, he greeted applicants and would personally assess properties with his friend, realtor Taylor R. Holmes.<sup>165</sup> Thus established black neighborhoods were able to challenge some of the federally-sponsored discrimination and invest in their own community, but funding was minimal compared with federally-secured investments channeled into newly developing, mostly white suburbs.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Mitchell, Mitchell, and Page, *Industrial Bank*, 11-12.

<sup>165</sup> Mitchell, Mitchell, and Page, *Industrial Bank*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 213.

Despite passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited this kind of discrimination in lending, black-owned banks remained the only answer for many people who wanted to invest in neighborhoods like LeDroit Park. Current resident Dr. James Hill, describes his challenges in getting a loan for his house:

It was almost impossible for me to get financing for my house. I had been banking with, the bank was called the Madison Bank, ever since I had been here, I forget when I came here, the early 60s to the 1980s, just banked with them, everything. And when I applied to them for a loan to buy my house, they turned me down. And the way they turned me down, they told me that the interior of the house had to be painted, the exterior had to be painted, and they put all these conditions. I didn't own the house, so how could I fix up someone else's property? So that's how they turned me down. And I went to maybe 3 banks, 4 banks, and each one turned me down.

And I was very lucky, there was a black bank here, it was owned by a black man from where I come from in South Carolina, and I went down there and I saw him walking down the street and he asked me why was I looking so sad. And I told him I had put this money down and I was going to lose my money... And he said "I'll tell you what you do. Monday morning, I am going to see that you get your loan for your house." I said "what time should I come?" He said, "no, you don't come to my place, I am going to send someone to you." And that is how I got that house. And if it had not been for that black bank, that black man that I had happened to have known, I would not have had this house, because... I know at least 3 banks turned me down. And I had a savings account in the Madison Bank. And they still wouldn't do it.<sup>167</sup>

And so it was the self-reliance of the African American community that ensured lending to new generations of residents, contributing to the preservation of the houses in LeDroit Park into the present.

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<sup>167</sup> Dr. James K. Hill, interview with author, July 1, 2015.

### *Legal Challenges and Political Implications*

Concurrent with change in urban demographics nationally was a continuation of the struggle for equal citizenship for African Americans. Though most historical accounts highlight the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the turning point of race relations in the United States, several other significant milestones were achieved in the 1940s and 1950s that led to that sweeping legislation, and Washington, DC, was at the center of much of the activism. Often led by people with connections to Howard University and LeDroit Park, major strides were made toward equality using the court system.

The first major challenge to racial segregation came in 1948 when the Supreme Court heard *Hurd v Hodge* and *Urciolo v Hodge*, companion cases to the more well known *Shelley v Kramer* case that overturned racial and religiously restrictive covenants on deeds. Both the Hurd and Urciolo cases were based on sale of houses in the 100 block of Bryant Street NW, just outside of the current historic district for LeDroit Park, a block occupied by both European and African American families. The houses were sold to African Americans, but were under restrictive covenants to be sold to European Americans only. Part of the innovative legal argument to challenge covenants was based on the United Nations charter where the United States government pledged in 1945 “Universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinctions as to race, sex, language or religion.”<sup>168</sup> The cases were heard in District Court, and the decision upheld the legality of covenants, but when the case was appealed to the Supreme

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<sup>168</sup> Article 55c, Chapter IX, *United Nations Charter*, as cited in *Hurd v. Hodge* United States Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit. 162 F.2d 233 (D.C. Cir. 1947).

Court, it was decided in favor of the plaintiffs, overturning the legality of racial covenants. The crux of the legal argument, presented by NAACP lawyers Charles Hamilton Houston, the Dean of the Howard University Law School and Thurgood Marshall, one of his protégés and a graduate of Howard Law, was that denying African Americans the ability to purchase houses in any neighborhood was in violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the equal protection clause. Thus one of the major decisions that changed the demographics of Washington, DC and cities across the nation had ties to the activist community in LeDroit Park.

In 1954 the Supreme Court decided on *Bolling v Sharpe* as part of the combined cases for *Brown v. Board of Education*. Charles Hamilton Houston, lead counsel on the Hurd case for equal housing rights, prepared the arguments challenging the parity of separate educational facilities provided for black and white students in Washington's segregated school system. After Houston's sudden illness, arguments were led by Howard University Law professor (and later Howard University President) James Nabrit Jr. who expanded the scope to challenge the concept of segregated services under both the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which provides for due process and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, providing equal protection under the law.<sup>169</sup> Though the lower court decision upheld the principle of separate but equal facilities established in 1896, with the *Plessy v Ferguson* ruling, the Supreme Court decision overturned this ruling which ultimately led to national school desegregation "with all deliberate speed" as determined by each state.

Though the process of school desegregation was often delayed in states across the country, the District of Columbia moved toward immediate desegregation because

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<sup>169</sup> <http://brownvboard.org/content/brown-case-bolling-v-sharpe> summary of the court case.

of its position in national politics. President Eisenhower had run in 1952 on a platform including a pledge to end racial segregation in the nation's capital, and thus moved quickly to "voice the hope that the District would be a 'model' to the rest of the nation in putting the Supreme Court decision into effect."<sup>170</sup> The school board met one week after the *Bolling* decision to propose a plan for desegregation, which was met with mixed reactions even four years later, according to Edwin Knoll, reporter for both the *Washington Post* and *Times Herald*. Knoll quotes the School Superintendent Carl F. Hansen's glowing assessment in 1958 "They will feel a glow of pride that in the Nation's Capital the ideal of individual dignity and worth, no longer simply an idle phrase in a textbook on American democracy is now to a much larger extent a living reality in the lives of its citizens."<sup>171</sup> Knoll contrasted this view with a Richmond newspaper's conclusion that "Washington is a 'city of seething unrest: a chaotic area of flux and movement, uneasy and unstable...it is a city where many white families who remain, imprisoned, hesitate to talk for fear of violent reprisal.'"<sup>172</sup> Thus school desegregation in Washington was not without its challenges or pitfalls, but the process ultimately led to a unified school system for the entire city.

In higher education in the District, students were also concerned with desegregation. Beginning in the late 1940s, Howard University students began a series of sit-ins to protest racial segregation in city restaurants. Though they made some headway in terms of integration at individual establishments, true success came in 1950 when LeDroit Park resident Mary Church Terrell, who was already a

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<sup>170</sup> Knoll, "The Truth About Desegregation in the Washington DC Public Schools," 93.

<sup>171</sup> Knoll, 93.

<sup>172</sup> Knoll, 93.

nationally-known civil rights leader, led several visible challenges to the customary segregation in public spaces in Washington. She was one of the plaintiffs on the case *District of Columbia v. John Thompson Co*, which used the non-discrimination laws of 1872 and 1873, as the basis for the case against the local lunch counter. These laws, which provided for equal treatment in public accommodations like restaurants and transportation, were invalidated in 1883 for the states, but were never repealed in the US territories including the District of Columbia. When the District Court did not rule in favor of the plaintiffs, it was appealed to the Supreme Court, and in 1953 the nation's highest court ruled in support of desegregating restaurants and other public services. And thus, LeDroit Park residents continued to use the neighborhood and its connections with Howard University to launch protests against discrimination, having a deep impact on the city of Washington, DC, and ultimately the country.

### **Social Change in “Elite” LeDroit Park**

The neighborhood of LeDroit Park was a self-contained world in the decades after the war in much the same way that was envisioned by its developers. Its relative isolation and racial homogeneity allowed a feeling of security and distance from challenges of urban life; the black community also found a retreat from the everyday indignities of segregation. For many of the adults in the community, this atmosphere was the perfect medium to cultivate and grow seeds of social change, and as discussed many legal and political challenges had their origins in the neighborhood.

But children in LeDroit Park were intentionally sheltered from the harsher realities of the city within this protected environment. Margaret Prather Shorter, who grew up on the 100 block of U Street, wrote an oral history for the *Washington Post* in 1986, and began her article with this definitive statement: “Growing up in LeDroit Park in the '30s and '40s was a celebration -- a celebration of childhood. When my great-aunt Lizzie needed needles threaded for her never-ending mending projects, I'd sit at the foot of her rocking chair, thread a supply of needles and listen to her tell the story of the final days of slavery, when she was a child.”<sup>173</sup> Her piece flows through nostalgia-tinged recollections of creative summertime activities, treats at the corner store, and shows at the Howard Theater. Towards the end of the narrative Ms. Shorter poignantly considers how that feeling of security may have discouraged her questioning the rules of segregation in the way that subsequent generations did:

But as I reflect, I wonder -- It was not until I was grown and my own progeny gave me reason to question that tight little world. My three offspring had the questions that did not occur to me. I grew up in a segregated city accepting the status quo. But my little ones would ask, 'Why can't we sit on the stools in the five- and 10-cent store and eat a hot dog?' 'Why can't we go to that movie theater downtown?' 'Why won't that cab stop for us?'

Such questions had an awesome impact. How do you answer without conveying a negative self-image? As my children came along, there were dramatic changes taking place for blacks in Washington as elsewhere. My Gary, Dori and Wendy grew up in a vastly different Washington. Change had come; was way overdue. Yes, even for my elite LeDroit Park.<sup>174</sup>

The change that came to Ms. Shorter's “elite” LeDroit Park was not gradual and evolutionary. Instead, the protective bubble of LeDroit Park was burst with the burning and looting that followed Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in April of

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<sup>173</sup> Shorter, “Comic Swaps and Sock Hops: Lots to like in Pre-TV Life.” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1986.

<sup>174</sup> Shorter, “Comic Swaps and Sock Hops: Lots to like in Pre-TV Life.” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 1986.

1968. As reporter Ben Gilbert writes in his account of the unrest, Washington was legally integrated in 1968, but social segregation predominated:

Such enterprises as restaurants, barber shops, theaters, swimming pools, hotels, and bowling alleys were forbidden to discriminate. An open housing ordinance applied, but, in practice, substantial housing segregation remained. Affluent whites lived in largely segregated areas, while an increasing number of affluent Negroes moved into luxurious homes in previously all-white areas. There were also 'gray' blocks, where both blacks and whites had lived side by side for years. Poorer Negroes were largely confined to virtually all-black areas, where high rents, congestion, and substandard conditions prevailed.<sup>175</sup>

This de facto segregation acted as a catalyst to fuel the anger and violence in Washington, and in 110 cities across the country. In the District, as in the Red Summer of 1919, the U Street Corridor between 14th and 7th streets at the edge of LeDroit Park was a main focus of the turbulence [Figure 48].

Another point of contention unique to Washington was the lack of self-government, which was felt particularly strongly in a city that had become majority black in 1957.<sup>176</sup> Though Congress revoked the District's self-government in light of accusations of graft under Boss Shepherd in the 1870s, the black community resented the territorial status of the District keenly as another expression of the lack of equal rights and citizenship for African Americans. Two years before the riots, this had become a hot button issue when Stokely Carmichael, a student at Howard University, "had excited Washingtonians' interest when he declared that his group [Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee] would fight for local self-government in the capital 'in the ways the boys in Vietnam are fighting for elections over there.'"<sup>177</sup> Although President Johnson tried to preemptively address these concerns when he appointed

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<sup>175</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 4.

<sup>176</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 59.

LeDroit Park resident Walter E. Washington as the Mayor and approved a majority black city council, the supposedly riot-proof Washington, DC, erupted in violence with the news of Dr. King's death.

Over a half century later, LeDroit Park resident Mechelle Baylor recalls the events of the first day of the riots clearly:

It was something, the riots. Because my mom and I was at the Lincoln Theater on U Street. All of a sudden, people came in and said "King is dead! The movie is closed, King is dead!" and then I was 16, and my mom grabbed my hand, no cell phone, no pagers, no beepers. So my dad is on the porch looking for us because we was driving through smoke. And you know where U Street is to where we live. It was just all smoked up from the tear gas. And people was looting and busting the windows. It was just lighting things on fire to it and throwing into peoples cars, but its really sad, because they torched their own stuff. They still didn't get anything accomplished because it wasn't gonna bring Dr. King back. And he wouldn't have wanted that.

So, this is like they had the riot in Baltimore [protesting the death in police custody of Freddy Gray] and the young man's mother said "Please, go home." It's not going to bring her child back. The police was going to handle that. Justice would have been better. But you can't, it's like they say you can't fight fire with fire, so my mom and I... So we got in the car, and I kept saying "mom, what's going on, what's going on?" and she said "Dr. King is dead. This is what's happening."<sup>178</sup>

After a tense time returning the seven blocks to her home on T Street, Mechelle Baylor and her family watched the destruction in the relative safety of their living room. Reflecting on the aftermath of those days of unrest, Ms. Baylor says:

And we came home, and my father said, "Get in here! Get in here!" It's all on TV. And we had a TV floor model here, and we looked at it, and when they was showing H Street and U Street, Benning Road, all parts of Southeast. They was just tearing the city up. It was like "Where are they going to go tomorrow? Where are they going to buy groceries? They done tore the stores up." The Safeway, we couldn't even get in there, because of the tear gas. They had to keep that shut down. They just stole meats and toilet paper, and

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<sup>178</sup> Baylor, Mechelle. Interview with author, June 17, 2015.

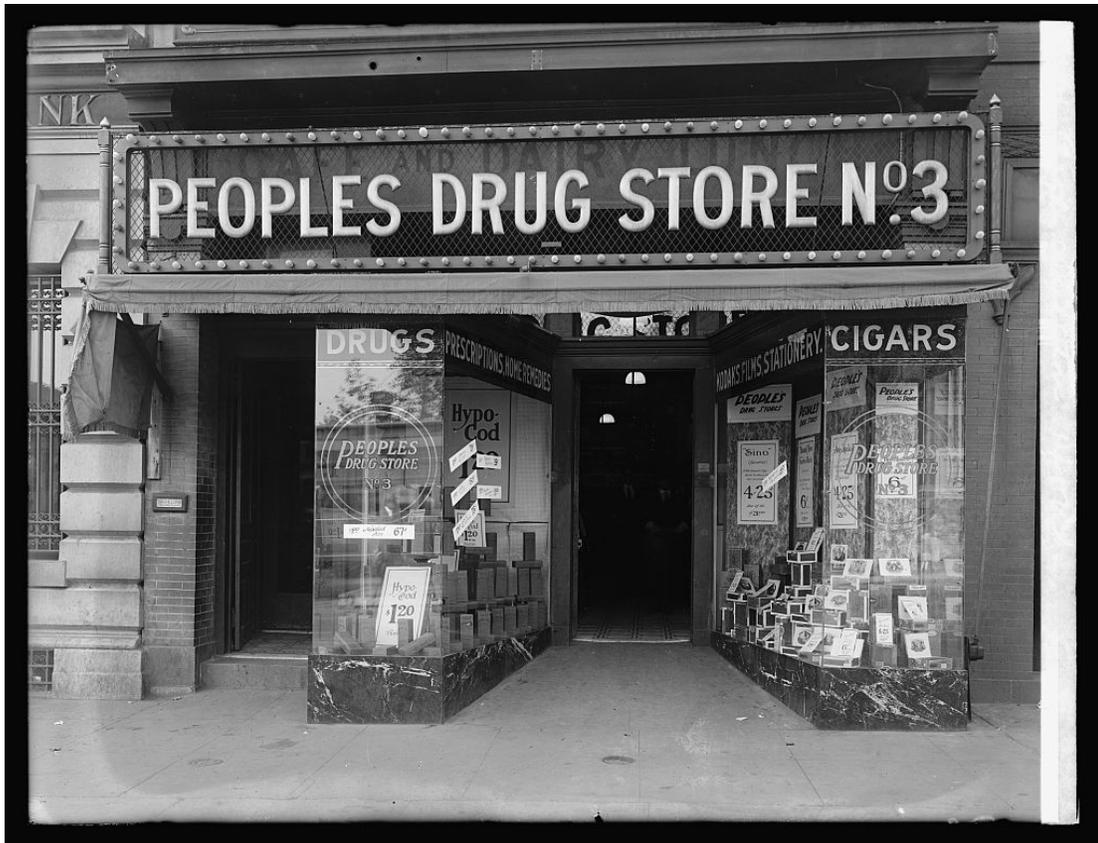


Figure 52: People's Drug Store at 14<sup>th</sup> and U Streets, NW c. 1930, the center of the riots following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Image courtesy of Library of Congress.

you know... I don't know. I just think we made it harder for ourself. In situations like that.<sup>179</sup>

Protestors reacted at first by destroying symbols of segregation such as the People's Drug Store that was at the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and U [Figure 52], but the situation devolved into four days of turmoil that included looting, arson, and general unrest. Working from his home in LeDroit Park almost continuously for three days and nights, Mayor Washington was able to keep the situation from escalating. Most importantly, though 40,000 people were arrested, Mayor Washington persuaded the National Guardsmen to refrain from firing on citizens. When it was over incredible damage had been done to the city, both physically and spiritually. In an oral history from 2003, Mayor Washington reflects on his leadership during the riots "no one ever taught me how to run a riot...but I did it."<sup>180</sup> The scope of the material damage [Figure 53] was apparent:

They could look up 7<sup>th</sup> Street and see, in place of stores that had stood two days earlier, block after block of rubble, bricks, and debris spilling over onto the sidewalk and into the street. At the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Florida Avenue, N.W., a tired soldier stood with his rifle in front of a block of blackened, brick-front walls, with cavities where doors and windows had been. There were no rooms behind.<sup>181</sup>

But the emotional damage was more difficult to assess. In reflecting on how to move forward, Mayor Washington saw a greater challenge than rebuilding structures:

'There is a voice coming from this city's ghetto neighborhoods,' ... 'That voice says 'We would like to be relevant to what happens in our communities. We would like to have entrepreneurship. We would like to be part of the American dream.'<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Baylor, Mechelle. Interview with author, June 17, 2015.

<sup>180</sup> Washington, Walter. 2003. Interview for the National Visionary Leadership Project, archived at the Library of Congress Center for American Folklife.

<sup>181</sup> Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 103.

<sup>182</sup> Mayor Washington quoted in Ben Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House*, 208.



Figure 53: Aftermath of riots at the intersection of 9<sup>th</sup> and U Street NW, just three blocks from LeDroit Park. Image captured by the Scurlock Studio, photographers who captured generations of African American life in DC. Image courtesy of Scurlock Collection, Smithsonian.

Thus LeDroit Park again became a nexus of many communities, when the Mayor's house served as the de facto center of the District Government during the riots.

### **Conclusion**

In the two decades between the end of World War II and the unrest that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the city of Washington, DC, experienced rapid change. The metropolitan region nearly doubled in population from 1940 to 1960, yet the majority of the populace moved out of the city and into newly developed suburbs. The District population declined by about 40,000 people from its wartime high of over 800,000 but the population had changed as well, and in 1957 became the first major city to have a black majority.

LeDroit Park remained an elite African American residential community during these years, with many leaders organizing legal challenges to segregation. Physically there were few changes within the core of the residential area, but on the periphery there were two major construction projects that altered LeDroit Park's status as a nexus for multiple communities. With the demolition of Griffith Stadium, there was less interracial interaction in the neighborhood, but the construction of a new Safeway Store brought the promise of connections to other neighborhoods.

A long process of disinvestment in the neighborhood began in this era, led by legal strictures on federally-backed mortgage loans that prevented lending in inner-city and African American neighborhoods. Though the black community was able to gather funds and challenge this new form of financial discrimination by starting its

own bank, it is clear that not enough investment was possible through local loans alone, and the results of this disinvestment became apparent in the following decades.

The four days of rioting in April of 1968 shifted the position of LeDroit Park politically. When the appointed Mayor used his own house to organize city-wide peace-keeping activities and eventually the rebuilding process, the neighborhood became a visible seat of local political power. The impact of those days on the social structure in LeDroit Park was even more profound, as the sense of isolation and safety were challenged viscerally. Though the neighborhood continued to be a crucible for fomenting change in the city, providing a safe space for African Americans to organize and challenge the strictures of racial injustice, the illusion that residents could be sheltered from the issues of the day was shattered. Neither the creation of the historic district nor small scale investments in the neighborhood would recover the feeling of safety in LeDroit Park. That would only come with major investment both inside and outside the neighborhood, the story of which is told in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 6: A Tree in Winter, LeDroit Park 1969-1997

### Introduction

The time period from just after the riots in 1968 until 1997 was characterized by many threats and challenges to the physical and emotional space in LeDroit Park, though the close-knit community often countered with action. Nearby Howard University, always an important presence in shaping LeDroit Park, drew up plans to expand the campus to the south and both purchased property outright and accepted donations of houses for this expansion [Figure 54]. Leaders in the community, including Mayor Walter Washington, marshaled resources and submitted a successful national and local historic district nomination for LeDroit Park in 1974. The designation not only stopped any immediate demolition and redevelopment plans by the university, but also began a long process of acknowledging and celebrating the events and people associated with the neighborhood.

The historic district designation did not lead to any immediate changes in the population, which would not come until after broader issues of crime, infrastructure maintenance, and city services within the District were addressed. Though many houses within the historic district were well maintained, the street trees had been removed, road surfaces were damaged, and concrete sidewalks were cracked and broken. Combined with numerous vacant properties in the neighborhood, many of which were owned by the university, the area had a worn look, as decades of disinvestment took its toll. [Figure 55] Citywide, crime and drug use became epidemic in the 1980s, and the city's population slowly diminished.

LeDroit Park, 1969–1997

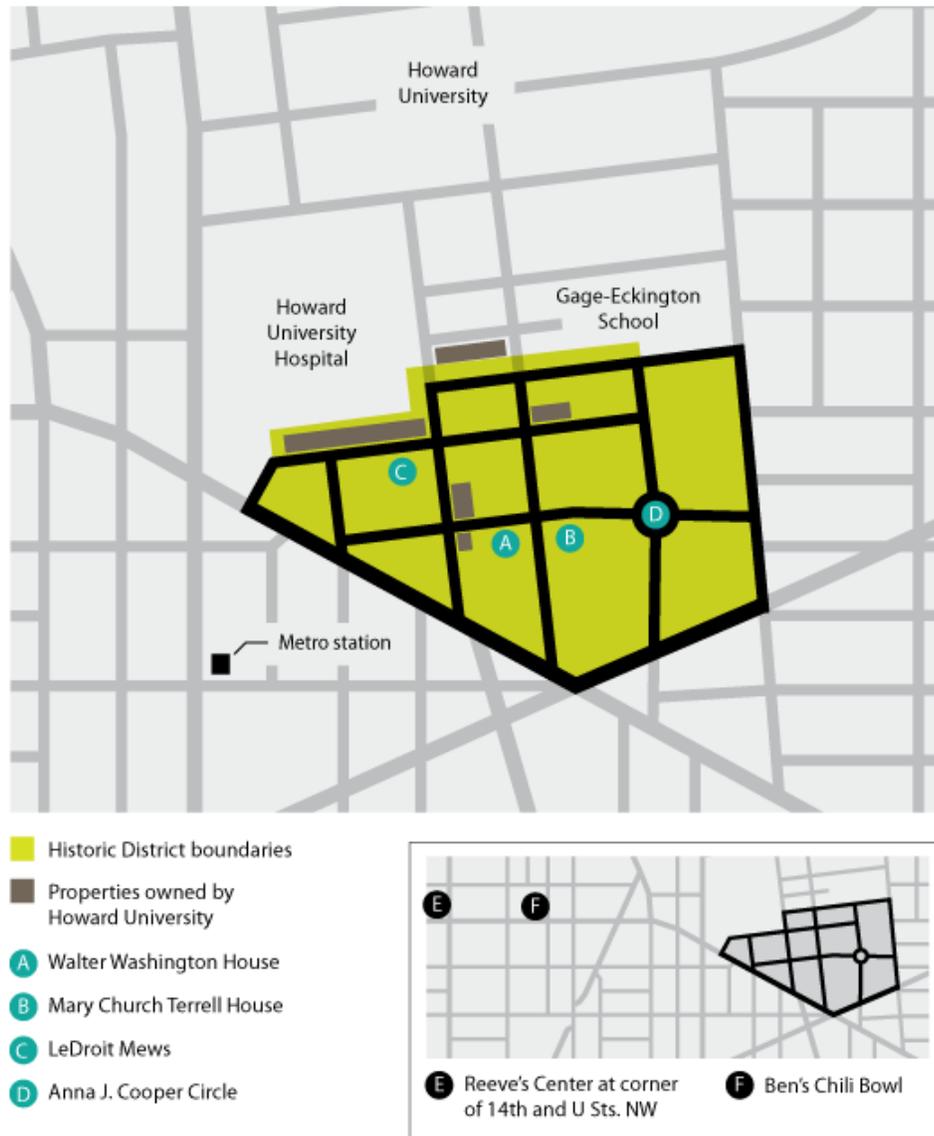


Figure 54: Diagram of LeDroit Park indicating properties owned by Howard University, the historic district, the Metro station, and proximity to landmarks on U Street.



Figure 55: Image of a duplex at 603-605 U Street NW, c. 1974. Constructed in 1873, the structures suffered from deferred maintenance likely due to larger issues of financing and redlining. Image courtesy of HABS.

But like a tree in wintertime, the neighborhood of LeDroit Park had deep roots that sustained the community. Neighbors organized to keep the streets clean and reduce crime through grass-roots action. The city began to invest as well, first with a consultant's report on enhancement of the historic district, followed up by the restoration of the traffic circle at 3<sup>rd</sup> and T, originally a manicured green space, the circle had been paved over by the city in the 1950s. The District also assisted the People's Involvement Corporation (PIC) in the renovation of an abandoned building into affordable condominiums. Though small, these infrastructure improvements set the stage for larger investment in LeDroit Park in following decades. Also at this time the Shaw/Howard University station on the Green Line of Metro Rail opened up two blocks from the neighborhood, forging more permanent connections with downtown and the entire Washington region. Thus, on the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the neighborhood of LeDroit Park was primed for major change.

### **Physical Evolution in LeDroit Park**

Perhaps the single most influential force in the neighborhood during this era was Howard University and its plan to expand the medical school into the dense urban fabric of the city, attempting to reclaim the land that was sold to the developers of LeDroit Park. The first step occurred in 1965 when Griffith Stadium was demolished and the university announced plans for a state-of-the art hospital and medical facility to be constructed on that site. Howard then quietly began to purchase houses on adjacent streets in LeDroit Park: including V Street, Oakdale Place, and 5<sup>th</sup>

Street [Figure 54]. By 1983, the university either purchased or were gifted by alumni over three-dozen houses,<sup>183</sup> a number that grew to 45 by the late 1990s.<sup>184</sup>

#### Creating the Historic District

These plans did not go unnoticed by neighbors, many of whom opposed expansion plans based on both the architectural history and the important people associated with the neighborhood. A small but active group led by Theresa Brown [Figure 51], Laretta Jackson, and others involved in the LeDroit Park Civic Association, diligently researched the history and submitted a successful local and National Register historic district nomination covering most of the neighborhood in 1974. [Appendix 4] Current resident Dr. James Hill, who was working at Howard University at the time, recalls the events:

Theresa Brown realized the importance of the area, and she went to Howard, and Michael Winston, who was part of the Morland-Spingarn Center, and asked him to help her save this area, because it was so important. So Michael...no, she went to the President of Howard [James M. Nabrit, Jr.]...who was delighted that she came to ask to save it because he really wanted to expand Howard University in this direction, so he gladly appointed the Vice President [Winston] to help her, and he wanted him to convince her that it was not important so that Howard could raze it. So Michael came and he started looking at it, and he was excited about the importance of it, he knew the importance, and so he helped her make it become a historic district. And the President of Howard University was angry with him thereafter because Michael thwarted his...[plans].<sup>185</sup>

With diligent effort and support from Dean Winston at Howard, residents of LeDroit Park challenged the university's plans to expand into the neighborhood and demolish many structures by using the tool of historic districting to prevent displacement.

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<sup>183</sup> Sargent, Edward D. "University Expansion Changes LeDroit Park Neighborhood" *Washington Post*, February 28, 1983

<sup>184</sup> Maybelle Taylor Bennett, interview with author, July 21, 2015.

<sup>185</sup> Dr. James Hill, interview with author, July 1, 2015.



Figure 56: Ms. Teresa Brown on T Street in the LeDroit Park historic district. Image courtesy of [preservationnation.org](http://preservationnation.org).

While focused on the historic houses and street design laid out during the initial construction a century before, the text of the National Register nomination also pays homage to the associative significance of many of the structures with historical figures important in the African American community. Just mentioning Judge Robert Terrell, Mary Church Terrell, Major Christian Fleetwood, General Benjamin Davis, Paul Laurence Dunbar and his wife Alice Moore, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mayor Walter Washington and his wife Benetta Bullock Washington by name as important leaders in the black community who had lived in LeDroit Park was an important first step in recognizing the contributions of the area to local and national historical narratives.<sup>186</sup> What the National Register nomination text does not capture is the significance of the neighborhood subculture supported by the urban design, an intangible heritage of relative freedom from the indignities of segregation that nurtured leaders of the African American community. Though not unique to LeDroit Park, it is the loss of this subculture that ultimately led to a sense of displacement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 1975, shortly after the historic district was designated, the Terrell residence at 326 T Street NW was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL), a significant honor only given to about three percent of properties listed on the National Register. This was only the second property in Washington, DC, to be designated an NHL for its association with African American history. [Figure 57 and Appendix 5] Though only the eastern half of the duplex structure remained after a fire in the late 1960s, it was considered sufficiently intact to convey its historical association with the suffrage and civil rights leader Mary Church Terrell and her husband Judge

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<sup>186</sup> LeDroit Park National Register Nomination Form, page 7.



Figure 57: Mary Church Terrell House, 326 T Street NW, image courtesy of HABS.

Robert Terrell. The Terrells moved to LeDroit Park in the 1890s, shortly after the first African American family moved into the previously gated community, a story recounted in Ms. Terrell's autobiography *A Colored Woman in a White World*.<sup>187</sup> Though they eventually lived in several houses around the neighborhood, the residence at 326 T Street was closely tied with Ms. Terrell's work in organizing protests and sit-ins for integration of restaurants and shops in Washington.

These two designation processes were part of a greater movement toward acknowledging and integrating black history into mainstream historical narratives. In the early 1970s a local organization called the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation formed to identify sites and narratives for inclusion in the impending national bicentennial celebrations planned for 1976. A symposium with the National Park Service was held in 1972 and two reports were produced by this group that highlighted many significant events and people connected with LeDroit Park.<sup>188</sup> Though the population of both the city and neighborhood were slowly declining, these reports and the historic designation solidified the status of LeDroit Park as a symbol of African American achievement and pride.

#### Investments in Infrastructure

Not long after the historic district was created, the city of Washington began explicitly investing in LeDroit Park as part of a larger strategy to attract funding to

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<sup>187</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 112-115.

<sup>188</sup> The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation published two reports, one in 1972 titled *A report on a symposium sponsored by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation and the National Park Service to prepare for historic site and building identification for commemorating the history of Blacks in America* and one in 1973 titled *A summary report of thirty sites determined to be significant in illustrating and commemorating the role of Black Americans in United States history*. Both reports focused on creative ways to make African American history more integral to the stories told in the upcoming Bicentennial Celebration planned for 1976.

the city. Although not described as gentrification, policies designed by Mayor Marion Barry were intended to increase the tax base by attracting black businesses and higher-income residents, what journalists Tom Sherwood and Harry Jaffe called a “black capitalist revolution.”<sup>189</sup> Beginning with a contract in 1978 with Carr, Lynch and Associates, a nationally known urban consulting firm, to survey and make recommendations for two African American neighborhoods, LeDroit Park and Anacostia, the city’s modest investments eventually contributed to the vast population changes in the early 2000s. In the resulting report, a portion of which focused specifically on LeDroit Park, the consultants recognized the need for both change and stasis in the physical environment:

Change is recognized as a necessary element of neighborhood conservation; if carefully managed, it can permit full use and enjoyment by those who are living today, while retaining and enhancing an area’s significant architectural and historical qualities. This handbook is written in that spirit, expressly for the citizens for the LeDroit Park Historic District. Its purpose is to help them improve their houses and their streets.<sup>190</sup>

There is no hint in the report that physical conservation of structures may result in any change in the residents. Instead the report was written with the intent of assisting the current residents in preserving and maintaining their homes. Carr and Lynch did however understand the result of neighborhood resistance to the university plans through the historic district process: vacant and nuisance properties.

Some 60 houses are boarded up, half of which belong to the University. But the neglect is recent and there are signs of more recent recovery. Many of the McGill and row houses have been maintained in good condition throughout their existence and many more are being rehabilitated. The buildings were solidly built, and they are still sound.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Sherwood and Jaffe, *Dream City*, 91.

<sup>190</sup> Carr, Lynch, and Associates, “LeDroit Park Conserved,” 6.

<sup>191</sup> Carr, Lynch, and Associates, “LeDroit Park Conserved,” 12.

More importantly, the report explicitly stated that while the architectural design of the neighborhood was noteworthy, it was the historical figures associated with the structures that formed the basis of not only its historic designation, but also its continued significance in the hearts and minds of Washingtonians.

In sum, LeDroit Park is a remarkably preserved specimen of an early romantic suburb, in which street and house designs were coordinated by one good hand. More than that, LeDroit Park has played a central role in the history of the black leadership of this city.<sup>192</sup>

The first tangible result of the report occurred in 1982 with the restoration of the circle at 3<sup>rd</sup> and T Streets [Figure 42], a part of the original design for the neighborhood. Renamed for educator and resident Anna Julia Cooper, the ribbon-cutting was attended by Mayor Barry and heralded as a celebration of Washington history.

The next major investment in the neighborhood came in 1990 when the People's Involvement Corporation (PIC) a community development corporation (CDC), chartered in 1968 to assist low-income residents with finding employment, residential and business opportunities within the city of Washington redeveloped a long vacant 9-unit apartment building located in the 500 block of U Street [Figure 54 and 58]. Renamed LeDroit Mews, the project was intended as a catalyst for individual investment in LeDroit Park. Financing for the redevelopment was provided through low-cost DCHA mortgages and HPAP financing, making the units within reach of many new moderate-income homeowners. PIC's Executive Director Andree' Gandy stated:

The 512-514 "U" Street property...presented an opportunity for PIC to not only address the issues of improving the quality of the housing stock in the

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<sup>192</sup> Carr, Lynch, and Associates, "LeDroit Park Conserved," 12.



Figure 58: 500 Block of U Street, LeDroit Mews Condominiums. Photo by author.

area, but also to implement a partnership with private sector financial institutions. Further...the project addressed the goals of the District and federal government by eliminating blight and encouraging other property owners to improve their properties.<sup>193</sup>

Though Ms. Gandy stated that the historic district added an additional layer of approvals and challenges, she also acknowledged that the history of the neighborhood contributed to the desirability of the renovated condominium units.

A much larger scale project just beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood was to have even greater influence on LeDroit Park. In 1990 the Green Line of the Metro Rail system was partially completed, and the Shaw/Howard University station was opened at 7<sup>th</sup> and T Streets, just south of the historic district and not far from where the original trolley lines, one of the major factors in the early success of LeDroit Park, terminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though it was another eight years before the Green Line was completed, this infrastructure investment so close to the neighborhood ultimately had a major impact on the desirability of the houses as reflected in sales prices [Figure 59], and contributed to the rapid change in racial and economic character of the neighborhood by the turn of the century. As current resident James Campbell\* describes, the history of the neighborhood was part of his decision to buy a house in LeDroit Park in the late 1990s, but the connection to transportation was even more important:

What influenced me was that it was close to a Metro station, and that the house had a garage. I liked the structure of the houses, which are historical in nature, but if this was another name...if this neighborhood was named something else, but it was still two blocks from a Metro station and had this kind of, the physical structures, I would still have thought it was great.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Gandy, "LeDroit Mews," nomination form for Rudy Bruner Award for excellence in the urban environment, 4.

\* pseudonym

<sup>194</sup> Interview with author, July 2, 2015.

## Average single-family sales prices and units sold, adjusted for 2013 dollars

Source: District of Columbia Office of Tax and Revenue



Figure 59: Chart of Real Estate Sales Data in LeDroit Park from 1999-2013. Data courtesy of DC Office of Tax and Revenue, Real Property Tax Administration.

Thus in the years between the 1968 riots and the end of the 1990s, the physical attributes of the historic district did not change appreciably, though signs of renewal were beginning to attract attention. The city invested modestly in the neighborhood, providing guidance for aesthetic changes and seed funding in small projects like LeDroit Mews to encourage individual homeowner investments, yet the driving force of change in the coming years would be connection to the regional subway system.

### **Waves of Social Change in Washington**

The four days of unrest that followed the news of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in April of 1968 cast a long shadow on the city of Washington. Though Dr. King's murder was neither the first nor the last act of public violence in an era of social upheaval, its effects on DC were profound. Much of the destruction wrought on buildings was not immediately addressed, either because individual property owners did not have the means or the will to rebuild. Instead of creating scars on the landscape, many areas remained more like open wounds, lending an air of disinvestment and slow decay. Once bustling commercial strips were hollowed out and vacant lots were common, even on U Street, previously known for its glittering nightlife. LeDroit Park remained relatively unscathed physically, though the increase in crime led to the installation of wrought iron bars on doors and windows of many, an indicator of the loss of freedom and security for the neighborhood's residents.

[Figure 60] The most intense impact, however, was on the social structure of the city.

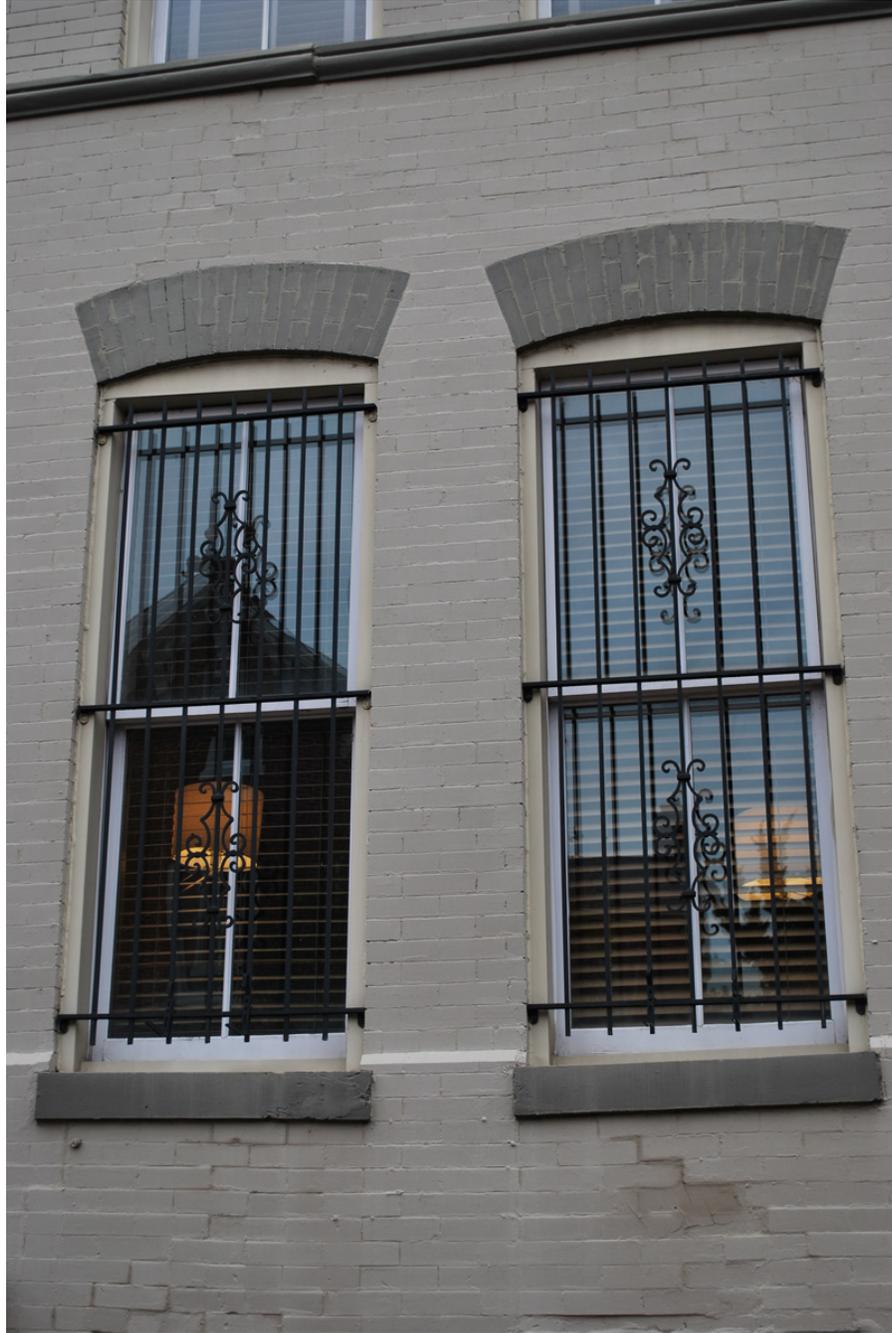


Figure 60: Wrought iron bars on windows of house on 300 block of T Street, an indicator of the increased fears about crime and security, which began after the riots in 1968. Image by author.

## District of Columbia population, by race, 1960–1990

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

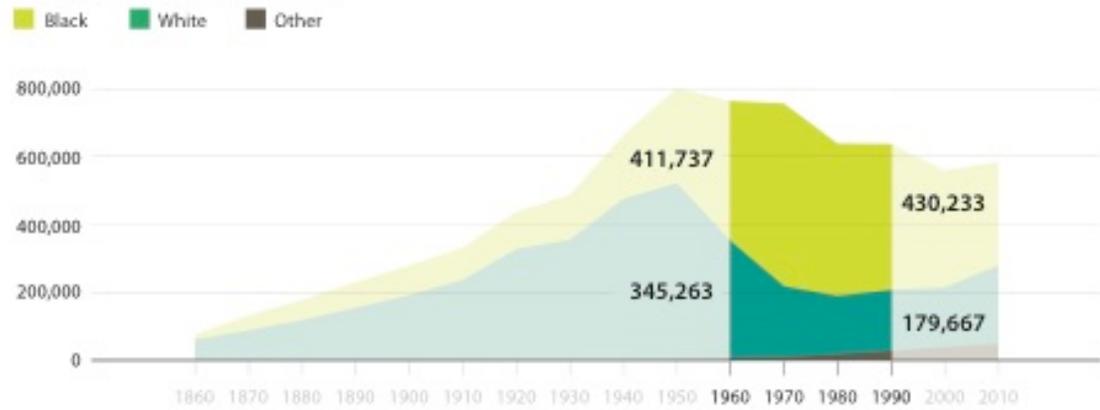


Figure 61: Chart of DC population by race, 1960-1990.

## Demographic Change Affects the Neighborhood

The city of Washington officially became the first majority African American major city in the U.S. with the release of the 1960 U.S. Census, [Figure 61], but after the 1968 riots this demographic trend escalated. Though the urban population declined slightly between 1960-1990, the regional population grew exponentially while the population of the city became increasingly black. In 1950, 62 percent of the 1.3 million people living in the Washington, DC, Metropolitan area resided within the District, but by 1960 with a total population of 2.1 million in the region, the urban population had fallen to 36 percent and was 54 percent African American. By 1990, the region had a total population of over four million, but only 15 percent lived within the boundaries of the District. However, the African American population in the District was roughly seventy percent from 1970-1990.

This concentration of African Americans led to the popular term Chocolate City, first used by black AM radio stations WOOK and WOL in the early 1970s to describe the vibrant black culture that was thriving despite economic challenges in the District.<sup>195</sup> The nickname was codified in 1975 when George Clinton and Parliament released their album titled “Chocolate City” as both a celebration of black pride and the uniquely Washington musical style, Go-Go.

The desegregation laws discussed in chapter five led to demographic changes, as African Americans had many more neighborhoods to choose from throughout the District and the suburbs. LeDroit Park was no longer unique as an enclave of the black elite within a majority white city. Instead, as the nickname Chocolate City implies, the entire city had become “black space” and LeDroit Park was one of a

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<sup>195</sup> Hopkinson, Natalie. *Go-Go Live*.

number of neighborhoods that were considered part of a network of black communities across the District.

An indicator of the strong connection between LeDroit Park and African Americans throughout the city is a group called the LeDroit Park Planning Committee, which has held yearly picnics for current and former residents and their families at the Carter Baron Amphitheater for several decades.<sup>196</sup> Based on an unnarrated video of the 2008 picnic posted on YouTube, the tone was like a family reunion with people embracing one another after long absences amid dancing and food.<sup>197</sup> The Planning Committee also produced a newsletter called *The Falcon*, the bulk of which was devoted to nostalgic childhood memories. Among the seven contributions to the 2008 newsletter, Dan Johnson's stands out as particularly evocative of his childhood, likely in the early 1960s:

As I reflect on life in LeDroit Park I remember the scent of fresh baked bread coming from the Wonder Bread Factory, riding the street cars to the end of the line on Sundays, and also having to run through the various neighborhoods (to avoid gangs) to arrive to home/school safely.<sup>198</sup>

The picnics continue to gather exponentially larger crowds of current and former residents, as well as descendants of residents who had not themselves lived in LeDroit Park, but celebrate it as a spiritual homeplace through these yearly gatherings.

Property as Tangible and Intangible Heritage

Though during this period the elite status of LeDroit Park was diminished, there were still people willing to invest long-term in both the structures and the

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<sup>196</sup> *The Falcon*, The LeDroit Park Planning Committee Newsletter, July 27, 2008.

<sup>197</sup> LeDroit Park Picnic 2008 Video, <https://youtu.be/zdc9t6zDT6c>.

<sup>198</sup> *The Falcon*, The LeDroit Park Planning Committee Newsletter, July 27, 2008.

community. Contemporary resident Ashley Jefferson described how the house she recently purchased was not just an investment for her, but for her entire family:

To be very honest, at first I did not want to live in LeDroit Park. I really didn't. I wanted to move to a condo, but this house became available... it just made sense to buy it ...what I bought it for from my aunt was so far below market rate that the bank did not believe that we were getting that price. And they initially thought that we were taking advantage of my aunt... it just didn't make sense for the bank. But it did make sense for the family, because the house had been in the family for so long, and there was just so much equity in the house... So it just made sense to kind of keep that money in the family right now.<sup>199</sup>

That investment proved a valuable strategy to pass on cultural and financial wealth through generations, a key to economic and social stability. Ashley was candid about her impressions of LeDroit Park in the 1980s and 1990s, when she was a child visiting her great-grandmother in that house:

I didn't grow up here but my big grandma, my great grandmother, on my father's side, she was definitely the matriarch of the family before she passed. So we would have our holidays in LeDroit Park at her place. So all major...well, Thanksgiving and Christmas, we used to do at her house. And with her lived my uncle, before he passed away. I did spend a lot of time in LeDroit Park on the holidays. But to be very, very honest ... during that time, LeDroit Park was a little rough. Actually it was a lot rough, so my parents didn't really want to....we just didn't stay here too late, because it was just not a safe neighborhood.<sup>200</sup>

Then she reflects on what it has meant to her to live in a historic district:

I love it, I really do, especially my family being a part of it. Because we are just a simple family, we don't have any superstars....So this little thing kind of means a lot to us. And to be very honest, I don't think grandma even thought that the house would even be in the family this long. I don't think she thought that her little investment or her little blessing would be a major investment for me, anyway... and it's a blessing and I think that the family as a collective is very proud that we are a part of this, and that it is a historic district, and we are still here.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Jefferson, Ashley. Interview with author, July 9, 2015.

<sup>200</sup> Jefferson, Ashley. Interview with author, July 9, 2015.

<sup>201</sup> Jefferson, Ashley. Interview with author, July 9, 2015.

Though LeDroit Park had deteriorated some after the 1968 riots, it was still a place that many African Americans were willing to invest in because of its long association with the black elite in Washington. That investment was long-term, both a financial transaction that transmitted wealth through generations and an act of intentional cultural preservation maintaining ties with black history and leaders, and is key to preventing residential displacement.

#### Commercial Change Brings Social Change

Partially due to proximity and partially to connections with black business owners, ties between U Street and LeDroit Park have always been significant [Figure 54]. Once the hub of flourishing black commerce and nightlife, U Street struggled to recover after the successive punches of the 1968 riots, disinvestment in the 1970s, and the challenges of Metro Rail construction in the late 1980s. The survival of Ben's Chili Bowl, now a local landmark started in the 1940s to serve late-night after show crowds, was an exception among businesses in the area. Local historian John DeFerrari describes the trajectory in his book on Washington restaurants:

...the 1968 riots changed everything, leading to severe hardships throughout the African American community and devastating the U Street Corridor. As crime spiked, most of the old nightclubs and restaurants were forced to close. Ben's managed to hang on, at times one of the only businesses open on its block. In the late 1980s, Ben's struggled again as subway construction tore up the street directly in front for several years.<sup>202</sup>

Yet as in LeDroit Park, the immediate community kept the culture of the area alive. As Blair Ruble writes, "Significantly, the dense social and economic networks that had emerged during the previous century did not disappear, even as social unrest

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<sup>202</sup> DeFerrari, *Historic Restaurants of Washington*, DC, 114.



Figure 62: Image of northeast corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and U Street, NW c. 1988. Image courtesy of Michael Horsley, DCist.



Figure 63: The Franklin D. Reeves municipal building on the northwest corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and U Street, NW, built in 1986 as a catalyst for redevelopment to the area.

devastated the physical environment.”<sup>203</sup> Though visually the area appeared to lack economic viability [Figure 62], it would be revived through a series of investments beginning in the 1980s.

Major investment came to U Street in 1986 when Mayor Barry dedicated the Reeves Center on the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and U [Figures 54 and 63]. This site was particularly symbolic as the epicenter of the unrest twenty years prior. The intention was to direct investment and attract businesses by bringing government services to the struggling neighborhoods surrounding the new building.<sup>204</sup> Unfortunately, it was not able to fulfill this promise until the early 2000s, after several other infrastructure projects were completed, most notably the Green Line Metro which was completed in 1999. Linking the Shaw and U Street neighborhoods with downtown and the outer suburbs, the subway made this neighborhood once again a hotspot for nightlife with bustling restaurants and theaters, rekindling a meeting ground between different populations.

### ***Political Changes in the City***

Perhaps the most momentous change that occurred in Washington politics happened in 1973 when President Richard Nixon signed the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, giving some measure of local control back to District residents for the first time in over 100 years. This change had its basis in the leadership of Walter E. Washington, a LeDroit Park resident who was appointed by President Lyndon

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<sup>203</sup> Ruble, *U Street: A Biography*, 174.

<sup>204</sup> Ruble, *U Street: A Biography*, 174.

Johnson in 1967 as the first black Mayor-Commissioner. Taking office just prior to the riots, Mayor Washington was calm in the most challenging of situations.

Recalling the immediate aftermath of the riots in an oral history recorded shortly before his death in 2003, Mayor Washington states:

I walked the streets after Martin Luther King Jr. died. I tried to talk with people to keep the peace...I understood the anger of the people...I was worried that the city would go up in flames—it was tagged as city that couldn't go up in flames; that is just when it happens!...no one ever taught me how to run a riot...but I did.<sup>205</sup>

Though many people were arrested and the physical destruction was tremendous, Mayor Washington was credited with preventing total devastation when he ordered the National Guard not to fire on people, which he knew would only incite more anger and violence. His leadership was remarkable because he was not democratically elected at the time, but a presidential appointee who ran the city from his home on T Street, in the heart of what would become the historic district. The trust and respect he earned contributed to Congress passing the Home Rule Act, which allowed for an elected mayor and city council, ceding some power to local officials.

Washington was elected mayor by popular vote in 1975, becoming the first person to hold that office in Washington, DC, since 1871. Serving only one term, Mayor Washington was voted out of office in 1979 in part because he was seen to represent old-fashioned, upper-class elite values. Unseated by a young civil rights activist from Mississippi, Marion Barry, who would go on to serve four terms as mayor and earn the moniker “Mayor for Life,” Mayor Washington continued to be consulted by the media and local politicians on city matters throughout his life. With

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<sup>205</sup> <http://www.visionaryproject.org/washingtonwalter/>.

Washington's defeat, the connection to black leadership in LeDroit Park that had been important for generations was no longer as powerful, at least in local politics.

Marion Barry's multiple mayoral administrations were known for many initiatives, including an explicit interest in cultivating development in the 1980s. Barry tried to entice upper and middle class African Americans back from Prince George's County to invest in the city through outreach to companies, tax incentives, and other favorable deals. It was a very intentional process of gentrification, but unlike the usual paradigm, Mayor Barry was trying to cultivate African American wealth in such a way as to not displace people, but to contribute to the overall economy and provide better services for all who lived in the District. As Tom Sherwood and Harry Jaffe, Washington journalists describe in *Dream City*, their account of the District in the 1980s, when Barry insisted on more minority contracts in government he was following precedents of other ethnic groups: "Barry's approach may have seemed heavy-handed, but he was only doing openly what many Irish, Italian, and Jewish politicians had done behind closed doors."<sup>206</sup>

While the Barry administration focused on development downtown, residential neighborhoods across the city experienced a plague of drugs and violence. Though LeDroit Park was still home to elites like Mayor Washington, the political clout of the residents could not prevent the neighborhood from being touched by these urban realities. Though still physically isolated in the 1980s, LeDroit Park had lost its sense of safety that generations of residents fondly recalled. As resident Ashley Jefferson stated about LeDroit Park when she visited as a child, "it really was

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<sup>206</sup> Sherwood and Jaffe, *Dream City*, 130.

an unsafe neighborhood. Personally, I don't know how to express that, because I think that is something that you should highlight. It was the 'hood honey."<sup>207</sup>

Yayo Grassi, who has lived in the neighborhood over 25 years, also recalls the lack of safety he felt after he bought his house in 1989:

The thing that surprised me though when I.... or the first shock that I received was to realize that actually the neighborhood and mostly my block was completely taken over by drug dealers. There were 4 drug houses in this block and it wasn't a pleasant sight. People would be up late at night, screaming, fighting, cars were double and triple parked. My guests, and my friends did not feel safe coming over, and cab drivers would not take me here. I learned that in order to get a cab and bring me to my home, I had to get into the cab and then give my address because if I would do it from outside the cab.... I'm sure that happened to you too...[the cab] they would say "I'm not going there" and they would just take off.<sup>208</sup>

But Mr. Grassi also described a neighborhood where people formed close bonds, and eventually created a sense of safety.

When I moved in, I started to study and started to ask questions of neighbors and things. I was very well received by the neighbors, and that was...I was aware that I was the first white person to move in a block where 100% were African Americans. It wasn't intimidating to me because I liked the neighborhood, but I was always aware of that, that I was the one that was...different. But immediately neighbors came to see me, I went to see them, so we established a wonderful relationship. And its one of the thing that I am very glad, because it persists today.<sup>209</sup>

Current resident Natalie Andrews,<sup>\*</sup> who reflected on the change in the neighborhood as people became more engaged in the 1990s, echoed this sentiment:

...So we saw more people engaged in what was going on in their neighborhood. And I feel a sense of community because every block I go to, I always think if I'm walking down the street and something happens to me, what will I do? And I know somebody on every block where I feel comfortable that if something happened to me I could knock on their door and say "Hey, something's going on, someone's following me, I don't feel safe,

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<sup>207</sup> Jefferson, Ashley. Interview with author, July 9, 2015.

<sup>208</sup> Grassi, Yayo. Interview with author July 9, 2015.

<sup>209</sup> Grassi, Yayo. Interview with author July 9, 2015.

\* pseudonym

do you mind if I come in for a few minutes, can we call the police?” and that kind of thing. So I feel good in that sense. Again, I feel that sense of community and it’s a good thing, where I didn’t feel that before.<sup>210</sup>

So the political changes in Washington had an impact on LeDroit Park, as the center of power shifted away from the neighborhood, drugs and violence reached the elite enclave. But neighbors worked together, just as they did to fend off the expansion of Howard University, reclaiming the interpersonal ties among residents, and restoring a bit of the emotional safety that was important for generations of residents. Although in the past LeDroit Park provided a sense of freedom from racial strictures, in the 1980s and 1990s the neighborhood provided a relative freedom from urban decline and crime.

### **Conclusion**

LeDroit Park physically did not change much in the time between the 1968 riots and the end of the 1990s, but socially the neighborhood and the city were dramatically shifting. Through desegregation laws that were championed by many LeDroit Park residents, the neighborhood began to lose its cache as an elite black enclave, and began to be incorporated into the greater community of the District. When Howard University introduced plans to raze a great deal of the neighborhood for an expansion of the hospital on campus, residents rallied and submitted a nomination for a local and nationally recognized historic district in 1974, stalling plans for expansion. This action also meant a renewed interest in the people who had

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<sup>210</sup> Andrews, Natalie. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.

been associated with the neighborhood, and a celebration of the contributions made by generations of African Americans living in LeDroit Park.

Throughout this time, large and small infrastructure investments in the political, social, and physical landscape of the city impacted LeDroit Park, yet rarely were those impacts dramatic. Incremental changes in access, safety, and the aesthetics of the area became apparent. Social networks were maintained and in some cases strengthened. But change was on the horizon, both for the city and the neighborhood, as long-term investments would begin to pay off in the late 1990s, and a flood of new residents would change the complexion and more importantly, the emotional landscape of the neighborhood.

## Chapter 7: Investment and Renewal 1998-present

### Introduction

This chapter analyzes the changes, both physical and social, that have been documented in the LeDroit Park historic district at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. During this seventeen-year period, physical change and infrastructure investment has led to dramatic visual transformation in the neighborhood. However, the more dramatic change brought on by the restoration and renewal has been in the economic and racial diversity of residents. In preservation and planning literature these kind of changes are often attributed to historic districting, but as has been stated in the previous chapters, the changes in LeDroit Park are much more complex.

Tradition held that LeDroit Park was a stronghold of middle and upper-middle class African Americans, but trends both city-wide and nationally have led a more racially diverse group of people to move into the neighborhood, leading some residents to express a feeling of displacement. This displacement is partially financial as rising property values are reflected in steadily increasing average sales price for houses [Figure 54] and increasing property taxes, but the more pressing concern is expressed as a loss of a shared history and culture. While the historic district remains intact and physical artifacts such as houses and streets are arguably in better condition than in the recent past, the neighborhood's intangible history as a protected African American enclave is fading.

Beginning in 1998 with a significant investment from Howard University, the LeDroit Park neighborhood experienced nearly two decades of dramatic social and

physical change. The LeDroit Park Initiative, as the Howard University project was formally known, assembled financing from a team of non-profit and government sources to upgrade the physical neighborhood, repopulate vacant housing, and encourage the infilling of vacant lots. In addition, a high-speed internet cable was installed under newly-paved streets, cracked concrete sidewalks were replaced with historically compatible brick sidewalks, and street trees were planted improving the overall landscape and accessibility of the neighborhood. The beginning of this multi-year project coincided with the completion of the Green Line on Metro Rail in 1999, thus connecting two rapidly developing areas of the city, Petworth and Columbia Heights, and resulting in a technologically modern and aesthetically attractive community readily accessible once again via mass transit. Though many new residents moved in, the Gage-Eckington Elementary School on the northern edge of the neighborhood was demolished in 2008 due to flagging enrollment [Figure 64].

Socially, LeDroit Park was influenced by city-wide political policies designed to increase the city population by 100,000 people in a decade. With financial incentives to entice first-time home buyers and favorable programs to encourage small businesses to invest in the city, the goal was to increase the overall tax base. Though many of these ventures took significant time to mature, the ultimate result was a population surge of young professionals interested in urban living for social and environmental reasons. While the physical design of LeDroit Park retains the atmosphere of a protected enclave, there are indicators that the overall social atmosphere has changed.

LeDroit Park, 1998–present



Figure 64: Diagram of LeDroit Park neighborhood indicating new housing developments, LeDroit Park Initiative houses, and the new city park on the site of a demolished elementary school.

## *Physical Change*

### The Howard University Initiative

Perhaps the most visible change in LeDroit Park since the creation of the historic district was started in 1998 under the umbrella of the Howard University Initiative, a multi-prong, multi-year project to renovate and restore residential properties owned by the university as a catalyst for greater investment and change. Maybelle Taylor Bennett, the Director of the Howard University Community Association, an organization created in 1996 to foster dialogue and direct engagement with the surrounding city neighborhoods, including LeDroit Park, described the goals of the project:

LeDroit Park initiative took on several phases, really. And the first one went from 1998 to 2002 or thereabouts. And in that phase we had a combination of activities that reflected a partnership between ourselves and our for-profit partner Fannie Mae where the target of redevelopment were our own properties. There were 45 properties, 40 of which were redeveloped, 28 of them renovated, 12 of them newly constructed...with the redevelopment of the housing also came physical infrastructure as well. So there was the gate, that was put up using federal DDOT monies, when Rodney Slater who was the first African American DDOT Secretary, was there. And that money went through DPW. DPW also oversaw some sidewalk bricking, some traffic calming measures, they got rid of the changeable lane on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, again something that the neighbors asked for. And so there were a number of efforts to coordinate what the infrastructure improvements would look like together with the housing changes: the housing rehabilitation and new construction. So that was Part 1, the focus being on creating a catalyst for the redevelopment of residential, or the residential area.<sup>211</sup>

Because it was a complex project with many aspects, Ms. Taylor Bennett expanded on the goals of the initiative by detailing the partnerships involved:

So the first part was housing, the second part was mixed-use commercial [which is an ongoing project], and then the development of the middle school

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<sup>211</sup> Bennett, Maybelle Taylor. Interview with author, July 21, 2015.

[focused on science and math, strengths of the Howard University curriculum]. The other part of the housing piece, was not only working with our properties, but working with lower-income housing developers where they had site control within the same small area. So Manna and the People's Involvement Corporation (PIC) were recipients of funding that we acquired through the HUD HBCU grants, and so the Ellington Mews [new construction] which took place in the 300 block of U Street and the 1900 block of 4<sup>th</sup> Street.... we provided assistance to them for that particular development. Working closely with Reverend Dickerson and George Rothman who headed up Manna. We also provided assistance for 345 Oakdale Place, which used to be part of the Kelly Miller public housing, and which Manna acquired and fixed up with 9 condos, low and moderate-income condos. Again using HUD HBCU set-aside finding. And then 1838 4<sup>th</sup> Street which was a site that was controlled by PIC and that also had 9 units, I can't remember now. And we made assistance available through that grant opportunity to the PIC to make that available for low and moderate income households. So we were able then to combine our effort with a for-profit entity and not-for-profit entities in the residential community. It was helpful because it helped create a critical mass, not only with our units, our 45 properties, but Manna had 21+9 is 30, and you had the 9 from PIC, so that's 39 plus our 45 gave you 84 and you start creating a catalytic effect. So it wasn't a *majority*, but it did take place in the heart of the neighborhood. And it created a safe place for others to come in and invest in their own homes, when they might not have absent that initial investment.<sup>212</sup>

Seasoned real estate agent Betty Pair agreed when reflecting on how the vacant structures affected sales in the neighborhood:

It was an issue, in part, because if you're spending money and you see that a house is lying derelict, you want to know what are the chances that that house will be fixed and you say, if I said, "well that belongs to Howard University and I really can't tell you what they're going to do with it"... it did have an impact, particularly with that persons' interest in living along side it or on the same block. It did have an impact. I was really glad when there was enough pressure from the neighborhood so that the University couldn't get away with it anymore.<sup>213</sup>

Her sense of sales trends is born out when analyzing the real estate sales prices in the LeDroit Park neighborhood from 1999 through 2013, the most recent year data is available from the city [Figure 59]. In 1999 the average sales price for a house was

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<sup>212</sup> Bennett, Maybelle Taylor. Interview with author, July 21, 2015.

<sup>213</sup> Pair, Betty. Interview with author. June 21, 2015.

\$141,589<sup>214</sup> and in 2003 after most of the activity in the Howard University Initiative had been completed, the average sales price in the neighborhood had more than doubled to \$336,692. While these price increases are in keeping with the national average housing price escalation during what was later called the housing bubble, LeDroit Park only experienced a modest reduction in average price in 2008 when the market crash occurred. This decrease was unusual when compared with national trends, but is in keeping with the market in DC, which was particularly strong despite the housing crisis. By 2013, the average sales price in LeDroit Park had risen to \$562,029, an increase of 67% in a decade.

While housing value was a longer-term change, the most immediate result of the renovations initiated by Howard University was an influx of new residents. The first project completed was the new construction on 4<sup>th</sup> and U streets [Figures 64-65]. Current resident Donna Morris describes her path to homeownership that began in 1996 with an essay contest where the prize was \$1000 toward closing costs and an encounter with a homebuyers club run by Manna:

Manna was a non-profit housing developer, that kind of thing, so I joined the homebuyers club, I realized that I had this \$1000, I only had a year to use it... So I viewed a couple of sites, and then one of the sites that they were building the first development in over 100 years was LeDroit Park, so I was real excited about that. So there was two places in LeDroit Park, and I went to the first place, which I didn't particularly care for, and then I came over here and it was actually still dirt, where they had torn down the existing houses, and Manna was actually building this development. So I could physically see the homes being built standing across the street. And this house that I live in, 331 U Street, was one of the first properties that was built in that development. I think it was like 3 semi-detached homes, and then on U Street there was maybe 7 or 8 homes, and around the corner on 4<sup>th</sup> street there were maybe 3-4 homes, and this development was called Ellington Mews, after Duke Ellington, who also lived in the community. And that was a good tie-in for me, because I am a big jazz person. So all these things are kind of coming

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<sup>214</sup> All figures are adjusted for inflation and are listed in 2013 dollars.



Figure 65: New construction c. 1996 in LeDroit Park, 300 block of U Street. Photo by author.

together for a reason. And then the fact that I would physically be able to come day by day see my house being built, be a part of it, things of that nature, that intrigued me too. So I settled on this address here, 331 U and the rest is history. [laughs]<sup>215</sup>

The next wave of residents moved into LeDroit Park when the renovated and restored houses were sold to Howard University employees. Richard Myers described his experience and the catalytic effect on the neighborhood he observed:

When I moved in 15 years ago there was more vacant housing. Not a lot, but some vacant housing. I moved in because Howard University owned about 4-5 houses in the 400 block of Elm Street. And they owned the whole row of houses on Oakdale Place. So, when I moved in, there was a lot of vacant property. And right after that, because of Howard University and their agreement with Verizon and HUD then all of Howard's houses became occupied. They were remodeled and occupied. And then the other houses that weren't began to get fixed up and sold.<sup>216</sup>

Thus the initiative had the intended effect, with the Howard University houses restored and occupied, private owners were encouraged to invest in their properties as well.

Concurrent with the very localized investment in the neighborhood was the ongoing major infrastructure investment of Metro Rail construction. In 1999, the Green Line was completed when the section between the U Street Station and Fort Totten [Figure 66] was opened for passengers. While the closest station to LeDroit Park, Shaw/Howard University, had been open since 1991, that section of the Green Line only traveled one station north, resulting in long delays to get to sections on the northeast side of the system. The completed line meant easy and full access to all areas connected to the Metro system, and as mentioned in earlier chapters, this accessibility was very attractive to new residents.

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<sup>215</sup> Morris, Donna. Interview with author, July 25, 2015.

<sup>216</sup> Myers, Richard. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.



Figure 66: Complete map of Metro Rail System. LeDroit Park neighborhood indicated in red triangle, not to scale.

## Gage-Eckington Elementary School and the Park at LeDroit

While there was a great deal of construction and restoration happening with residential structures in LeDroit Park, there was a major demolition just beyond the boundary of the historic district that drastically changed the social dynamic of the neighborhood. In 2007 citizens of the District of Columbia elected Mayor Adrian Fenty. A young, energetic, native Washingtonian, Mayor Fenty ran on a platform that highlighted school reform as a necessity for improving quality of life for current residents, and as a way to attract and keep middle-class homeowners in the city. Mayor Fenty hired an equally activist and controversial Chancellor of Public Schools, Michelle Rhee, who undertook a multi-pronged plan to reform the school system. As part of that plan, there were many school consolidations planned, leaving multiple neighborhood school buildings vacant. While many neighborhoods recognized the redundancy in schools at the time, criticism of the seemingly top-down decision process was vehement.

With a trend of flagging enrollment, Gage-Eckington Elementary School [Figure 67] located on 3<sup>rd</sup> and Elm Street just north of the LeDroit Park historic district, was one of the schools slated for closure in 2008. That structure was constructed in 1977 after DCPS decommissioned the Nathaniel P. Gage School [Figure 68], located on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, on the eastern edge of LeDroit Park. The original Gage School was built in 1904 for white students, but was deeded to the Colored School Division in Washington in the 1920s, after the population in the area had



Figure 67: Gage-Eckington School, c2007. Image courtesy of *Washington City Paper*.



Figure 68: Figure 45 Nathaniel P. Gage School building, c2000 after it had been converted into Parker Flats, a high-end condominium building. Image courtesy of Rathberger/Goth Associates, consulting structural engineers. <http://www.rath-goss.com/>.

changed to majority black, as discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>217</sup> Though the Gage School building was eventually converted into high-end condominiums in 2000, the building stood vacant and derelict for over two decades as the city decided what to do with the historic structure. So when the new Gage School, as many local residents called the 1977 Gage-Eckington building, was slated for closure, there was concern by some in the community for the future of the space. It was feared that such a large vacant structure would attract trash, debris, and eventually criminal activity. An activist group in the neighborhood who thought that the low enrollment was likely a temporary change, and that the population of elementary school children would increase with new development in the neighborhood, formed a working group to envision new uses for the building. Ultimately, the mayor's office decided to demolish the thirty-year old structure and allow the space to be used for a park, playground, dog park, and community garden, following some of the community's suggestions and requests [Figure 69-70].

This decision did not sit well with some older members of the community, in particular Dr. James Hill, a retired professor from Howard University, who grew up in South Carolina and attended segregated schools. He thought that the symbolism of the school was paramount to the community of LeDroit Park as well as the African American community around the city:

One thing in LeDroit Park that hurt my very soul was the tearing down of the black school [Gage-Eckington Elementary]. Nowhere in this country can America afford to tear down a black school. I don't give a damn if you are in Maine or wherever you might be, it might be segregated so forth and so on. But to tear down a school and put a dog park, tear down a black school, or a school attended predominantly by black people, to tear it down and to put a dog park and a garden... I fought it. I did fight it, I protested. But the

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<sup>217</sup> Stuckey, Ken, Historian at Sumner School Archives, voicemail with author, August 18, 2015.



Figure 69: Entrance to new Park at LeDroit, site of the local elementary school, Gage-Eckington shown in Figure 67. Part of the Kelly Miller Dwellings can be seen in the background. Photo by author.



Figure 70: Community garden beds on the western edge of the Gage-Eckington school site. Photo by author.

Europeans in LeDroit Park did not want a vacant building in the community. Well, the building, it was a new building [built in the 1970s]... But still they didn't want a vacant building in the community. But the point was, it was a building associated with where black people went. So it *had* to go. My last thing is, the reason that I am so sensitive about it, when integration came to the schools in South, if a black school had just been built, I say just been built, it was 3 years old, and integration was ordering that white kids had to go to that school, the first thing that they would do when the white kids went to that school, they would rip out the toilets. The toilets in the bathroom *had* to go. The white kids could not go to a black school and use the toilets where black people had used. That was very sensitive to me, and then when they came to tear this building down, to me it was a continuation of the same thing.<sup>218</sup>

While Gage-Eckington was built well after the era of legal segregation had ended, because of the racial composition of the neighborhood during its use, the student body was almost completely African American, and so in Dr. Hill's view, the school was part of that long continuum of valuing education in LeDroit Park. What Dr. Hill found even more objectionable than the demolition was that part of the land was repurposed for a dog park, which he saw as putting pets before children. But other community members, such as James Campbell\* who is African American, but of a different generation than Dr. Hill, notes:

...I supported that [the demolition of Gage-Eckington]. I thought it was an eyesore, and I hated to see that building just sit there if they weren't going to do anything with it. So I think that the park is a positive. I think that the problem is that people have gotten used to the park, but I remember that they said that one day they may build on that again, so I don't know how the community is going to react to that. That was an understanding that Mayor Fenty gave when they tore it down is that we may have to give up that park again.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Hill, James. K. interview with author, July 1, 2015.

\* pseudonym

<sup>219</sup> Campbell, James. Interview with author, July 2, 2015.



Figure 71: Aerial map of the Park at LeDroit, showing relationship to the historic district (outlined in red), and the varying uses of the space. Map courtesy of Google Maps.

Several distinct use-areas were carved out of the school site to serve various community needs [Figure 71], but this process was not without controversy. Maria Fyodorova, who has lived in LeDroit Park for nearly a decade, was on the planning committee for the park space. She reflects on the design process and in particular the discussion of a fence:

So a new community was emerging, we had a committee working on the design of the park. MPD [the police department] was like we want you to put a fence around the park. And there was a really big contingent of people who did not want a fence, because the idea was that if you put a fence up you are separating, because Kelly Miller [public housing apartment building] is right there, and the park is here, and then the rich people are on the other side of the park. Except it brings up all of these issues....But looking back on it, its like this idyllic view on....that structures create cultural changes. Looking back on it now, it was so naïve... So the committee, coming up with the design, was trying to force this inclusion and interaction and what it is resulted in was a lot of tension, unnecessary tension.

And not having the fence results in not having appropriate policing of the area. A shooting happens or there's drug dealing or anything and the police say we can't do anything because we go in this end and the person goes out the other end, and there's 17 different places to exit the park, you are handicapping our ability to appropriately police your community, so we're not going to bother. We had a lot of those kind of discussions when I was involved with the civic association. So its just interesting, and its not like the fence wouldn't be open, its not like we would close it on that side, it would just be open, there would be two entrances, one on this side and one on the other side. The end.<sup>220</sup>

So while the proposed fence discussed was only intended to enclose the park, the discussion of inclusion and exclusion implied a connection to the historic fence that once encircled the neighborhood. As discussed in Chapter Two, the origin story of the neighborhood as a gated and segregated community still looms large in the minds of current residents.

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<sup>220</sup> Fyodorova, Maria. Interview with author, July 10, 2015.

In the upper northwest section of the school site, where the old baseball field was located, sits an experimental non-profit, Common Good City Farm, dedicated to bringing fresh food to low-income people in the city. According to their web site, the farm's mission is to "provide hands-on training in food production, healthy eating and environmental sustainability. The Farm itself serves as a demonstration site to individuals, organizations and government agencies in the DC Metro area. The site and our programs integrate people of all ages, classes and races to create vibrant and safe communities."<sup>221</sup> As current Executive Director Rachael Callahan recounts, the founding directors of the farm were part of the planning process:

Common Good City Farm was started by two co-founders on 7<sup>th</sup> Street next to Bread for the City, where they were doing some gardening in a vacant lot over there. Somewhat in the neighborhood, but when the whole repurposing of the park space was being discussed and underway Common Good City Farm was sort of invited in as a stakeholder in that conversation and then took over the space in the Fall of 2008.<sup>222</sup>

The role of the farm within the community as a meeting place between the residents of the historic district, who tend to be well-heeled, and the lower-income residents in the apartments has grown slowly. Rachael describes the interactions positively:

So in the two years plus that I have been with Common Good City Farm I have noticed a shift towards more interaction with those borders, specifically using the open space, the park space for sure. I think that I have noticed more community events happening there, or specific opportunities where interaction between members living in those border communities can come together. I absolutely notice that on the farm on a daily basis, I think that is something that we are very mindful of, being a space where different community members from different age ranges, socio-economic backgrounds and racial backgrounds interact for different reasons and it happens all in our space, and that is something that we facilitate intentionally. But I will say that most community members are, in my observations, and through anecdotal

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<sup>221</sup> <http://commongoodcityfarm.org/about> accessed September 10, 2015.

<sup>222</sup> Callahan, Rachael. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.

conversations, are aware that those borders exist, they have not been erased, but I have noticed more interaction.<sup>223</sup>

New resident Angel Rios and his husband Kevin Coy, who has been in the neighborhood for over a decade, reflect on the impact of the new park:

...one of the biggest [changes], even though it is technically outside of the historic district is the conversion of the Gage-Eckington [school site] into the Park at LeDroit, has had a big impact, a focal point for the community. I don't go to the park as much as I should, but Angel goes and takes the dogs and uses the dog park, and I think that tomorrow you were going to try out the farmer's market... So changes like that are good and they promote additional community cohesion. There certainly would be cohesion if the city ever tried to repurpose it into something other than a park.<sup>224</sup>

However, dog ownership is a flashpoint among neighbors. Despite the dedicated space for dogs, some newer residents don't take advantage of that amenity and try the patience of others in the community. Resident Heather Samuelson\* reflects on how this behavior affects her connection to the neighborhood:

There are a lot of pets around, and its difficult for me to enjoy the greenery in the area, because I fear the dog mess, and its abundant. And there is a nickname for this area now, its called "LePoop Park"... That's so embarrassing... So that is part of the change. That's part of the good and the bad, maybe.<sup>225</sup>

Maybelle Taylor Bennett, Director of the Howard University Community Association, describes the effects of disrespectful pet owners on the university community:

We have had people walking their dogs on central campus, allowing their dogs to drink out of the water fountain that our children drink out of, and getting upset because someone told them that this was inappropriate. So, there's this sense of entitlement that enrages us, and that we are convinced would not happen on an AU campus or on a Georgetown campus, without at least someone saying to them that this is inappropriate.

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<sup>223</sup> Callahan, Rachael. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.

<sup>224</sup> Rios, Angel and Kevin Coy, interview with author, June 17, 2015.

\* pseudonym

<sup>225</sup> Samuelson, Heather. Interview with author, July 7, 2015.

And we have an open campus, we recognize that. 6<sup>th</sup> Street is a public street, and has not been closed because our neighbors did not want it closed, they fought us on that. So there is the opportunity to walk across campus and all of that, but with that opportunity from our perspective comes the responsibility to be respectful of our grounds, of our students, of our faculty staff and visitors. And these kinds of things did not happen 20 years ago when I got here, it was different.<sup>226</sup>

Dog ownership here is not the heart of the issue, but is a proxy for a deeper issue that will be discussed later in this chapter, the loss of interaction among people in the public realm.

### **Political Change**

Before analyzing the major social transformation in LeDroit Park, it is necessary to explore a bit of the political climate that affected the neighborhood and contributed to the social changes. Mayor Fenty's transformation of the school system was just one part of a larger political tidal wave of policies in the late 1990s and early 2000s targeted at improving the overall quality of life for District residents. The tidal wave, however, began with policies initiated under Mayor Marion Barry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as discussed in Chapter Six. Mayor Barry was explicitly trying to increase the tax base by attracting middle and upper middle class families back into the District, a policy of encouraging gentrification. But as discussed, he was not seeking racially diverse new residents, but was explicitly trying to court black businesses and residents into the District, particularly those who had moved to nearby Prince George's County in the preceding two decades.

Unfortunately Mayor Barry's final administration, from 1995-1999, was fraught with financial troubles, issues that had been brewing for years. The newly re-

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<sup>226</sup> Bennett, Maybelle Taylor. Interview with author, July 21, 2015.

elected mayor found a city on the brink of bankruptcy, with basic city services like trash removal and road repair intermittent at best, and a deficit of nearly \$700 million. Barry petitioned Congress for assistance, but instead of providing funds, Congress created an appointed five-person commission, the Financial Control Board, to oversee the crisis. Seen as punitive by many DC residents, the Control Board did eventually balance the budget and restore city services and infrastructure, without which the influx of new residents would not have happened. Just as with vacant structures in a neighborhood, most people would be loathe to invest in a house in a city that is unable to regularly pick up their trash, let alone advance long-term improvements.

Federal oversight also took the form of hands-on policing, with particular focus on the drug trade that was active in the city. According to an article in the *Washington Post* there was a huge-scale operation planned for LeDroit Park in 1995, but was thwarted when the raid was accidentally released to the press hours before it occurred:

The undercover operation at Kelly Miller was part of a national campaign by the ATF and HUD to root out violent crime in public housing and make the projects safe again for long-suffering residents...Every ATF agent from Baltimore to Richmond had been brought in to assist. A special communications vehicle had been brought all the way from Dallas. And a fistful of arrest and search warrants had been secured by pounding the pavement for thousands of hours, running down leads, conducting interviews and watching the LeDroit Park Crew.<sup>227</sup>

The drug raid in LeDroit Park was eventually successful, and the resulting arrests reduced drug trafficking and violence in the neighborhood, another investment by the city that contributed to population increases a decade later.

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<sup>227</sup> Loeb, Vernon. "Press Release Blows Huge DC Drug Raid/8-month effort goes down drain." *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1995.

## District of Columbia population, by race, 1990–2010

Source: United States Bureau of the Census

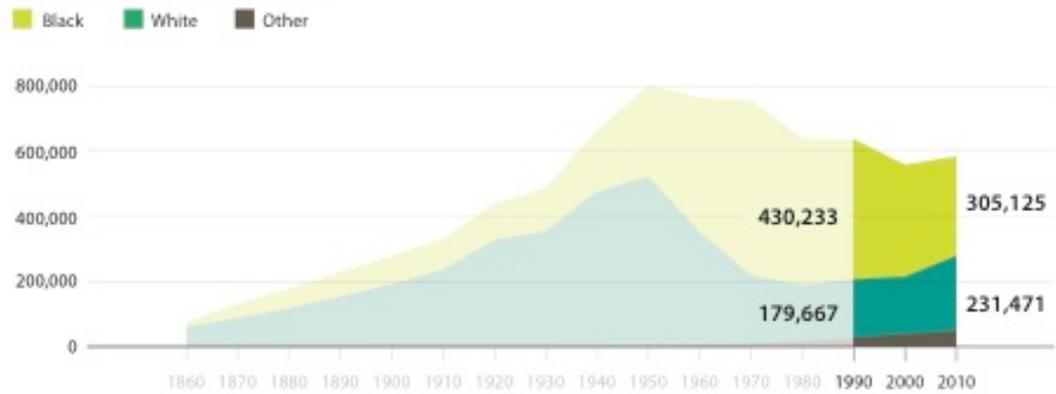


Figure 72: Chart of DC population by race, 1990-present.

Anthony Williams, who was elected to two terms as mayor after serving as the District's Chief Financial Officer under the Control Board, emerged as another leader who championed a population increase for the District as a path to long-term financial stability. Though Mayor Williams' approach was not racially-based, he was explicitly courting higher income taxpayers into the District, which he announced in 2002 as a goal of increasing population by 100,000 in 10 years. By the year 2010 the population in the District had grown by over 30,000 people [Figure 66], so while Mayor Williams' goal was not reached, his programs reversed the trend of population loss beginning in the 1950s. To entice coveted higher-income taxpayers, policies such as federal income tax rebates for first-time homebuyers were created, which continued to blur federal and local governmental jurisdictions for DC residents. These policies, in combination with infrastructure and local investment contributed to a visible demographic change in residents in LeDroit Park. As Rachael Callahan observes:

I also noticed a shift in the residents of the neighborhood. So in 2008-2009 when I passed through here, I would see a lot fewer young professionals, and I certainly notice that there are a lot more young professionals that now live in the neighborhood. A lot more restaurants and amenities that you would find in a neighborhood that has young professionals. [laughs] that is certainly a bit of editorializing, but...<sup>228</sup>

Other informants also noted visible changes in the racial composition of LeDroit Park, which is becoming more diverse [Figure 3]. The new residents not only increased the overall population of LeDroit Park, but as Rachael mentions, also brought businesses to the area. Despite the increased pressure on parking mentioned by nearly every informant, most everyone agreed that the new residents were a

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<sup>228</sup> Callahan, Rachael. Interview with author, June 15, 2015.

positive force, bringing new ideas and energy to the ongoing process of building community.

### **Social Change**

One unwelcome change brought by new residents is an overall shift in the level of interaction in the public realm. Multiple informants described the “culture of greeting” or culture of “hello” that was a deeply ingrained aspect of the character of LeDroit Park as significant to them, but noticeably diminishing with the influx of new residents. Mechelle Baylor describes how this change in interaction surprised her:

And some people don't want to, they don't speak. Because I'm a speaker. When I get up in the morning, and open up my house up, I go out on the porch. I just see people walking with their coffee or riding their bike or reading the newspaper, or texting. And I'll say “Good morning” and some of them will say “Good morning”, and others don't. ...Just speak. Yeah, you don't have to know who they are, I don't have to know that you are Christine Henry, I just see you walking and I was like “I see you every day. Good morning.”<sup>229</sup>

In order to address this change, and essentially acculturate people to this aspect of the neighborhood, a group of people within the Civic Association created a formalized program called the “Hi Campaign” which was a way to introduce new residents to this custom. Headed by Maria Fyodorova, the campaign was unfortunately short-lived:

I kind of want to say that the “Hi campaign” *wasn't* because it really didn't...I launched it, and then it got a lot of press, because it hit on a lot of issues like gentrification and the hipster culture, and things like that, but I guess....when I first moved into the neighborhood, the inflow of new people was so slow, and there were still so many people who had lived here for decades, that when you moved in you were inculcated into the culture that existed, and the culture that existed was you greeted people on the street. And I want to say that it's kind of like a southern style, but I have met a lot of people from the mid-west

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<sup>229</sup> Baylor, Mechelle. Interview with author, June 17, 2015.

that say that's the same there. So it's just a particular type of way of relating to your neighbors, so if you saw someone on the street you greeted them. You don't have to have...you are not becoming best friends, you are not inviting them over, it was just kind of a polite acknowledgement of the humanity of everybody walking by. And as the influx of new people became faster...its just the dynamic. It's harder to train those people to what the culture was or is, or what the people living here want it to be.

And so I, I kind of came on this idea that we could do just a fun sort of way to reach out to people. And it was just getting people to say hi to each other on the street. And there was...there are several components to it...But it was basically signage on the street, signage on businesses, people could put something in their yard, things like that. There was a piece of the campaign that focused on buttons that people could wear and the button just said "hi", and the idea was if you saw someone walking down the street with a button, you would know that they are the sort of person who supported this kind of environment.<sup>230</sup>

Maria then reflected on why she felt this change occurred:

So there are key pathways from the metro and the bus stops into the neighborhood where there's significant foot traffic at certain times of the day, so you are not going to be able to say "hi" to all of those people, but that kind of attitude then comes into the neighborhood. Where there isn't that much foot traffic, or there is a manageable enough foot traffic where you could say "hi" to everybody you come across, or you could wave or you could smile, it doesn't have to be a verbal communication, but people just don't do it. And there's a lot of reasons people don't do it. Some people are moving from a car culture, and its just not their experience, and some people are moving from other densely populated urban places where that's just not the culture. But what the impetus was for me was to launch the "Hi campaign" was that I started noticing that the old neighbors stopped saying hi, to *me*, because I think they've learned that people don't say hi back to them. So that was really depressing to me because I know how important that part of our community was to a lot of people living here.<sup>231</sup>

The effort was a good one, although it did make some new residents, like Ethan Arnheim, a bit apprehensive, who felt that in other cultural contexts this kind of greeting may be perceived as aggressive.

Well, I think that for me as a single white male, I don't understand how "hi" in this context is automatically perceived positively... So, how are we certain

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<sup>230</sup> Fyodorova, Maria. Interview with author, July 10, 2015.

<sup>231</sup> Fyodorova, Maria. Interview with author, July 10, 2015.

that in this community that all “hi’s” are positively received? ... it makes me think that there’s not a clear understanding of what makes one hi acceptable and not another... I think that the way to go about creating a community of people who say hi to each other is just more interactions...more occasions to go over to the Park at LeDroit and interact with people so you know them. More occasions for people just to be walking around outside, so you just begin to say hi to them. Like, I know enough of the people in the alley now, that its pretty regular that I do a head nod at least if not a hi maybe a stop and chat. But its not because there’s a “Hi campaign.”<sup>232</sup>

Ultimately what the “Hi campaign” speaks to is a rapid change in the population of the neighborhood. The new population is more diverse ethnically, as measured in the U.S. Census [Figure 3] and perhaps experientially, as new residents don’t necessarily have family ties to the area as in past decades. Hence, the new population has brought different expectations and ideas about community engagement and public space to their new environments. While it may be easy to dismiss this as an insignificant and perhaps inevitable change, the frequency that this topic was addressed when asked about perceived changes in the neighborhood speaks to deeper concerns. There are clear connections to the feeling of displacement that some long-term residents expressed in the anecdotes of minor rejection that these interactions represent. While the “Hi campaign” itself was not a general success, mostly because of the short-lived nature of the formal programs which were in place for less than a year, it does highlight the need for a conscious approach to preserving the intangible heritage and culture of a historic district while also preserving the physical space. If preservationists want to create environments that not only retain the material artifacts of the past, but maintain some of the culture that was cultivated within those places, then emotional constructs of space will also have to become part of the narrative to be preserved. LeDroit Park residents expressed many emotional constructs of space

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<sup>232</sup> Arnheim, Ethan. Interview with author. June 23, 2015.

throughout the interviews, such as the connection to historical figures who have lived in the neighborhood, and the negative reaction to even symbolic enclosures or fences. Communal knowledge such as how to use or not use space is the foundation of placemaking, and preservationists need to be sensitive to these constructs when determining how to preserve not just the buildings but the community in the buildings if preservation is not to be seen as a tool for intentional residential displacement.

### **Conclusion**

In the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, LeDroit Park experienced some of the most rapid change in demographic and physical character since the process of desegregation began at the turn of the previous century. The historic district had been designated for nearly 25 years before these changes occurred. Interviews for this project revealed that while the historic nature of the housing in LeDroit Park contributed to many new resident's choice to move to the area, there were many other factors that shaped their decision. These other factors include investments in major infrastructure like mass-transit accessible to the neighborhood; changes in the political administration of the city that focused on quality of life factors such as crime reduction, creating an atmosphere that encouraged individual investment; and, specifically in LeDroit Park, localized restoration of vacant buildings owned by Howard University, which energized individual homeowners to renew their property as well.

The physical changes in LeDroit Park have resulted in demographic changes, as newer residents are more diverse in age, ethnicity, and income. The renewed density of the neighborhood and diversity has led to positive changes such as

increased services in close proximity. New restaurants close to the neighborhood do a brisk business in evenings and on weekends. Many long-term informants mentioned that it was difficult to get food delivered or find necessities such as dry cleaning and hardware stores within walking distance of the neighborhood only a few years ago, but with the new development around LeDroit Park in conjunction with the renewal of the historic district, residents have many choices and opportunities for commerce nearby.

The population changes have not been without challenges, as this new diversity of people has meant a diversity of opinion and approach to issues such as friction between the college population and homeowners; in the past there was a community understanding that students needed guidance in how to live within an established community, and now there is occasional conflict when clashes of opinion arise with regards to issues like noise and the use of public space. While gradual population change allowed new residents to become integrated into the customs of the neighborhood, the more rapid change experienced in the past two decades has meant that even those long-term residents who have not left feel a sense of loss. The residents of LeDroit Park never intended the historic district to be frozen in time, either physically or socially. However, there is value in exploring how communities can actively cultivate and sustain culture as part of the physical preservation process. The final chapter explores recommendations and strategies for preserving intangible heritage as part of a more inclusive historic preservation practice.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

### Introduction

This study began with an exploration of the perceived relationship between historic district designation and gentrification, but evolved into an exploration of the ongoing process of placemaking in historic districts. Gentrification, a term that is applied broadly in both popular press and scholarly literature to describe observed demographic changes in 21<sup>st</sup> century cities around the world, was first noted in London and New York in the 1970s. Scholars described gentrification as the process of higher-income individuals moving into lower-income urban neighborhoods and driving up housing values, resulting in increasingly expensive spaces, escalating taxes, and displacement of lower-income residents. A historic district is a contiguous group of structures, often a residential neighborhood that collectively illustrates a historical narrative. The buildings are preserved as tangible artifacts, but the residents, integral to the historic narrative being preserved, change over time. Within both gentrification and historic preservation literature, there are references to the role that historic districting plays in making an area more desirable to wealthier individuals, and thus may act as a harbinger if not a catalyst for displacement of current residents. This project focused on that relationship more deeply, to investigate the connection between preserving a neighborhood and rapid residential change.

The research questions and methodology employed in this project were designed to examine the multifaceted phenomenon of displacement in urban neighborhoods, and in particular to explore the role that race may play in the process

of change. Because the explanation of gentrification varies greatly from a market-based phenomenon where lower-income people are replaced with higher-income people based solely on changing demand, to a racially charged interpretation that is rooted in discriminatory housing policies, the questions posed in this investigation were a set of interrelated queries about the role of historic preservation in shaping urban residential patterns, ranging from whether historic districts always result in displacement of residents and, if so, within what time frame, to how the historic district process and stewardship can change residents' social ties and experience of place.

The research focused on a single case study, the LeDroit Park historic district, located in Washington, DC. This narrow focus allowed exploration not only of demographic patterns over time in the small, tightly constricted area, but also enabled extensive interviewing of informants within the community who shared their perceptions of change, a powerful factor in the shaping of place. Because historic preservation practice concentrates much of its efforts on the material culture of cities, it was also necessary to extensively research the physical evolution of this one neighborhood within the context of the city of Washington and its connections to the broader social constructs within the area. This multi-faceted approach was key to understanding and unpacking the process of gentrification and how it impacts and transforms communities. Gentrification is often distilled into simple causal narratives about economics, such that prevention seems untenable because effective interventions would be too cumbersome. However, this research demonstrates that markets are shaped by financial and emotional investments in places, and these two

factors drive demographic change. Displacement occurs because of rising prices, but it also occurs because residents feel disconnected from their neighborhoods during periods of rapid change. Preservation can help mitigate this negative effect of gentrification by not only focusing on the material preservation of structures, but by also working to preserve the intangible heritage and culture of the residents of historic districts. Historic residential districts are not merely significant for the historic structures and physical spaces that make up the tangible space, but also have customs and historic narratives, an intangible heritage that is shared among residents and defines the place. It is through an inclusive approach to preservation that established residents can maintain and pass on the emotional constructs of place that are the key to sustainable communities.

### **Research Findings**

The historic district in LeDroit Park was created in 1974 as a grass roots effort by an activist group of African American residents in reaction to Howard University's plan to expand its campus to the south and demolish structures in the neighborhood. The text submitted for the nomination process highlighted both the romantic suburban design of the neighborhood and the collection of Victorian cottages, many designed by noted local architect James H. McGill, as illustrative of a national suburban movement and unique within the boundaries of Washington, DC. The nomination also acknowledged some of the prominent African Americans who lived in the neighborhood throughout its history and made significant contributions to the civil rights movement, law, government and science, but made no connection between the

physical design and these prominent residents. The historic district designation process did not immediately lead to major changes, either demographic or physical, in the neighborhood. In fact, with the exception of the structures owned by the university which were vacant and deteriorating, the historic district's population and buildings remained relatively stable for the next twenty-five years, with limited investments from the city.

It was not until the early 2000s that major changes were observed in LeDroit Park. Two indicators of change were the decennial census that revealed a shift in the racial composition of Census Tract 34 from 94% black in 2000 to 79% black in 2010 [Figure 3], and the change in sale prices in the neighborhood, which doubled in the five-year period from 1999-2003 [Figure 59]. Though these price changes were partially due to the national housing bubble, where prices rose precipitously, LeDroit Park and the District housing values only fell moderately during the subsequent crash, indicating that the increase was due largely to increased demand and improvements in infrastructure rather than market volatility. These changes were driven by a multi-pronged series of investments in the neighborhood, the city, and the region. Locally, Howard University began a process of renewal of university-owned vacant properties in 1998. Dictated by the restrictions of the historic district, the University restored and sold a majority of the properties to their employees, demonstrating commitment to the neighborhood and inspiring private investment as well. The condition of some university-owned structures was too poor to restore, and so they were demolished and a careful process of infill was undertaken in partnership with non-profit housing companies to create some affordable housing units within the historic district.

City-wide, there was a great deal of investment in controlling crime, balancing the city budget, and improving city services such as trash removal, road repair, and schools, a process which began in earnest with the election of Mayor Anthony Williams in 1999. Specifically in LeDroit Park, these policies resulted in safer streets and growth in neighborhood businesses, which pleased long-time residents and attracted new residents. Regionally, the major investment in the Green Line of Metro Rail was completed in September of 1999 with the opening of the Petworth and Columbia Heights stations, linking LeDroit Park and other neighborhoods along this line to the vast network of mass-transit in the Washington Metropolitan area. This convenient transit connection increased the desirability of LeDroit Park as an inner city neighborhood with a distinctive architectural character.

In speaking with neighborhood informants ranging in tenancy from less than a year to a lifetime, it became clear that both the physical character and historical narrative of the neighborhood had influenced decisions to locate in and stay in LeDroit Park. Extensive archival research was conducted to put reactions to the contemporary physical and cultural evolution of the neighborhood in context, analyzing the physical, social, and political influences that shaped LeDroit Park as it is experienced today.

Focusing on the physical aspects of the neighborhood, Chapter Two explored the initial platting and construction of LeDroit Park as a romantic suburb, with intentional gestures of exclusivity through gently curving streets off the city grid that were encircled by a fence to provide security from strangers. Informally maintained for the first 20 years as a gated white enclave, LeDroit Park had a necessarily fraught

relationship with nearby Howard University, a school created for equal education for all races. Current residents regarded the open lawns, Victorian architecture, and street structure as an important aspect of their choice to live in LeDroit Park, but nearly every informant was also aware of the neighborhood's early history of racial exclusion. While the architecture and neighborhood design was the essence of the historic district nomination, it does not seem to be the driving factor behind the diversifying neighborhood population.

Chapter Three, focused on social changes in the neighborhood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, explored the evolution of LeDroit Park from gated white suburb to privileged black city neighborhood. Though the physical fence was removed, LeDroit Park retained a sense of elitism, as notable African Americans congregated in the neighborhood of gracious houses and manicured greenery. Often called the Black Intelligentsia, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century residents were active in education and civil rights reforms, challenging racial strictures through creation of parallel black institutions like Industrial Bank, and open protest such as the Red Summer of 1919. This historical narrative was a small but essential part of the historic districting process, and played a role in some resident's choice to live in the district, but does not seem to be a key factor in contemporary residential change.

Examining the interwar years, Chapter Four looked at the contribution that the physical structure of LeDroit Park made in creating a black enclave. As racial segregation became more explicit in Washington, the lack of major through streets in the neighborhood lent a secluded atmosphere to the area and nurtured a sense of safety and security from the indignities and dangers of the city at large. This sense of

safety was created by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century developers for their white clients, but served the black resident's need for a racial enclave as a bulwark against racial discrimination. The sense of safety and seclusion not only nurtured black artists and scholars in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but has attracted a new generation of more racially diverse residents to LeDroit Park looking for a less dense but accessible urban environment in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. This feeling of seclusion in LeDroit Park contributed to new resident's choices, but also influenced established residents to remain through challenging times in the city. The security of the area did not cause gentrification, but was an attractive aspect of the neighborhood to new and established residents alike.

Chapter Five analyzed the larger political landscape that affected LeDroit Park through the dismantling of legal segregation. Residents of LeDroit Park championed Supreme Court cases that decided national policies on racial integration, first in 1948 with the rejection of racially-based covenants on house sales, and then in 1954 with school desegregation. These legal decisions opened options for African Americans to move throughout Washington, DC, and LeDroit Park lost the cache as an elite neighborhood, becoming part of a network of black neighborhoods in an increasingly black majority city. These circumstances set the stage for gradual neighborhood decline. Structures in LeDroit Park became undervalued for their size, materials, and historical attributes, a precursor to economic gentrification driven by market correction.

Disinvestment in LeDroit Park is explored in Chapter Six. A combination of long-term federal loan policies that did not favor urban houses or African American

neighborhoods and an expansion plan by Howard University to demolish houses in the neighborhood resulted in physical decay in the LeDroit Park neighborhood. With the establishment of the historic district in 1974, the city began to make small investments in the community, which eventually paid off when larger infrastructure changes were made at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, as explored in Chapter Seven.

Thus gentrification was not caused by the designation of the historic district, and in fact the districting process halted the university expansion plans, a major intervention that would have changed the physical and social networks drastically. The historic district did however contribute to the desirability of the housing, particularly after major infrastructure investments were made within and around LeDroit Park. Economic displacement, the rapid removal of residents that is a result of gentrification and escalating prices, is not evident in the data. The number of home sales before and after the Howard University Initiative and other interventions is relatively stable, indicating that the improved environment did not push out a majority of residents, though there clearly has been residential turnover.

This extensive social and physical history of LeDroit Park is not merely background information, but a rich matrix into which contemporary residents construct their emotional understandings of place. People use their knowledge of the spaces and historical narratives to construct an understanding of their environment and what their place is in that continuing story. Many informants expressed that they had observed rapid demographic changes in the neighborhood. Though the scale of racial change in LeDroit Park has been modest relative to the city at large, the neighborhood has declined from nearly 100% African American in 2000 to

approximately 80% in 2010 [Figure 3], the change has been swift. It is the pace of change that appears to have most radically impacted the social constructs that are part of the intangible heritage, linked inextricably with the physical and historical landscape of LeDroit Park. Gradual change in residents may have allowed for a process of acceptance of local customs and culture, as described by earlier generations. However, multiple informants expressed a sense of loss of shared cultural norms, particularly focused on the close-knit feeling reflected in greeting one another on the streets of the neighborhood. Though not part of the historic fabric, this culture of greeting was significant for many generations and as it diminishes, is an indicator of cultural displacement or change.

### ***Recommendations***

This dissertation recommends three areas of action that can address the loss of intangible heritage in LeDroit Park and hopefully diminish the sense of alienation among long-term residents, which may ultimately lead to physical displacement. The first area is to acknowledge the associative history of the neighborhood with the same level of formality as the architectural history. According to the 1978 report by Lynch, Carr, and Associates, while the neighborhood's buildings are important, it is the associative history that is most significant: "In sum, LeDroit Park is a remarkably preserved specimen of an early romantic suburb, in which street and house designs were coordinated by one good hand. More than that, LeDroit Park has played a central role in the history of the black leadership of this city."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Carr, Lynch, and Associates. 1979 "LeDroit Park Conserved" p. 12.



Figure 73: Unveiling ceremony, heritage trail signs, October 17, 2015.

A major step toward acknowledging and formalizing this history for new residents was made during the time this research was conducted. A long-anticipated heritage trail consisting of 13 signs in the LeDroit Park/Bloomingdale neighborhoods was officially unveiled in October 2015 [Figure 73]. Part of a city-wide effort of DC Cultural Tourism, these engaging signs make clear to visitors and residents alike the accomplishments of generations of African American residents in these two neighborhoods. This is a significant accomplishment and makes visible on the landscape stories and narratives that shaped the neighborhood and the city. In order to continue and extend this work, residents should be encouraged to compile individual house histories that have been informally gathered, beginning in the 1960s with the Civic Association, and publish them online, as a companion piece to the heritage trail.

The second action area is to integrate the physical and cultural preservation strategies in the neighborhood. The buildings, streets, and green spaces in the LeDroit Park historic district have been lovingly restored, so there should be a systematic way to restore and preserve the intangible heritage as well. To begin this work, it is recommended that residents of the historic district create a system of mentorship for new residents, which would address both physical and cultural stewardship of the neighborhood. Several informants expressed that the historic district permitting process felt very opaque and confusing, until they had actually gone through the process and made some mistakes to learn how to work within the regulations. If new residents are welcomed into the neighborhood by a resident who has already made those mistakes, and shares their knowledge of the process, it could

make any planned renovations much easier and less stressful for the new owner.

Through this mentoring relationship, the new resident would also be introduced to the important customs and heritage of the neighborhood, and even of their house.

I experienced just this kind of mentorship when I became a resident of the neighborhood nearly two decades ago, and though not formalized, it was clearly an intentional action to share the customs and history of the neighborhood, to make me feel a part of the larger story. Just after moving into the historic district I did a great deal of archival research on our house on my own, which provided broad information about who had lived there, their occupations, and physical changes to the structure. Both Ms. Chase, the seller of our house and our next-door neighbor, Dr. James Hill shared stories, anecdotes, and eventually photos and paintings of past residents that provided depth to the stories. It is a richness of narrative that just can't be captured in the archives, and it deserves to be preserved and passed on to the next owners as well as visitors to the area. Most of this information was shared with me over many evenings sitting and talking on the porch, being introduced to the culture of greeting one another within the neighborhood. Since this is such an important aspect of LeDroit Park heritage to many residents, it could be explicitly passed on through the mentoring relationship. Unlike the permitting process for brick and mortar changes, intangible history must be preserved through the conscious action of sharing these stories and customs.

Over time, the house and neighborhood history has become part of my identity, an important component of heritage preservation. In his book on families and identity, *Far from the Tree*, psychologist Andrew Solomon describes two kinds

of identity, vertical, which is passed from one generation to the next through the sharing of some traits, whether physical, like hair color, or cultural, like language, and horizontal identities, which are inherent or acquired traits that define individuality from the family. Solomon examines this idea in terms of disabilities like deafness and human variations like being gay, but it is also applicable in terms of acquired geographic identity. As new people move into LeDroit Park, they will likely acquire the location as part of their complex construct of personal identity. However, it is tough to navigate geographic identity in a racially-specific enclave when the ethnicity of the new residents may vary from the historical norm. It will be important to find ways for all new residents to embrace the African American history of the neighborhood without colonizing it. This could be accomplished, at least in part, by making sure that the history of segregation and how those forces shaped LeDroit Park are explicitly part of all histories, whether written or oral.

This introduces the third area of action that is recommended to address the issue of emotional displacement, where established residents feel excluded from the positive effects of change and the ongoing process of placemaking. This disconnection from community may lead to physical displacement and a loss of cultural continuity. To address this rend in the fabric of the community, neighbors need to renew the sense of safety that the enclave design of the neighborhood provided. A long-term solution would be to establish a Site of Conscience in the neighborhood, and invite dialogue about contemporary issues of race and unrest tied to the historical figures and narratives within the neighborhood.<sup>234</sup> Because of

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<sup>234</sup> The International Sites of Conscience is an alliance of historic sites around the world whose mission is “Memory to Action.”

multiple incidents of violence during the summer of 2015 while I was conducting research, including the death of Freddie Gray in neighboring Baltimore, many informants mentioned not only the racial climate within the neighborhood, but also the need for a place for dialogue about these issues on a broader scale. Establishing a space for this dialogue would extend the work of the many generations of civil rights activists who lived in the neighborhood. Howard University owns the National Historic Landmark Mary Church Terrell House, home of the formidable civil rights activist, located on T Street in the heart of the neighborhood. The university is currently undertaking a process to determine an economically self-sustaining solution to the restoration and use of that building. There have been long-term plans to turn at least a portion of the site into a museum to the neighborhood and its famous residents, but because of financial constraints at the university, it will by necessity be a multi-use structure. By using the model of the Tenement Museum in New York City to bring the Terrell House to life, Howard University could use the museum as a center for dialogue about racial issues in contemporary society. The center could occupy part of the structure, and the remainder could be used for compatible revenue generating activities like an alumni house, a bed-and-breakfast for alumni visiting Washington.

This research process has been an intense investigation into a single case study site, to analyze the multiple factors that have affected demographic change in the historic district. This investigation has revealed that while historic districting does eventually change the dynamic between residents and may be a catalyst for change, it is by no means the only factor that leads to displacement, either physical or

emotional. Though the conclusions and recommendations from this research are very place specific, the project is replicable in other urban historic districts, or areas that are eligible as historic districts. There are many ethnic enclaves in the United States that could possibly benefit from the use of historic districting as a tool to control change, but much of the literature implies that this will lead directly to gentrification and displacement. By applying this multi-method process which combines informant interviews with analysis of demographic, physical, and political change, residents could discern the interrelated factors that shape their own neighborhoods, and make a more informed decision about using the tool of historic districting.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey of Current Residential Forms in the LeDroit Park Historic District

Survey conducted in 2015 of all of the residential forms in the LeDroit Park Historic District showing the varied urban fabric that has developed over the 140-year history.

#### T Street

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>500 Block T Street</b>	North Side	3		2	1	
	South Side		4	9		
<b>400 Block T Street</b>	North Side	1		9		
	South Side		6			
<b>300 Block T Street</b>	North Side	1		17		
	South Side		1	12		
<b>200 Block T Street</b>	North Side	1		4		
	South Side			4	1	

#### U Street

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>600 Block U Street</b>	North Side			11		1 church
	South Side			3		
<b>500 Block U Street</b>	North Side	1	2	15	1	
	South Side	1		7	3	
<b>400 Block U Street</b>	North Side	4	6			
	South Side		10			
<b>300 Block U Street</b>	North Side		4	10		
	South Side			14		

#### Elm Street

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>400 Block Elm Street</b>	North Side			15		
	South Side			12		
<b>300 Block Elm Street</b>	North Side			19		
	South Side			19		
<b>200 Block Elm Street</b>	South Side	3		2	2	

<b>6<sup>th</sup> Street</b>		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>1900 Block</b>	East Side			9		
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Street</b>	West Side			11		

<b>5<sup>th</sup> Street</b>		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>1800 Block</b>	East Side			9		
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Street</b>	West Side			4		
<b>1900 block</b>	East Side			3		
<b>of 5<sup>th</sup> street</b>	West Side		2	4		
<b>2000 block</b>	East Side			3		
<b>of 5<sup>th</sup> street</b>	West Side			2		

<b>4<sup>th</sup> Street</b>		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>1800 Block</b>	East Side		8	11		
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Street</b>	West Side			14	2	
<b>1900 block</b>	East Side			10	1	1 store
<b>of 4<sup>th</sup> street</b>	West Side			5		

<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Street</b>		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>1800 Block</b>	East Side	2		6	1	
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Street</b>	West Side			10		
<b>1900 block</b>	East Side		2	6	1	
<b>of 3<sup>rd</sup> street</b>	West Side	1		16	2	1 Elks Lodge

**2<sup>nd</sup> Street**

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>1800 Block 4<sup>th</sup> Street</b>	West Side			10		
<b>1900 Block 4<sup>th</sup> Street</b>	West Side			21		1 store

**Rhode Island Avenue**

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>200 Block Rhode Island Avenue</b>	North Side			7		3 churches
<b>300 Block Rhode Island</b>	North Side				1	1 social services building

**Florida Avenue**

		Single Family detached	Duplex	Row House	Multi- family	commercial
<b>400 Block Florida Avenue</b>	North Side			18		1 restaurant
<b>500 Block Florida Avenue</b>	North Side			21		2 services, 2 restaurants
<b>600 Block Florida Avenue</b>	North Side			10		1 church, 1 service

Appendix 2: LeDroit Park Interviews, Conducted Summer 2015.

Name	age	role in community	date of interview	years in LeDroit Park
Pete Morelewicz	42	resident	5/31/2015	18
Doug Newcomb	50s	resident	6/1/2015	6
Derek Younger	50s	resident	6/1/2015	6
Richard Myers	70	resident	6/15/2015	15
Natalie Andrews*	49	resident	6/15/2015	22
Rachel Callahan	30	Dir. of Common Good City Farm	6/15/2015	2
Eric Fidler	30	resident	6/16/2015	6
Mechelle (Mikki) Baylor	63	resident	6/17/2015	63; 3rd generation
Jenny Suzdak	24	resident	6/17/2015	1
Kevin Coy	44	resident	6/17/2015	12
Angel Rios		resident	6/17/2015	3
Jeehye Kim	31	resident	6/18/2015	1
Becky Nichols*	34	resident	6/19/2015	2
Betty Pair	72	real estate agent	6/22/2015	38 in real estate
Ethan Arnheim	35	resident	6/23/2015	5
Petra Gardner*	32	resident	6/23/2015	4
Von Robinson	38	resident	6/24/2015	10
Catherine Adams*	40	resident	6/24/2015	10
Wendy Johns*	43	resident	6/25/2015	1.5
Zeba Floyd	53	resident	6/26/2015	10

Name	age	role in community	date of interview	years in LeDroit Park
Robert Sullivan	upper 50s	resident	6/29/2014	10
Dr. James K Hill	80	resident	7/1/2015	30
James Campbell*	52	resident	7/2/2015	16
Brian Footer	31	resident	7/5/2015	1.5
Heather Samuelson*	39	resident	7/7/2015	8
Yayo Grassi	67	resident	7/9/2015	26
Ashley Jefferson	31	resident	7/9/2015	Family= 50+ years; she has been here 2 yrs
Maria Fyodorova	42	resident	7/10/2015	9
Jane Freundel Levey	n/a	Historian Cultural Tourism DC	7/10/2015	n/a
Maybelle Taylor Bennett	n/a	Director of Community Association HU	7/20/15	23 years working with HU and community
Donna Morris	67	resident	7/25/15	17
Charley Pearce*	34	business owner	8/25/15	Less than a year

\* indicates informant who wishes to remain anonymous, a pseudonym has been created and used throughout the findings.

Appendix 3: Timeline of Events Impacting LeDroit Park.

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
<b>1860</b>	<p>1862 horse-drawn trolley built on 7<sup>th</sup> street</p> <p>1867 Howard University Chartered by Congress; is the first school south of Mason-Dixon line to be explicitly dedicated to biracial education</p>		
<b>1870</b>	<p>1871 Organic Act—integrates Georgetown into Washington City</p> <p>1873 developers buy 55 acres and create LeDroit Park, exclusive gated white community</p> <p>1877 building regulations in city prohibit dwellings of wood frame, must be brick to prevent fire</p>	<p>1870 M Street School precursor opens to give classical education to African Americans in DC</p> <p>1873 national economic panic; many lost jobs in DC, African Americans hardest hit</p> <p>1875 Civil Rights Act/Enforcement Act—Reconstruction era law that guaranteed African Americans equal treatment in public accommodations, transportation, and jury duty [determined to be unconstitutional by Supreme Court in 1883 in all states, but stays legal, if not enforced in DC and territories]</p>	<p>1871 Organic Act—combines federal core, Washington County and Georgetown into Metropolitan area, under single jurisdiction</p> <p>1873-4 Alexander Boss Shepherd, Governor of the City of Washington</p> <p>1874-1967 because of alleged corruption, home rule taken away and city run by appointed board of Commissioners</p> <p>1874 Freedman’s Bank fails</p> <p>1875 Civil Rights Act passes— Reconstruction Law, includes section on non-discrimination in</p>

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
<b>1880</b>	<p>1880 development corporation takes over building, and LeDroit Park begins to densify</p> <p>1888 city passes suburban subdivision regulation bill, so streets etc will conform with L'Enfant plan</p> <p>1888 motorized street cars begin to appear</p>	<p>1888 unrest from surrounding communities, leads to fence being torn down and immediately replaced</p>	<p>public accommodations</p> <p>1883 Civil Rights Act of 1875 declared unconstitutional for states, but stays valid in DC</p>
<b>1890</b>	<p>1890s lots in LeDroit Park are subdivided and developed by many small builders, rather than by Barber and Co—diversifying size, style, and density</p> <p>1891 wooden baseball stadium constructed on 7<sup>th</sup> St adjacent to LeDroit Park</p> <p>1889 PL225 extends city road names and maintenance into LeDroit Park</p>	<p>1891 fence torn down again and not replaced</p> <p>1892 purpose-built school constructed on M Street for classical education of African Americans</p> <p>1893 Octavius Williams and family becomes first black homeowner in LeDroit Park and begin process of racial integration</p>	<p>1890 Boundary Avenue renamed Florida Avenue</p> <p>1892 Congress passes law banning new alley dwellings in DC (based on report from 1877)</p>
<b>1900</b>	<p>1900 census, City of Washington expands north of Boundary</p>	<p>1900 Andrew Hilyer creates Union League directory of black</p>	<p>1902 LeDroit Park Civic Association formed; oldest civic</p>

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
	Street, and imposes city grid onto suburban streets in LeDroit Park	businesses to take stock of racial progress and to encourage black patronization of black-owned businesses	association in Washington, DC (replaces LDP citizens association, who opposed tearing down fence); Civic Associations tended to serve African American Communities
	1902 McMillan Reservoir opens	1902 Armstrong Vocational School opens	
	1907-1919 Olmsted Jr's plan for Park implemented		
<b>1910</b>	1911 original wooden stadium burns, and reconstructed in steel in three weeks	1910 Howard Theater built 1910 YWCA for African Americans established in LeDroit Park  1911 Omega Psi Phi, first black fraternity, established at Howard University, first housed in Terrell's house at 326 T Street in LeDroit Park	1914 Alley Dwellings Act passed at urging of First Lady Edith Wilson; later determined to be unconstitutional
		April 1917-November 1918 US involvement in World War I	
		1917 Industrial Bank established	
		1918 (by end of World War I) LeDroit Park becomes majority black enclave	
		1919 in July 5 days of unrest erupts at 7 <sup>th</sup> and T—returning black veterans	

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
<b>1920</b>	1920—last substantial single family housing built until 1980s	<p>demonstrating for equal treatment</p> <p>1920 Griffith renames ball park in his honor, rents park to Negro League games, and other events central to African American community</p> <p>July 5, 1924 Babe Ruth knocked unconscious when trying to get ball in left field stands</p> <p>1925 Columbia Elks Lodge Hall (important black social club) buys former home of David McClelland on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street as headquarters</p>	
<b>1930</b>	City begins to densify, with families taking in boarders and doubling up in response to the economic challenges of the Depression	Great Depression	
<b>1940</b>	<p>c. 1940 elite black residents begin to move to new neighborhoods across city (upper 16<sup>th</sup> street and Brookland)</p> <p>1941 Kelly Miller Apartments (160 units walk up and town houses) built as public housing in</p>		1948 Supreme Court abolishes racial covenants in deeds; opens new areas for African Americans to live, and results in whites moving to suburbs (1948 Supreme Court cases <i>Hurd v Hodge</i> and <i>Shelly v Kramer</i> )

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
	northern part of LeDroit Park		
	1941 McMillan Park closed to public for security of water supply		
<b>1950</b>		April 17, 1953 Yankee Mickey Mantle hits homerun over left-field wall, lands estimated 565 feet from home plate [in front yard in LeDroit Park]	
<b>1960</b>	1965 LeDroit apartments built on 2125 4 <sup>th</sup> Street 124 units disabled and elderly housing public housing; midrise and walk-up buildings	1960s residents compete for historic preservation awards from city for individual restorations amid increasing vacant lots, fires, and threats of Howard University expansion	1967-1975 Walter Washington appointed by Lyndon Johnson as city's first black mayor
	1965 Griffith Stadium demolished to make way for Howard University Hospital	1968 Columbia Elks Lodge Hall demolished to make way for Safeway	
<b>1970</b>		"Chocolate City" term used by Washington's black AM radio stations <a href="#">WOL-AM</a> and <a href="#">WOOK-AM</a> since the early 1970s to refer to the city.	1973 Home Rule declared by Richard Nixon
		1972 Formation of LeDroit Park Historic District Project	1975-1979 Walter E Washington first elected mayor of Washington, DC

	<b>City and Urban Development</b>	<b>Social History</b>	<b>DC Politics and Policy</b>
		<p>1974 Nomination to National Register accepted</p> <p>1975 Chocolate City album released by George Clinton and Parliament—signifies ongoing pride in black community in DC</p> <p>1977 LeDroit Park Historical Society formed</p>	<p>1978 city hires Carr, Lynch and Associates to recommend strategies for conservation in LeDroit Park and Anacostia</p> <p>1979-1991 Marion Barry serves 3 terms as mayor; many policies to built tax base and black owned businesses in the city</p>
<b>1980</b>	1982 Restoration of landscaping in Anna J Cooper Circle, focal point of original rural suburb scheme	Crack cocaine becomes readily available in DC, and the associated crime and violence lead to further disinvestment	1980 Tenant Opportunity to Purchase act passes in response to “real estate boom”
<b>1990</b>	<p>1990 (June) LeDroit Mews Condominiums open; developed by Peoples Involvement Corporation (PIC)</p> <p>1998 Manna completes infill housing (11 units)</p> <p>1998 Howard University-LeDroit Park Revitalization Initiative</p>		<p>1991-1995 Sharon Pratt Kelley serves as first female mayor of Washington</p> <p>1995-1999 Marion Barry serves 4<sup>th</sup> term as mayor</p> <p>1999-2007 Anthony Williams, after serving on DC Control Board, serves 2 terms as mayor</p>
<b>2000</b>	2003 Sorg and Associates wins AIA Honor award for work on Howard University Initiative	2008 housing finance crisis, slows real estate market in city, and nationally	2001 First-Time homebuyers credit extended to 2006

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>City and Urban Development</b></p> <p>2006 apartments at 345 Oakdale, renovated by Manna as condos; originally part of Kelly Miller, but DCHA persuaded by HU to sell to Manna</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social History</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DC Politics and Policy</b></p> <p>2002 Anthony Williams declares that we need to increase city population by 100,000 people in 10 years</p> <p>2007-2011 Adrian Fenty serves as mayor</p> <p>2007 Inclusionary Zoning Act passed</p> <p>2011-2015 Vincent Gray serves as mayor</p> <p>2015-present Muriel Bowser serves as mayor</p>
<b>2010</b>			

Appendix 4: National Register Nomination Form for LeDroit Park

PH0001732

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 FOR NPS USE ONLY  
 ENTRY DATE: **FEB 25 1974**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON:  
**LeDroit Park Historic District**  
 AND/OR HISTORIC: \_\_\_\_\_

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: *Democratized community by the National Park Service*  
 (See No. 7, for boundary description)  
 CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: **Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, D.C.**  
 STATE: **District of Columbia** CODE: **11** COUNTY: **Washington, D.C.** CODE: **001**

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <b>Private institutions</b>

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Multiple private and public ownership**  
 STREET AND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY OR TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ CODE: \_\_\_\_\_



5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Recorder of Deeds**  
 STREET AND NUMBER:  
**6th and D Streets, N.W.**  
 CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **District of Columbia** CODE: **11**

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: **Proposed District of Columbia additions to the National Register of Historic Places recommended by the Joint Committee on Landmarks**  
 DATE OF SURVEY: **1968, revised 1973**  Federal  State  County  Local  
 DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**National Capital Planning Commission**  
 STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1325 G Street, N.W.**  
 CITY OR TOWN: **Washington,** STATE: **District of Columbia** CODE: **11**

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ENTRY NUMBER: **FEB 25 1974**  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE			
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) Subdivision created in 1873			
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	osophy	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	itarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			
<p>The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the LeDroit Park Historic District a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia.</p> <p>Created as a subdivision in 1873, LeDroit Park represents an important aspect in the development of Washington. LeDroit Park is important for several reasons. It is an early example of a planned, architecturally unified subdivision. This development of substantial detached and semi-detached homes, designed by one architect, James H. McGill, was packaged by its developers to become an affluent and exclusive subdivision. The architectural style is borrowed from pattern books influenced by A.J. Downing, and the houses are designed in the style of Italian villas, Gothic cottages and many variations in between. LeDroit Park is also important because it represents an early unsuccessful attempt at integration, and it has served as home for many prominent white and black Washingtonians. Today, LeDroit Park retains much of the same scale and character and most of the architecture that it had at the turn of the century. A walk through the area reveals many of the original freestanding houses scattered among the slightly later brick and frame rowhouses.</p> <p>LeDroit Park was developed by Amzi L. Barber, one of the founders of Howard University. Barber married the daughter of successful real estate broker, LeDroit Langdon, and resigned his post at Howard in 1873. He and his brother-in-law, Andrew Langdon, purchased the tract of land which was developed as LeDroit Park from Howard University for \$115,000 in the form of a promissory note at 7% with no cash payment. In 1874, the Executive Committee of Howard was in financial difficulties and accepted an offer from A.L. Barber and Company for \$95,000 in full payment of Langdon's note.</p> <p>Although the above is probably the most accurate account of the real estate transaction that established LeDroit Park, A.L. Barber and Company put forth an entirely different account in their brochure, "LeDroit Park Illustrated" published in 1877. This account states that LeDroit Park was composed of four tracts formerly known as Miller, Gilman, Prather, and McClelland properties, and that the first three tracts were purchased at different times from June 1872 to March 1873 by Messrs. A. L. Barber and Company, and that McClelland later agreed to unite his property with the above.</p>			
(Continued on Form 10-300a)			

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

James H. McGill's Architectural Advertiser, Washington, D.C., 1879;

A.L. Barber & Co., LeDroit Park Illustrated, Part I, Washington, D.C.: Beresford, 1877.

Much information and help was provided by Mrs. Roland Brown.

Information was provided by Mr. Truax of the Columbia Historical Society.

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

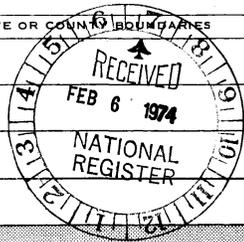
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	38 ° 55 ' 03 "	77 ° 01 ' 18 "				
NE	38 ° 55 ' 03 "	77 ° 00 ' 52 "				
SE	38 ° 54 ' 50 "	77 ° 00 ' 52 "				
SW	38 ° 54 ' 50 "	77 ° 01 ' 18 "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 42.6 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Suzanne Ganschinietz, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Capital Planning Commission

DATE: 11 December 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1325 G Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

CODE: 11

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION	NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION
<p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name: <u>James W. Smith</u></p> <p>Title: <u>Assistant to the Mayor for Housing Programs</u></p> <p>Date: <u>FEB 4 1974</u></p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p><u>Al Montrose</u> Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date: <u>2/25/74</u></p> <p>ATTEST: <u>George F. Emery</u> Acting Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date: <u>Feb 18, 1974</u></p>



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	FEB 25 1974

7. Description - Continued

in this style left in LeDroit Park. Constructed of brick, it is two stories high with a very steep mansard roof and tower with elaborate dormers and decorative brick chimney caps. The iron balustrade above the tower still remains, as do the bracketed cornice and carved wooden bay windows.

The double house on Third and T Streets constructed for General William Birney and Mr. Arthur Birney also has a high mansard roof. The house is in good condition and retains its patterned and scalloped roof, a finial, the elaborate moulded wood cornice and dormers, the window hoods and the wooden supports for the porch.

The house at 201 T Street (later the home of the Frelinghuysen University) still retains some Eastlaskan motifs, especially on the interior, combined with Italian villa style alterations added probably in the 1880's, and reflected in the twisted columns, the hexagonal gazebo with roundheaded stained-glass windows and red-tiled roof, all of which lend an eclectic air to the structure.

Two of the original carriage houses also are standing. One is located behind the house at 325 T Street, N.W. and the other is located at the rear of 1922 Third Street.

The rowhouses, constructed in the late 1800's and 1890's, are primarily low rise brick structures with fine terra-cotta and decorative brick-work. They have rooflines which are frequently accented with turrets, towers, pedimented gables, and iron cresting and combine to provide a varied and rhythmic pattern to the streets. Many of the houses and rowhouses retain decorative iron work fences and balustrades. One feature unique in Washington are the twisted porch columns found in the rowhouses on Third Street near the circle.

The original developers took care in landscaping the area with the planting of ornamental trees and hedges. The circle at the juncture of T and Third Streets provides a focal point for the area and could easily be restored.

Boundary Description

Beginning at the intersection of the west side of Bohrer Street, N.W. extended southwesterly across Florida Avenue, N.W., with the south side of Florida Avenue, N.W., thence southeasterly along the south side of Florida Avenue, N.W. to its intersection with the south side of Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., thence northeasterly along the south side of Rhode Island Avenue, N.W. to its intersection with the east side of Second Street, N.W., thence north along the east side of Second Street, N.W., to its intersection with the north side of Elm Street, N.W. extended east across Second Street, N.W., thence west along the north side of Elm Street, N.W., to its intersection with the east side of Third Street, N.W., thence north along the east side of Third Street, N.W., to its intersection with the north property line of lot 800 in Square 3085 extended east across Third Street, N.W., thence west across Third Street, N.W., along the north property line of said lot 800 and continuing west in Square

GPO 921-724

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7. Description - Continued

3085 along the north property lines of lots 803, 804, 805, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 36, 37, 38, and 39 to the northwest corner of said lot 39, thence east across a 10 foot alley in Square 3085 to the northeast corner of lot 40 in Square 3085, thence east along the north property line of said lot 40 and continuing west in Square 3085 along the north property lines of lots 41, 42, 43, and 44 in Square 3085 to the northwest corner of said lot 44, thence east along the north property line of said lot 44 extended across Fourth Street, N.W. to its intersection with the west side of Fourth Street, N.W., thence south along the west side of Fourth Street, N.W. to its intersection with the north property line of lot 33 in Square 3080, thence west along the north property line of said lot 33 to its intersection with the east property line of lot 34 in Square 3080, thence north along the east property line of said lot 34 to the northeast corner of said lot 34, thence west along the north property line of said lot 34 and continuing west along the north property lines of lots 35, 37, 38, 39, and 40 in Square 3080 to the northwest corner of said lot 40, thence southwesterly across an 11 foot alley in Square 3080 to the northeast corner of lot 817 in Square 3080, thence west along the north property line of said lot 817 and continuing west along the north property line of lots 12, 13, 15, 16, 29, 30, and 31, in Square 3080 to the northwest corner of said lot 31, thence west along the north property line of said lot 31 extended across Fifth Street, N. W. to its intersection with the west side of Fifth Street, N.W., thence south along the west side of Fifth Street, N.W. to its intersection with the north property line of lot 84 in Square 3079, thence southwesterly along the north property line of said lot 84 to the northwest corner of said lot 84, thence southwesterly across a 10 foot alley in Square 3079 to the northeast corner of lot 73 in Square 3079, thence southwesterly along the north property line of said lot 73 to the northwest corner of said lot 73, thence south along the west side of said lot 73 to its intersection with the north side of a 15 foot alley in Square 3079, thence west along the north side of said 15 foot alley to its intersection with the west side of a 10 foot alley in Square 3079, thence southwesterly along the west side of said alley to its intersection with the north side of Bohrer Street, N.W., thence west along the north side of Bohrer Street, N.W., to its intersection with the west side of Bohrer Street, N.W., thence southwesterly along the west side of Bohrer Street, N.W. to the point of beginning.





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8. Significance - Continued

The architect for the development was James H. McGill, a Washington architect and developer, who designed several downtown structures including the LeDroit Building. McGill's sketches for the development were published in two publications which served as prospectuses for the Park. These were "LeDroit Park Illustrated," previously mentioned, and a larger publication, James H. McGill's "Architectural Advertiser", published in 1879. The sketches and floor plans for the houses are very similar in concept to those published in A.J. Downing's sketches and plans in The Architecture of Country Houses which first appeared in 1850. By 1877, 41 houses had been built at a cost of \$200,000. By 1887, approximately 64 houses comprised the subdivision. Today approximately 50 of these remain. This includes both single and double houses. The 1890's and the 1900's are characterized by the brick and frame rowhouses that began to be built between the McGill houses, and, by the turn of the century, the suburb had the character it has today.

LeDroit Park was developed as an exclusively white residential area, and this policy was enforced to the extent that a wall enclosed the area and guards were stationed at the gate to restrict access. Some of the better known residents of this era included General William Birney and Arthur Birney (Professor of Law at Howard), General William Wade Dudley, Benjamin Butterworth, Congressman from Ohio and later Commissioner of Patents, James H. McGill, and many other prominent businessmen and bureaucrats.

The fence which surrounded LeDroit Park became a focal point of unrest between the white inhabitants inside and the blacks who were kept out. Attempts were made through legal actions to have the fence removed, and, in July of 1888, the fence was torn down by protesting blacks. Four days later it was rebuilt, but this incident was the beginning of a movement toward integration of the area. In 1893, a barber, Octavius Williams, became, perhaps, the first black to move into the subdivision. His daughter, Mrs. Gilbert Spears lives in the House at 388 U Street today, and recalls that her father told her often about the time shortly after they had moved into the house and were seated at dinner when a shot was fired into the dining room. The bullet remained in the wall until the children were old enough to see it and appreciate the story. The LeDroit Park area was integrated only a short time, and by the beginning of the First World War, the white families had moved out and the area was almost totally black.

Among the prominent blacks who have lived in Le Droit Park were, Judge Terrell, the first black municipal Judge and his wife, Mary Church Terrell, the first woman member of the Board of Education; Major Christian Fleetwood, Civil War Hero; General Benjamin Davis, first black Army general; and Violinist Clearance Cameron White. Washington's Mayor Walter Washington and his wife today reside in her father's house on T Street. The poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar is reputed to have lived with his wife, Alice Moore, in LeDroit Park.

(Continued on Form 10-300a)

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8. Significance - Continued

The Frelinghuysen University also had its roots in LeDroit Park. This school, founded in 1906 by Dr. Jesse Lawson and Dr. Anna J. Cooper, was established to provide evening education classes for employed blacks who were unable to attend school during the day. Dr. Cooper donated the use of her house at 201 T Street for the school and the school remained at that location until it closed in the early 1960's.



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9. Bibliographical References - Continued

Information was provided by Mrs. Laretta Jackson.

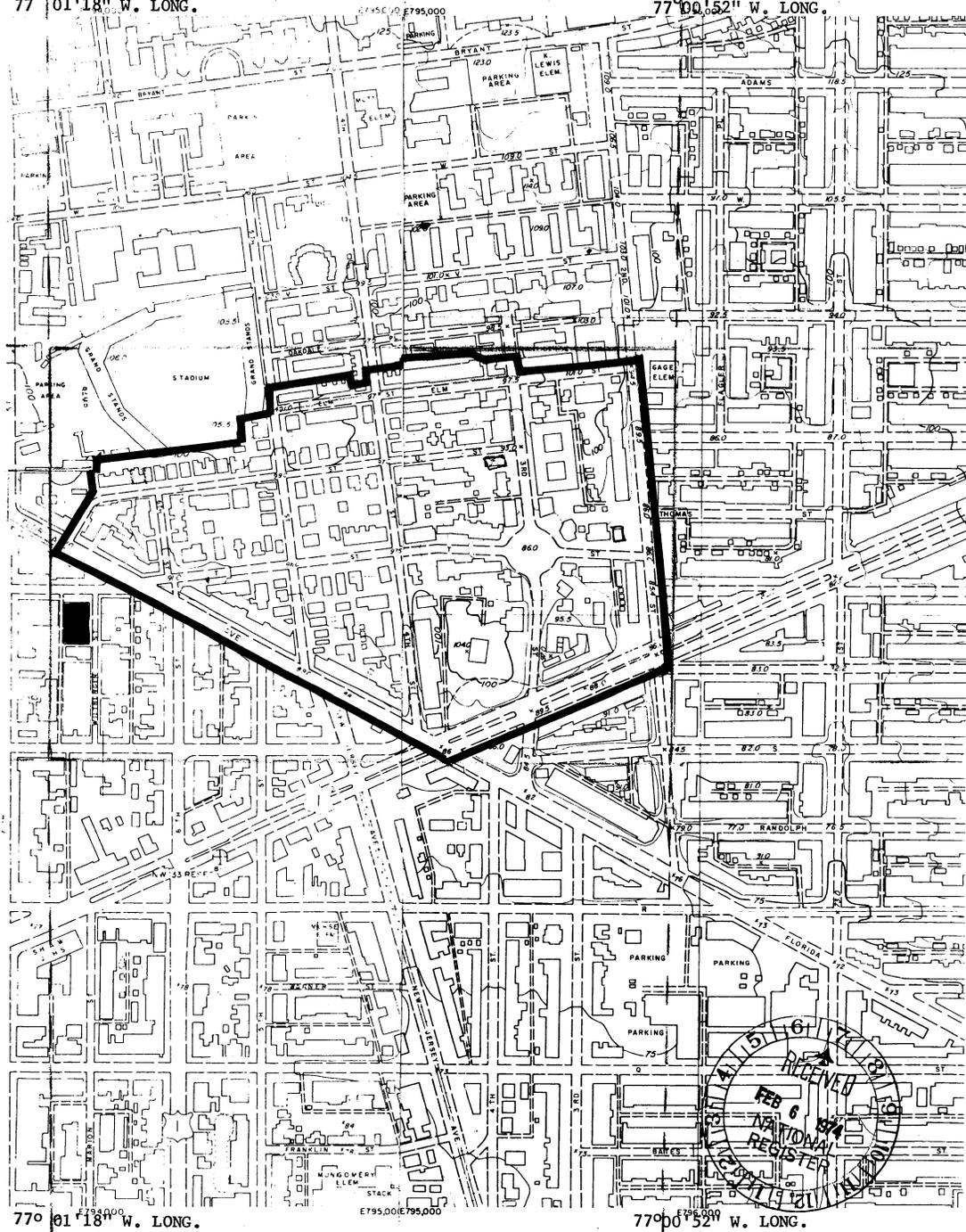
A Study of Historic Sites in the District of Columbia of Special Significance to Afro-Americans, Afro-American BiCentennial Corporation, December 1972, p.87.

Clippings file of the Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Library.



77° 01' 18" W. LONG.

77° 00' 52" W. LONG.



77° 01' 18" W. LONG.

77° 00' 52" W. LONG.

Appendix 5: National Landmark Nomination for the Mary Church Terrell House at 326 T Street NW.

*Theme 961c Theme 8c*  
*Theme 961f*  
 Form 10-300  
 (Rev. 6-72)

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(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
 Washington, D.C.  
 COUNTY:  
 FOR NPS USE ONLY  
 ENTRY DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON:  
 Mary Church Terrell House  
 AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 326 T Street, Northwest  
 CITY OR TOWN:  
 Washington  
 CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
 STATE:  
 D.C. CODE: 11 COUNTY: CODE: 001

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
 Phyllis T. Langston  
 STREET AND NUMBER:  
 1238 "You" Street, Northwest  
 CITY OR TOWN:  
 Washington  
 STATE:  
 D.C. CODE: 11

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
 Recorder of Deeds  
 STREET AND NUMBER:  
 6th and D Streets, Northwest  
 CITY OR TOWN:  
 Washington  
 STATE:  
 D.C. CODE: 11

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
 None Known  
 DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local  
 DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
 STREET AND NUMBER:  
 CITY OR TOWN:  
 STATE:  
 CODE:

STATE: Wash., D.C.  
 COUNTY:  
 FOR NPS USE ONLY  
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 DATE

218.

7. DESCRIPTION	
CONDITION	(Check One)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered <input type="checkbox"/> Moved <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site
DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	
<p><b>I. <u>General Statement</u></b></p> <p>A. Architectural character: This house, built in 1907, has a very simplified Victorian architectural style, commonly used in Washington, D.C. residential structures around 1900.</p> <p>B. Condition: Structurally sound and presently occupied.</p> <p><b>II. Description of Exterior:</b></p> <p>A. Overall dimensions: The total lot acreage is 2,390 square feet. The house consists of three stories. It is semi-detached, the house to the right having been torn down. The main entrance is located on a side porch. The front yard is about 15 feet deep, and the back yard is approximately 20 feet by 50 feet. The third floor is set back from the rear of the house.</p> <p>B. Foundation: Apparently brick on top of a concrete basement floor.</p> <p>C. Wall Construction: Brick walls</p> <p>D. Porch: The porch is elevated above the ground floor and is located on the left side of the house. Its dimensions are approximately 30 feet by 5 feet. The access to the porch entrance is from T Street, three steps above the sidewalk and eleven steps to the entrance level. Entrance to the ground floor is inside the house.</p> <p>E. Firescape: No apparent firescape</p> <p>F. Chimney: Brick, not in working order</p> <p>G. Openings:</p> <p>1. Doors: A single side entrance and two screened back doors which lead to a narrow back porch, about four feet wide, with wood hand railings.</p> <p>2. Windows: All windows are double hung. The first and second floor each have three windows arranged in an angular bay. The third floor has two windows and the attic has one.</p> <p>H. Roof: Asphalt tile</p>	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

222.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE			
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) <u>1863-1954 (Terrell) 1899-1913 (Terrell's occupancy of house)</u>			
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	<u>Afro-American</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	<u>History</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Military		_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		_____
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			
<p>Mary Church Terrell was born in Memphis, Tennessee on September 23, 1863. She received her entire education in Ohio and graduated from Oberlin College with an A.B. in June, 1884. In September, 1885 she went to Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio to teach and in 1887, she came to Washington to teach Latin at the M Street High School. Following the award of her M. A. from Oberlin in 1888 Mary Church went abroad to travel and to study languages. Returning home in 1890 she continued to teach at the M Street High School and in October, 1891 she married the head of the school's Latin department, Robert A. Terrell, who was also a prominent black lawyer.</p> <p>After her marriage, Mrs. Terrell continued her interest in the District's colored school system although she no longer taught in it. In 1895 she succeeded in receiving one of the three appointments to the Board of Education that were designated for women and thereby became the first black woman in the U. S. to be so appointed. Her two six year terms on the board, 1895-1901 and 1906-1911, were distinguished by hard fighting for quality education, fair hiring employment practices, and more adequate appropriations for schools.</p> <p>During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Mary Terrell became interested in the colored women's club movement. When the Federation of Afro-American Women and the Colored Women's League combined in 1896, Mrs. Terrell was chosen President of the resulting organization, the National Association of Colored Women. Under her leadership the Association established a fund to help children, started schools of Domestic Science, discussed the labor question, the Convict Lease system, and Jim Crow car laws. As an acknowledgement of her tireless efforts in the organization, Mrs. Terrell was unanimously voted Honorary President for life.</p> <p>Mary Terrell's concern for black women widened to encompass a concern for the entire women's suffrage movement. She joined the National American Suffrage Association at Susan B. Anthony's request and was friendly with some of the leading feminists of her day. In May, 1908 she was invited, in memory of Frederick Douglass, to the sixtieth anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention in New York. In 1848 Douglass had seconded a resolution by Elizabeth Cady Stanton that demanded equal political rights for women.</p>			

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

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Davis, Elizabeth. Lifting as They Climb. Washington: National Association of Colored Women, 1933.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES	
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE			
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds			
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "			
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "			
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "			
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "			

UTM:18.325160.4309140

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than one acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Marcia M. Greenlee

ORGANIZATION: Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1420 N Street, Northwest

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**      **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____ <i>Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</i></p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____ <i>Keeper of The National Register</i></p> <p>Date _____</p>
--	--

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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Association. The Washington Chapter was forced to reaccept the black woman's application.

At the age of eighty-six, Mrs. Terrell challenged the District of Columbia's failure to enforce the anti-discrimination laws of 1872 and 1873 that applied to various areas of public accommodation. She participated in the Thompson test case of 1950 that provided the Corporation Counsel with the necessary material for litigation based on the 1872 and 1873 laws. The repeated failures of the courts to uphold the laws increased her efforts to have public places of accommodation comply with the old statutes. Economic boycotts of the Hecht Company and the G. C. Murphy stores, in the downtown business district of Washington, finally resulted in the companies' agreements to comply with the old laws.

In June 1953 Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglass delivered the favorable decision of the court on the Thompson case saying, "We have said that the Acts of 1872 and 1873 survived the intervening changes in the government of the District of Columbia and are presently enforceable."

Mrs. Terrell's request to speak before a Congressional committee in April, 1950 in opposition to a bill directed at "un-American" activities symbolized her awareness of the necessity of continual and vigilant surveillance of the rights of other minority groups. The loss of the rights of one group often led to the loss of rights of others. She urged Congress to pass legislation guaranteeing application of the Constitution to protect the rights of all citizens rather than passing legislation to restrict, deny, or deprive people of their rights.

On July 24, 1954 Mary Church Terrell died in Arundel, Maryland while on a visit to the family summer home at Highland Beach. The condolences sent in memory of this remarkable woman from all over the world were a tribute to the esteem in which she was held and a testimony to her continual fight against prejudice and discrimination of all types.

Mary Terrell is of national historical significance for several reasons. She was the first black woman to serve on an American school board. She was also responsible for re-discovering the so-called "Lost Laws" of the District of Columbia which dealt with public accommodations and was successful in her subsequent Thompson restaurant suit that resulted in the 1953 Supreme Court decision ending segregated public accommodations in the nation's capital. Active in the women's suffrage movement and fearless in her expressions of black rights, Mrs. Terrell's social involvement is evidenced by her work as a civil rights activist and as president of the National Association of Colored Women. Her residence in Washington's Le Droit Park, 326 T Street, Northwest, is worthy of the commemoration of this remarkable woman because it is the house in which she lived for the greatest length of time as she involved herself in activities for the achievement of equality for American minorities.

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Mrs. Terrell's fame achieved international proportions in June, 1903, when she gave a speech in Germany at the International Congress of Women on the "The Progress and Problems of Colored Women." The acclaim she received from this speech started her on the lecture circuit across the United States. Most of her talks concerned lynching, colored women, and the race problem in general. In the meanwhile, she developed her literary talents by writing for Washington's The Colored American under the pseudonym of Euphemia Kirk, and for a number of other newspapers and magazines. She also began compiling material for her autobiography, A Colored Woman in a White World which was published in 1940.

Mary Church Terrell carried on her campaign against injustice of any kind all her life. When three companies of black soldiers were dismissed without honor after the Brownsville Affair of 1906, Mrs. Terrell pleaded their case to Secretary Taft of the War Department, seeking a suspension of the dismissal order until an investigation of the affair could be made. A temporary suspension of thirty-six hours was granted, and although the suspension did not prevent the dismissals, it did focus national attention on the injustice. (Fort Brown in Brownsville, Texas, where the Brownsville Affair occurred, is a National Historic Landmark and as a result of research completed earlier by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, the National Park Service's Consulting Committee and Advisory Board have noted its important relationship to Afro-American history.)

During World War I, Mary Terrell worked in the War Camp Community Service, organizing recreational facilities for returning black war veterans. In this way she was able to provide jobs for black women, who were sorely neglected in the employment field, and a service for black military men who were still segregated from their white counterparts. Following the riots of the "Red Summer" of 1919 when widespread racial violence, usually precipitated by white attacks on blacks, swept the country, Mrs. Terrell was a part of an investigative committee of D. C. citizens who looked into charges of the maltreatment of blacks during the affair. Many of the reports by blacks of unjust treatment by white policemen during the violence in Washington, such as those filed by many of the 150-300 blacks who were arrested (as compared to only thirty whites), were substantiated by her committee. The rumored rape of a white woman by a black man that had initially instigated the violence was also proven to be unfounded.

Mary Terrell continued her fight against discrimination by challenging the District's Chapter of the American Association of University Women's policy of racial exclusion in its membership. Resigning her membership in the 1920s because of increased responsibilities, Mary Church Terrell attempted to gain readmission to the organization in October, 1946. Although the local board continually refused to seat her, the national body agreed to do so in June 1949 when the matter was favorably settled at the Seattle convention of the

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(Number all entries) 9 - References

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