

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation:           IMAGINED PASTS, IMAGINED FUTURES:  
RACE, POLITICS, MEMORY, AND THE  
REVITALIZATION OF DOWNTOWN  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

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Through ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and archival research, this study explores differences in people's perceptions of an aging, inner-ring suburb, during a period in which revitalization has transformed its built environment, and its population has become more diverse. To examine how three sets of active residents have thought about and acted in response to transpiring material, social, and cultural changes, my interdisciplinary research draws on methodologies and literatures from anthropology, geography, urban and suburban history, cultural criticism, sociology, and political science. Subjects featured identify as historic preservationists, civil rights activists, and/or through affiliations with an organization devoted to making leadership and civic participation more representative of a multicultural community.

I demonstrate that there are significant differences in perception among members of these three sets, and that these variations stem from divergent individual and collective constructions of reality that are rooted in a range of histories, cultures, values, imaginings, and needs. I show that these different orientations affect how individuals relate to their surroundings, which is then reflected in public discourse. I investigate how these differences are exacerbated by internal group dynamics and external political structures that have kept segments of the community divided during the twenty years that revitalization plans have been debated. I illustrate that a reliance on public hearings as the main form of public discourse deepens adversarial relations by inhibiting dialogue and consequently an understanding of the diverse array of perspectives on the commercial built environment that exist. I convey how internal group dynamics that exclude community members with contrary points of view mirrors what occurs in public hearings, further diminishing the effectiveness of civic groups.

Finally, this dissertation argues that new processes must be designed to assist oversight of revitalization in multicultural communities like Silver Spring, Maryland, a subject that to date has been insufficiently investigated. I contend that unifying diverse segments of such communities is possible if areas of common concern are identified and new forms of cooperative dialogue and practices of leadership pursued.

IMAGINED PASTS, IMAGINED FUTURES: RACE, POLITICS, MEMORY, AND  
THE REVITALIZATION OF DOWNTOWN SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

by

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PROLOGUE:  
CONTEMPLATING SILVER SPRING'S PAST,  
PRESENT AND FUTURE

There are several places from which a person might contemplate Silver Spring, Maryland's past, present, and future. One is from its elevated, outdoor Metro platform. Standing there, you would be surrounded by office towers, high-rise condominiums and apartment buildings. In the distance you would see the flashing yellow marquee and red lights of the American Film Institute (AFI) Silver Theater sign, as well as the mammoth headquarters of Discovery Communications, an international media conglomerate. Decisions by those two firms to relocate their operations to downtown Silver Spring are frequently credited with jumpstarting the central business district's revitalization project.

Casting a glance to the street below you would notice Starbucks Coffee and Einstein Bagel outlets, a sign of commercial growth and the increasing presence of chain businesses in this downtown. You would also observe a steady stream of automobile traffic, and people traveling on foot or by bike. On the platform itself there would be people of all different races, ethnicities, and nationalities, yet another indication of how this aging inner-ring D.C. suburb has changed in recent decades, and how it challenges popular stereotypes of suburbia.



Fig. 1. Discovery Communication headquarters from Metro platform

On the ground you might choose to view and contemplate Silver Spring's past, present, and future in Acorn Park, located just outside the downtown core, a few blocks from the Metro station. In this bit of green space amidst a sea of concrete you would find an historic marker recounting the story of Francis Preston Blair's discovery of this land where he decided to build an estate, "Silver Spring." You would see the location of the dried-up spring and the acorn-shaped gazebo that Blair had built for his wife. You would also notice five, large, brightly colored panels on the building at the edge of the park illustrating scenes from Silver Spring's past. In the location where Blair's mansion once stood, you would spot new condominium construction underway. Casting your glance in the opposite direction you would see that this is only one of several such projects in progress. Part of the façade of the old Canada Dry plant across East-West Highway is being incorporated into new luxury housing and there is a new high-rise development next to it.



Fig. 2. Historic marker, Acorn Park

You might opt to view and contemplate Silver Spring’s past, present, and future from inside the Tastee Diner, one of the community’s most popular gathering places. Walking up Cameron Street, past a new townhouse development, Cameron Hills, you would catch sight of a much larger, cleaned up version of the local hang-out that was moved from a prime piece of real estate in June 2000 to make way for the Discovery headquarters. The somewhat disheveled diner had been at the corner of Georgia and Wayne for over fifty years, so it remains a bit jarring to find it here. Stepping inside you would enter the original dining car, manufactured and shipped from Jerry O’Mahony’s New Jersey company in the summer of 1946. Its counter is still intact but the wooden booths have been removed. While this structure pretty

much *was* the diner on Georgia—its counter crowded with patrons eating breakfast or lunch, waitresses rushing around taking and delivering orders—now nearly all of the customers have moved to more spacious and private seating areas located in dining rooms on either side of it. While Eunice is still on staff—she has been working at the Tastee for nearly the entire time it has been in business—most of the enlarged wait staff is unfamiliar. You would notice that the clientele has changed too. Whereas the Tastee was formerly a popular gathering place mainly for working-class white men, the historically segregated diner now seems just as popular with women as with men, with younger people as with middle-aged and older, with families and professionals as with singles and laborers, and with people of color as with whites. If any building in downtown Silver Spring serves as a barometer of social change, you think, perhaps it is the Tastee Diner.



Fig. 3. Tastee Diner on Cameron Street

To My Parents and Michael

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I am especially indebted to my committee co-chairs. Professor John Caughey has displayed patience and offered gentle guidance, thoughtful questions, astute feedback, and encouragement every step of the way. Before entering the American Studies program at Maryland I knew nothing about ethnography, so would not have guessed that it would become central to my scholarship. Taking a seminar with John was a life-changing experience for me. I value him both as a friend and as a role model. I am equally grateful for the many ways that Professor Mary Corbin Sies has contributed to my scholarship and this project in particular. Like John, Mary was keenly interested in and supportive of the directions my work was taking me. Her knowledge of the fields of cultural landscape studies and the history of suburbia proved indispensable as she critiqued drafts of this study. Mary consistently offered meticulous feedback and posed probing questions that made this a much stronger piece of work than it otherwise would have been. It is impossible to thank Professors

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADSW	Art Deco Society of Washington, DC
AFI	American Film Institute
B & O	Baltimore & Ohio
CDB	Central Business District
CEP	Community Empowerment Program
CEIP	Community Empowerment and Involvement Program
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CSPOSS	Citizens to Preserve Old Silver Spring
ESSCA	East Silver Spring Citizens Association
FHA	Federal Housing Authority
GGARC	Gateway Georgia Avenue Revitalization Corporation
HOC	Housing Opportunities Commission
HPC	Historic Preservation Commission
HRC	Human Rights Commission
LI	Lasting IMPACT
LT	Little Tavern
MARC	Maryland Rail Commuter
MCCF	Montgomery County Civic Federation
M-NCPPC	Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission

MVMA	Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SECO	Suburban Electric Company
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SSCLI	Silver Spring Community Leadership Initiative
SSEZ	Silver Spring Enterprise Zone
SSHS	Silver Spring Historical Society
UEC	Urban Entertainment Complex
UED	Urban Entertainment Destination
ULI	Urban Land Institute
VA	Veteran's Administration
WSSC	Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

## CHAPTER 1:

### COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION THROUGH RESIDENTS' EYES: AN INTRODUCTION

This study is guided by an interest in how civically active residents of local communities conceptualize and respond to changes occurring in their everyday environments. In it I explore how these individuals employ history, personal memory, and politics to make sense of, talk about, and act on the changes occurring around them. I consider how their engagement with downtown revitalization issues has affected the overall process and the resulting social, cultural, and physical landscape. I also demonstrate how discussions and actions surrounding revitalization are made more complicated as communities become increasingly multicultural. Arguing that it is important to consider how revitalization gets experienced "on the ground" in people's everyday lives, and for taking a more complex view of the entire process, I utilize ethnography as my main methodological tool for addressing these concerns.

In examining these issues I have attempted to understand the meaning systems of three categories of active citizens in one particular community, Silver Spring, Maryland. The individuals who comprise these three sets are atypical in terms of the amounts of time and energy that they give to that community. They devote more thought to its history and special qualities than do most residents and in turn give greater attention to what merits preservation. Their identities are intimately connected

to Silver Spring and because of that they approach its transformation more critically than do less active residents. Stemming from these orientations, they engage in ongoing conversations about downtown Silver Spring and attempt through various means to affect what transpires in its built and social environments.

It is important at the outset to emphasize that the subjects of this study are not the most powerful players in the revitalization process. Developers, regional planners, elected officials, and staff members of the county agency overseeing the project all wield far greater influence in decision-making. This is obvious to anyone who reads regional planning documents and/or attends public hearings<sup>1</sup> Randy Mason, in his essay, "Assessing Values in Conservation Planning," labels this group of stakeholders, "insiders." Insiders, he writes, are stakeholders who are "at the table," who participate fully in the process, and are actors with power.<sup>2</sup> Because of their power, these players' roles in shaping or re-shaping the commercial landscape of downtown Silver Spring would be worthy subjects for another study, but are outside the scope of this one.<sup>3</sup>

Of greater interest to me are those individuals and groups who have less power than "insiders" but nonetheless are acutely interested in influencing what happens to the landscapes that are important parts of their everyday lives. Mason terms these stakeholders, "outsiders." He writes that outsiders have a stake, "but little or no leverage" in the processes of planning and preservation. Clyde Woods contends that planners, for example, generally avoid questions of local voices and knowledge in favor of the "modernization-as-progress paradigm and other universal models of growth."<sup>4</sup> And June Manning Thomas notes that, "Government agencies stumble over

what they see as bothersome and meaningless requirements for public hearings and advisory committees. Those which attempt inclusionary planning are likely to experience conflict, distrust, and time-consuming negotiation.”<sup>5</sup> This is something that has been borne out in Silver Spring, writes William Hudnut:

Working with a community is not comfortable for developers....In nine months of intensive consultation...Jim Todd of the Peterson Companies and his partners went to ‘easily’ 40 to 45 meetings in Silver Spring, Maryland, to explain their redevelopment project....Todd warns, ‘All these meetings were a nasty part of the process. It’s not something that we want to do regularly, so it limits the number of public/private partnerships we can take on.’”<sup>6</sup>

Although citizens may be invited into discussions by "insiders," or force their way in, Mason suggests that they generally have little access to making or shaping the most important decisions affecting a site.<sup>7</sup> One result is that the efforts and perspectives of these civic groups and leaders tend to be less widely recognized than those of more powerful individuals and groups, which are accessible through sector reports, site studies, newspaper articles, and government brochures and web sites.<sup>8</sup>

Positing an alternative approach to thinking about power, Steven Gregory, author of *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*, writes: “From my perspective, community describes not a static, place-based social collective, but a power-laden field of social relations whose meanings, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms.”<sup>9</sup> He continues, “For my purposes, politics refers to a diverse range of social practices through which people negotiate power relations.”<sup>10</sup> Gregory’s approach opens up possibilities for power or influence on the parts of those who are frequently depicted as powerless. As my study

illustrates, active residents do have the potential to impact the built environment and the conversations around it in at least minimal ways.

The three sets of resident-stakeholders that I focus on are interesting for many reasons. First, their activities tend to be voluntary, often motivated by strong internal values, including a desire to exert their agency and resist popular trends. Second, they look at the possible consequences of revitalization from a critical stance, placing them outside of the mainstream of the community. And third, they critique the changes occurring from diverse cultural lenses, which often leads to misunderstanding and in some cases, isolation and/or conflict.

The first, and perhaps most vocal in redevelopment and revitalization debates, is the all-volunteer, nearly all-white, Silver Spring Historical Society (SSHS). Fearing that downtown revitalization will mean the continued erosion of architectural elements of the community's commercial landscape—and with them the loss of important markers of the past—this group has become best known for fighting against the demolition of historic structures. The organization's president, Jerry McCoy, is fond of explaining that if no physical signs of the past remain, he and others will be left with nothing to teach the public about the community's history. I sought to find out whether there are shared values or perceptions—a vision of Silver Spring—that motivate SSHS members in their resistance to revitalization plans. I also wanted to learn how representative of the diverse community the SSHS is in terms of membership and perceptions, to explore how inclusive its version of the past is, and to discern what factors are contributing either to organizational growth or stagnancy.

The second set of people I engaged with consists of African American activists in Silver Spring, people like Roscoe Nix and Ruby Rubens who until the late 1960s could not reside, shop, dine, play, or attend school in most sections of the community because of racism and segregation. I wanted to get a sense of their histories with and perceptions of parts of the commercial landscape which preservationists have fought to save. I wanted to discover what has motivated them to become and remain active in the civic life of communities that had excluded them and where, in their view, the "old guard" still reigns. I was eager to learn firsthand from their stories about Silver Spring's past and to see in what ways those memories—whether first- or second-hand—affect how they perceive the present day built environment of downtown Silver Spring and its revitalization. I was curious to find out if there is an image of Silver Spring, either as it has been or could be, that has guided their efforts

The third set of residents I focused on is comprised of individuals involved in IMPACT Silver Spring, a multicultural organization that, like the Silver Spring Historical Society, was founded in response to redevelopment and revitalization plans. I knew that IMPACT's mission involves taking steps to redress power imbalances to see that civic participation and leadership become more representative of the diverse population of Silver Spring. I was also aware that participants in IMPACT's leadership training program are involved either professionally or on a volunteer basis with issues affecting the community, including housing, education, immigration, youth, and small businesses. With that background I wanted to know what knowledge of Silver Spring's past and ideas about its built environment guide

this organization's work and participants. I sought to uncover what specific perceptions of and goals for Silver Spring motivate IMPACT participants and shape their work.

*Listening to Learn, a Grounded Approach to Studying American Cultures*

George Lipsitz has written that, "As a field, American Studies has been at its best when engaged with the complex and conflicted realities of American life and culture. Yet too often its dominant paradigms have suffered from an over-emphasis on what has been articulated within the profession, and a consequent under-emphasis on the voices, power struggles, and ideological conflicts outside it."<sup>11</sup> This tendency to remain detached from people outside their sphere, he contends, has frequently led to unjust representations of American culture, "depicting it as more monolithic and less plural than the realities of American life and history warrant."<sup>12</sup> Gene Wise, an earlier key figure in the field, observed similar challenges facing American Studies scholars. "Academe is a powerful socializing institution, especially for its lifetime inhabitants. It filters the world for scholars, who are tempted to confuse its institutional realities with reality itself."<sup>13</sup> These tendencies have led many in American Studies to advocate the use of fieldwork methods as one corrective. Jay Mechling was among the first to call for moving students of the culture out of the classroom and into communities. "The study of local place as a locus of meanings would be good for the souls of teachers and students in that it would clarify the link between their lives as students of American culture and their lives as Americans."<sup>14</sup>

Like Lipsitz, Wise, Mechling, and French critical theorist Michel de Certeau I am interested in learning about out how people navigate everyday life culturally. In

"Walking in the City," de Certeau contrasts those who strategize from offices in looming skyscrapers, with those who actually use the city, pedestrians at street level. Decision-makers, he contends, are prone to thinking in abstractions and from detached locations, while most people, who he labels "the ordinary practitioners of the city," are to be found living "down below."<sup>15</sup> Michael Peter Smith stresses the value of focusing attention on "the realm of the everyday, i.e., to micro-political relations of power, domination, resistance, and struggle, particularly as these articulate with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, ecology, and locality."<sup>16</sup> Likewise, in this study, I emphasize agency, meaning making, and practices of those groups who live "down below," focusing on what they do with products that have been imposed on them by dominant economic and political orders.

John Fiske, a media scholar who has been criticized for concentrating on practices of media consumption rather than production, points out that making such a choice remains a source of controversy:

The debate over whether theories of agency or of subjectivity offer the more convincing explanations of how people live within capitalist societies has been central in recent cultural theory. Briefly, theories of subjectivity put greater emphasis on the working of the forces of domination, which are usually explained by ideology theory, commodity theory, or psychoanalysis, whereas theories of agency focus more on how people cope with these forces. Because these forces of domination and discipline are relatively homogeneous, subjectivity theories tend to emphasize what is common to all subjects of a particular social order, particularly their consciousness (and subconsciousness). But because the material conditions within which people actually live under these forces vary widely, theories of agency tend to stress diversity.<sup>17</sup>

Again, I am not discounting the vital roles played by those who have produced and are marketing the commercial landscape I have studied. Nor do I want to downplay the important contributions of scholars who write about revitalization and related topics

from the perspective of those who strategize about design, production, and "imageering." Rather, I am making a case for the value of recognizing, examining, and understanding diverse responses to the changes anticipated and that result.

In highlighting agency and multiple responses to revitalization I have turned to ethnography as my primary methodology. Ethnography emphasizes direct involvement with people and communities, with researchers attempting to understand the world through the eyes of participants in a particular social milieu or scene. Mason argues that applying ethnography to communities undergoing change is especially useful for those of us striving to understand the values and knowledge which local populations wish to sustain.<sup>18</sup> Through local narratives, anthropologist S. Elizabeth Bird points out, we learn more about "how people construct their sense of place and cultural identity," than we do about the history of a place.<sup>19</sup> Historian Earl Lewis concurs on the importance of this aim within his field. He writes, "Ironically, in our attempt to write social history from the ground up, urban historians, like most historians, have paid more attention to the accuracy of particular recollections and far less to interpreting those recollections."<sup>20</sup> And planner John Forester highlights how valuable listening to such stories is for those working in his field. "Before we consider options and choices, we must have a decent sense of what is at stake, of who and what is involved, and to whom and to what we need to pay attention."<sup>21</sup>

Another distinguishing characteristic of this methodology is that scholars utilizing it typically do not presuppose that they are experts on the group or phenomenon that they are studying. Rather than arriving on the scene with a hypothesis to be tested and in search of evidence to support it, they approach their

studies as processes of discovery. The people interviewed, observed, and in other ways engaged are the experts.

Also a departure from other methodologies, contemporary ethnographers emphasize the importance of positioning themselves "as an integral part of the action."<sup>22</sup> Those of us who do ethnography recognize that we come to our investigations with frames of references and biases that shape the questions we ask and what we are able to see and not see. Michael Agar explains: "This concern with personality and cultural background of the ethnographer becomes even more critical when you consider that the ethnographer's background is the initial framework against which similarities and differences in the studied group are assessed."<sup>23</sup> Hoggart, et. al. describe how the "investigators' cultural baggage conditions interpretations and values allocated to them."<sup>24</sup> Consequently, ethnographers now typically recognize that research "...is not a passive exercise, but a social encounter extending beyond the research project" and that "questions of gender, class, race, nationality, politics, history and experience shape our research and interpretations of the world, however much we are supposed to deny it."<sup>25</sup>

As a result of this awareness *self*-ethnographic elements have increasingly come to be viewed as pertinent elements of written reports. Caughey writes that ethnography as it was traditionally practiced, "somehow assumed that the job was to understand 'other cultures' not one's own, to culturally understand someone else, not ourselves....The most rigid and conservative models of classic ethnography specifically rejected introspection."<sup>26</sup> In recognizing this shortcoming, he and others promote approaches that acknowledge that the ethnographer's own cultural

experience is a legitimate topic of study. They also endorse the use of storytelling techniques, with the scholar as narrator becoming a character in the unfolding narrative.

For example, here is how David Grazian opens his book, *Blue Chicago*:

It is showtime at B.L.U.E.S., and Tommy McCracken—a hefty, biracial singer and showman in his mid-sixties and one of the hardest-working performers in the club—takes a deep breath and wipes his dripping brow under his colored jet-black hair. He motions his band to lower their volume as they play behind him with a steady drumbeat while the guitar follows a slow riff, and as they quiet down, he begins preaching to his attentive audience as a minister might address his congregation.<sup>27</sup>

A few pages later the author inserts himself into the story by recounting his first encounters with blues bars and how they felt so different from his university experiences:

Perhaps because I felt as alienated from this elitist world (of academia) as any overwhelmed twenty-two-year-old probably should, the university felt like a staged arena of make-believe and artifice, where brainiacs performed for one another in dull soliloquies laced with esoteric verbiage. In contrast, the blues club promised the excitement of real action: the music was loud and fast, the audience was drunk, and the band was usually even drunker.<sup>28</sup>

As his account unfolds, Grazian illustrates what his ethnographic encounters taught him about the constructed and inauthentic qualities of Chicago's blues bars.

Subsequently, he exchanges a social world that had once provided a means of escape and pleasure, for that which he formerly held in some disdain, academia, where he discovers that the desire for authenticity persists, even among his colleagues.<sup>29</sup>

For those of us drawn to ethnography as a method it is often difficult to understand the bewilderment—even aversion—that some scholars seem to have to it. Interacting with people and coming to learn how they theorize or make sense of their social experiences seems richer to us than some forms of academic research, a way of

adding layers of complexity to our knowledge of contemporary life. By contrast, library, archival, and theory- or hypothesis-driven research, by itself, can seem insular, detached, and resistant to confronting and accurately describing the messiness of everyday life and people's experiences of it. The most abstract forms of academic research perpetuate the problems identified by Lipsitz and Wise in the opening of this section.

To discern how local civic activists conceptualize and respond to changes occurring in their everyday built environments led me to a variety of types of venues and exchanges. My main source of interactions came in the form of lengthy, and in most cases, multiple interview sessions conducted with residents. Sessions were often three hours in lengths, and some people were interviewed four or five times, although not always tape recorded. Conversations that began in interview sessions frequently continued through email communication or more informally. The words of many of the people interviewed are featured throughout the pages that follow.

In addition, I participated in the planning and execution of several events and projects with IMPACT Silver Spring and joined the Silver Spring Historical Society (SSHS). To discover what narratives were being produced and circulated by the latter group I took SSHS walking tours on three occasions as well as one offered by the Art Deco Society of Washington. To get a sense of internal dynamics I attended two of SSHS's semi-annual membership meetings and other events that it sponsored. I also sat in on meetings of Lasting IMPACT and participated in IMPACT planning sessions. For alternative historical perspectives I met with older African American residents who spoke about their history with a community that had once largely

excluded them. And for a project co-sponsored by IMPACT Silver Spring, the Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association (MVMA), and Boat People SOS I facilitated interview sessions with one relatively recently arrived Vietnamese immigrant family who told me about their feelings of isolation.

Other events I attended included the gala premier of a documentary film about the history of Silver Spring. I also led a discussion of it with IMPACT participants after another showing. To observe more inclusive events I took part in a town meeting discussion about the downtown's revitalization produced by WAMU, one of the area's National Public Radio affiliates, and participated in an open space diversity conference co-sponsored by IMPACT. I was in the audience for the debut of "Silver Spring Speaks," a collaborative project scripted and staged by Roundhouse Theater and IMPACT Silver Spring, featuring words of SSHS president McCoy at one point.

To gauge how small business owners and the community are experiencing the effects of revitalization I joined Council Member Tom Perez's staff and IMPACT Silver Spring participants to assist in the planning of a town meeting about the effects of downtown revitalization on small businesses. With Perez's staff and other community members, I later took part in a face-to-face survey of the needs of small businesses. And I consoled a long-time business owner who had been evicted by her landlord. To understand the struggles that historic preservationists have faced I sat in on at least a half dozen public hearings, most concerning an historic sites survey. During the time of my research I also watched the Tastee Diner be removed from its moorings and relocated to a less central location. And I enjoyed musing on all sorts of topics with Sujewa Ekanayake, a local filmmaker, zine writer, and aficionado of the

Tastee Diner; also with Richard Jaeggi, newspaper columnist and a regular at the Quarry House Tavern. I joined New York tour guide "Speed" Levitch for his bus tour of Silver Spring and visited with him and area residents about the community and Washington, D.C. over beers at the Quarry House. To experience the SSHS in a different context, I spent an enjoyable evening at the Half Moon taking in a Sleepy LaBeef concert with some of its members. In nearly every case I met with people in "third places," community gathering spots or "hang-outs" that are important parts of their lives. I always allowed them to select the meeting place.



Fig. 4. Media interview patrons on closing day (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)



Fig. 5. Manager John Littleton turns off "open" sign (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)



Fig. 6. Owner Gene Wilkes locks up (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)



Fig. 7. Tastee Diner moving day (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)

In addition to ethnographic interviewing and observation I sought context by delving into as many local historical accounts as I could find. This has taken me to secondary sources, such as Hiebert and MacMaster's *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland*, and a range of articles, including Richard Longstreth's on the history of retail in downtown Silver Spring.<sup>30</sup> Most helpful in terms of primary documents have been the files of Montgomery County Council members, the County's Human Rights Commission, and planning documents of the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). Sector plans developed over the course of the past thirty years were key to showing how planners' conceptions of downtown Silver Spring have changed over time. They also provided me an understanding of how the central business district has been divided up by a variety of boundaries that have been constructed and re-constructed. In addition I turned to reports written by outside groups—including the National Trust's Main Street Program, Urban Land Institute, and Harvard—as well as census data, newspaper stories, and a plethora of other primary source documents.<sup>31</sup>

Newspapers were an essential part of the stories that I traced. *The Washington Post*, its weekly community edition, the *Gazette*, and independent local paper the *Voice*, all provided extensive coverage of developments occurring in recent decades. Most of the reporting in these newspapers has focused on the unfolding story of downtown revitalization. Especially helpful for issues faced in prior periods was the *Montgomery Sentinel*, which offered detailed attention to the events leading up to desegregation of places of public accommodation and housing. Reports by outside groups have provided insights from a more detached and therefore less impassioned

perspective, seeing things that key players either did not, or were less inclined to recognize the significance of. One example is the Main Street program's observations about the roots and consequences of divisiveness among civic leaders.

### *A Definition and Literature Review*

In her examination of the revitalization of downtown Tempe, Arizona, Susan Riches Sargent explains that *redevelopment* typically involves leveling and replacing all existing structures, while *revitalization* involves a mix of adding new structures and restoring, preserving, and adapting others to reuse.<sup>32</sup> By these definitions, as we shall see, early proposals to spur economic activity in the central business district (CBD) of downtown Silver Spring fall under the category of "redevelopment," while the project eventually approved and being built is more accurately described as "revitalization." In both cases outside interests who stand to profit from these processes make decisions that are not always in the best interests of all residents, a central source of controversy.

Neil Smith, who has written widely on the subject, contends that, "Gentrification is part of a larger redevelopment process dedicated to the *revitalization* [emphasis mine] of the profit rate."<sup>33</sup> June Manning Thomas argues that in the period beginning after World War II, city leaders used redevelopment to advance their political and economic interests. "Using federal urban funds, they aimed to eliminate low-income neighborhoods located near central business districts of important local institutions and to replace them with 'higher' uses."<sup>34</sup> In their introduction to *Urban Planning and the African Community: In the Shadows*, she and Martha Ritzdorf point out that such policies came to be widely referred to as "Negro

removal.”<sup>35</sup> And Kevin Fox Gotham, editor of a collection of essays on the topic, writes that satisfactory and agreed upon definitions are elusive, "since the term [redevelopment] assumes that someone or something is 'underdeveloped.'" He continues: "What and who is in need of 'redevelopment' needs spelling out: is it the tax base? Downtown property values? Neighborhoods where poor people and racial minorities live?"<sup>36</sup>

While most writers have devoted their attention to the effects redevelopment initiatives typically have on housing prices, a recent study by a team at the University of Maryland conveys how revitalization also adversely impacts existing, small, independently-owned businesses. "Rental increases depend upon who has control over setting rent rates," they write. "In Silver Spring, by awarding the redevelopment area to a single developer, Montgomery County may have inadvertently created a situation with one dominant landlord, thereby allowing rents to be set at artificially high rates." The authors of the study go on to state that this situation—which leads to long-term high rent and upscale merchants—"does not allow for a mix of profitable, small, independent businesses, particularly those that serve a lower-income client."<sup>37</sup>

Representative of studies that look at reasons for and strategies of redevelopment/revitalization is John Hannigan's *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis*. Of primary interest to Hannigan and others who take a top-down approach to the subject are strategies that originate within a "new urban economy" to bolster local economies that have lost their manufacturing bases. Hannigan argues that these schemes recognize and exploit a long-standing cultural contradiction in U.S. society, that which has formed "between the middle-class desire

for experience and their parallel reluctance to take risks, especially those which involve contact with the 'lower orders' in cities."<sup>38</sup> The sociologist notes that it has been rare historically for leisure and entertainment activities to cross class barriers in America's downtowns and that mixed race audiences in those settings have been even rarer. This became especially pronounced as the U.S. population grew more suburban after World War II.<sup>39</sup> But as downtowns continued to decay, urban planners, civic leaders, and real estate developers eventually designed and profited from formulas that would "both dazzle and reassure" as a way of attracting the middle-class back downtown.<sup>40</sup>

The bulk of *Fantasy City* examines several of the popular plans arrived at to convince middle-class consumers that cities are fun by making entertainment a focal point. The author devotes considerable attention to the festival marketplace formula and what distinguishes it from traditional shopping centers. A related strategy described by Hannigan has been to give culture a more central and autonomous role in the urban regeneration process, for example by deliberately establishing cultural, arts, or entertainment districts, something that has been done in downtown Silver Spring.<sup>41</sup>

One of the most useful sections of the book explores the cast of public and private players typically involved in redevelopment. Hannigan begins by explaining the complexities involved in retail-entertainment projects that are developed and financed through public-private arrangements. Particularly with the rise of Urban Entertainment Destinations (UEDs) the role of the developer has changed, as has the cast of players. In the past, he writes, a developer would acquire a piece of land, line

up financing, obtain approvals and a package of subsidies, tax breaks, and improvements, and organize a roster of tenants. By contrast, there are now more often five categories of institutional players centrally involved in conceiving, financing, building, and operating developments: corporate lenders, real estate developers, gaming and entertainment companies, retail operators, and public agencies.<sup>42</sup>

Hannigan's description of these investors' expectations helps to clarify why the resulting projects are often characterized by "cookie-cutter" qualities and filled with recognizable chain retail outfits. "Despite their [investors'] public image as fast movers," he writes, "in fact, they don't like surprises, professing to deal with established companies with a sound operating history, a sterling track record and a Triple A credit rating."<sup>43</sup>

In his final chapter, Hannigan returns to some of the cultural themes featured in earlier sections, including the point that redevelopment strategies rest in attempts to "reinscribe secure, middle-class values within the urban center."<sup>44</sup> One of the problematic aspects of these strategies, he emphasizes, is that they transform the meanings of a place "from its original and genuine version to a commercial construction which tells a different story altogether." This is what Martha Norkunas's study of Monterey, California reveals, as does Christine Boyer's of the Fulton Street Fish Market in Manhattan.<sup>45</sup> In addition, because of the combination of players and their motives, most of these new developments lack distinctiveness, "thus reinforcing the 'placelessness' which cultural geographer Ted Relph has pronounced as the bane of contemporary cities."<sup>46</sup> Hannigan closes by asking whether local communities will be able to retain their distinctiveness. Reflecting questions that have been on the

minds of civic activists in Silver Spring, he argues that those redevelopment projects that work are the ones "woven into the city's fabric," while the failures are those that stand alone and "don't evoke the locale's culture, history, and identity."<sup>47</sup>

Many of these themes are repeated or elaborated on in Zukin's *The Cultures of Cities*, an exploration of how culture is used as a means of controlling cities:

As a source of images and memories, it [culture] symbolizes 'who belongs' in specific places. As a set of architectural themes, it plays a leading role in urban redevelopment strategies based on historic preservation or local 'heritage.' With the disappearance of local manufacturing industries and periodic crises in government and finance, culture is more and more the business of cities—the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique, competitive edge.<sup>48</sup>

Reflected in this quote is Zukin's interest in a new urban economy in which culture industries and "imagineers" play significant roles in making cities attractive to consumers by using culture as an economic base. She points out that individuals associated with these efforts have become key players in revitalization and redevelopment strategies, especially in terms of how they "frame, and humanize, the space of real estate development."<sup>49</sup> For example, every well-designed downtown has a mixed-use shopping center and a nearby artists' quarter. Among other strategies developed to enhance the visual appeal of urban spaces examined by Zukin is historic preservation. Here she notes that the trend toward designating and protecting historic landmarks marks a "sea change" in public attitudes.<sup>50</sup>

Alison Isenberg's *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* offers greater historical perspective to the discussion of commercial revitalization. While economic factors explain some of the rationale for decisions that have been made, Isenberg's approach views economic anxieties as having "long

intertwined with core cultural ideals to make Main Streets resonant and symbolic locations...."<sup>51</sup> She writes: "Improvement strategies of beautification, modernization, or renewal have gone hand in hand with policies designed to attract certain types of people downtown while ignoring or explicitly rejecting others."<sup>52</sup> One of her chapters explores segregation as a form of investment practice responding to and directing consumer habits.<sup>53</sup> Another focuses on urban renewal as an especially drastic solution for making downtowns appealing to white, suburban, middle-class women.<sup>54</sup>

A subsequent chapter looks at other strategies developed beginning in the 1970s to attract middle-class consumers back to urban downtowns. Historic preservation is cited as one of these, a departure from what Isenberg illustrates have been deep cultural tendencies to value what is most modern and devalue what is old, viewing it as "obsolete." Obsolescence, she writes, "was literally the label used in federal, state, and local redevelopment documents to certify buildings for demolition....In the 1950s, rebuilding indeed became the cornerstone of downtown investment strategies." She notes that Albert Cole, head of the U.S. Government's Housing and Finance Agency told audiences that the "worn-out past" must be "eliminated," not remodeled. This was a message echoed in others' speeches, articles, and reports.<sup>55</sup> However, by the end of the twentieth century, she writes, "historic preservation had grown from its inauspicious first encounters on Main Street to become the most popular revitalization strategy for smaller American cities."<sup>56</sup> She adds that preservation is no longer viewed as an alternative to market-driven development, but instead has become "the enabler of, event the catalyst for, developer profit."<sup>57</sup>

In each of these studies, the production of landscapes of consumption is the focus. The motivations and strategies of investors, developers, business entrepreneurs, and public officials are key. Propping up tax bases and property values of downtowns is shown to be a central motivation and projecting an image of a good business climate a paramount and related aim. All of this inevitably means that some groups and interests benefit from redevelopment and revitalization projects while others suffer, in particular those who can no longer afford to live or do business there and/or do not fit the new image that has been created. For the most part absent from this body of literature are descriptions of the contributions and concerns of civically active residents. In part, this may be because these and related works tend to discuss redevelopment and revitalization processes in very broad terms. Rather than drawing concrete detail from a single, specific site like my study does, they generalize about the process and occasionally interject examples to support their main points. Reichl's *Reconstructing Times Square* is a rare, detailed book-length case study of how many of the issues described above play out in one particular, massive project.<sup>58</sup>

Less prevalent in the literature of commercial revitalization and redevelopment to date are examinations of how residents of communities and/or consumers respond cognitively and through practices of local politics to the changes that result. As my research shows, many of the conflicts surrounding downtown revitalization originate in differing values and the contrasting histories that residents carry with them into discussions about built environments. As we will see, this range of histories and values is not always considered or treated with respect by "insiders" who wield power, nor by other sets of "outsiders" who have alternative perspectives

and priorities. The tensions that result are lost in top-down accounts of revitalization and redevelopment, which often give the impression that the residents of communities respond in uniform ways to the transformations occurring around them. Devoid of ethnographic research, these analyses are at times too heavily framed by pet theories. This has the potential to result in tightly made arguments that erase the messiness that occurs as people and communities negotiate changes being imposed on their everyday landscapes, something that my study vividly illustrates.<sup>59</sup>

In contrast to these top-down investigations, many in the field of historic preservation *have* turned their attention to determining and accounting for the full range of meanings and attachments that various groups of people develop around places. Questions of "cultural significance," "value assessment" and "social value" have become central to professionals whose work deals with preserving or conserving the "heritage" or "sense of place" of built environments. Reports such as the Getty Conservation Institute's "Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage," Chris Johnston's "What Is Social Value?," and Australia's Burra Charter, all reflect an awareness of the complexity of determining cultural and social values and being sensitive to them when working with actual communities. Johnston notes that this turn stems from a growing realization that he and other heritage professionals had that they "may have lost touch with the sentiments that inspire community love of a place and therefore action for its protection."<sup>60</sup> As a result, he says, he and his cohorts have frequently been "caught off guard by a sudden and unexpected community uprising in defence of place."<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Mason, in his contribution to the Getty report acknowledges that "expert appraisals" on what to conserve have often been limiting and "narrowly

drawn."<sup>62</sup> He writes, "We need a more social conception of context to get at the values that go beyond the site itself but that affect the site—for example, cultural change, economic markets, the dynamics of civil society, the politics of nationalism and ethnic conflict, and so on."<sup>63</sup>

In grappling with such problems, the authors of these three reports aim for more holistic and humanistic ways of understanding what places and landscapes mean to a multiplicity of users. Here, for example, is a statement from the Burra Charter:

Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences. They are historical records that are important as tangible expressions of Australian identity and experience. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us....<sup>64</sup>

The writers of the charter add that places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups and that, "Cultural significance may change as a result of the continuing history of the place. Understanding of cultural significance may change as a result of new information."<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, the Getty Report observes that sites, buildings, and objects have numerous values ascribed to them and that these values correspond to different stakeholders or experts. It notes that such values are contingent, produced out of the interaction of an artifact and its contexts.<sup>66</sup>

In turn, all three reports call for new methods and tools that will provide greater opportunity for all who are associated with a place to "contribute to and participate in understanding the cultural significance of the place."<sup>67</sup> Johnston emphasizes the importance of going beyond "architectural fabric" to uncover the myriad social values and collective attachments people in communities form with

places. He finds that there are a number of factors that often elude professionals, but which explain why people value the sites that they do. For example, these sites may provide a spiritual or traditional connection between past and present, tie the past affectionately to the present, help give a disempowered group back its history, or provide an essential reference point in a community's identity or sense of itself or historical grounding. Places may also be of value because they loom large in the daily comings and goings of life, or provide an essential community function that over time develops into a deeper attachment. They may shape some aspect of community behavior or attitudes, or be distinctive. Other reasons that they attain social value: they are accessible to the public, offering the possibility of repeated use to build up associations and value to the community of users, or they might be places where people gather and act as a community. In this last category he cites places of public ritual, public meeting or congregation, and informal gathering places, what have widely come to be known as "third places."<sup>68</sup>

Application of interactive and participative methodologies is seen as essential to deepening our understanding of what ideas various stakeholders, constituencies, or users have of the built environment. Marta de la Torre and Mason, in their introduction to the Getty report, allow that the identification and measurement of "social values" requires venturing into several new areas.<sup>69</sup> Johnston stresses the need for community planning, participation, and advocacy as important ways for communities to identify, clarify, and advocate their positions and values.<sup>70</sup> And Mason and Setha Low, in their respective essays in the Getty report, consider the merits of ethnography, dialogue, and a wide range of other methodological strategies

for determining how places fit into the context of people's daily lives and meaning systems. Low summarizes how some of these methods have been used in actual communities and historic sites by those doing preservation and planning work to identify important cultural values.<sup>71</sup>

Opportunities abound for doing similar kinds of fieldwork on a range of issues related to redevelopment and revitalization from other disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives. For example, sociologist Lyn Lofland observes that the literature in her field, "...does not as yet contain any articles about 'grieving for a lost barbershop' nor any ethnographies detailing the destruction by redevelopment of well-beloved bars." This is so, even though it is clear that people form links of an "emotionally meaningful nature" with such places.<sup>72</sup> As Lofland implies, these links often become much clearer when redevelopment or revitalization threatens places of this kind. Many of the conflicts that erupt over redevelopment and revitalization proposals concern the impacts such projects will have on small, independently owned businesses, often deeply rooted in communities. Randy Hester's field research reveals that these are typically the places that people hold most "sacred."<sup>73</sup> And Rebecca Solnit notes that in San Francisco, "Many of the non-chain businesses in the city—upholstery shops, hardware stores—display photographs of the businesses or the neighborhood long ago." This, she writes, "is one of the incalculable benefits of these non-chains: they sell commodities, but they give out history, memory, a sense of place, local flavor, community knowledge."<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, even the literature devoted to what sociologist Ray Oldenberg terms "third place"—defined as informal community gathering places outside of

home and work—has rarely been ethnographic. For example, Oldenberg's *The Great Good Place*, the volume that introduced the concept to a wide audience, is marred by sweeping generalizations and largely devoid of empirical evidence.<sup>75</sup> His conceptualization of the third place is largely nostalgic, devoid of attention to conflicts and exclusions. He does not consider actual use, nor does he entertain the contested meanings that such places hold. More useful for ethnographers to pursue in studies of contemporary third places is historian Andrew Hurley's depiction of such settings. He sees them not as harmonious, democratic spaces, but rather as borderlands, where "cultures have intersected, clashed, and sometimes fused."<sup>76</sup>

To date, those authors who have taken a more ethnographic approach to third place settings have most often used them as sources of "informants" to address other issues of concern. Mitchell Dunier in *Slim's Table* forms relationships with regulars of Valois Cafeteria in Chicago to learn more about how African American men construct concepts of morality.<sup>77</sup> And E. E. LeMasters uses a neighborhood bar to locate patrons who will teach him about working-class values in *Blue-Collar Aristocrats: Life-Styles at a Working Class Tavern*.<sup>78</sup> An exception is a chapter in Rich Bonus's *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space*, in which the author examines the roles that "Oriental stores" have played in demarcating a space of one's own within a largely unfamiliar world.<sup>79</sup> Based on an awareness of a significant void in the literature of this particular category of place, I feature third places as one of the central subjects of my ethnographic work on revitalization.

Although relatively little attention has been devoted to third places or commercial landscapes in fieldwork-based studies of resident activists' responses to redevelopment and revitalization, a handful of works do use ethnographic methods to describe and analyze how members of communities negotiate those processes and other forms of change.

Stephen McGovern utilizes ethnography in *The Politics of Development* to find out why so few grassroots movements seeking to challenge the power of downtown growth coalitions experience lasting success. The political scientist argues that success requires a vision on the part of activists and a set of actions consistent with that vision. In developing his case, McGovern emphasizes the importance of taking into account the political cultures of communities. He builds on Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and counterhegemony to posit a dynamic explanation of political change, one that accounts for both material and postmaterial concerns.<sup>80</sup> Counter hegemonic activism is what he is most interested in, "activism that subverts the cultural hegemony of the dominant groups in a society and simultaneously advances an alternative view of the world that facilitates a very different set of political practices and policies."<sup>81</sup> The main portion of his book contrasts the political culture of San Francisco, where counter hegemonic activism is more prevalent, with that of Washington, D.C. In studying these phenomena, McGovern's interviews are exclusively with those he views to be the "major players in development politics," with an eye toward gathering and representing a diversity of perspectives. From his encounters with those individuals, he focuses strictly on their

political roles in redevelopment debates and does not place those roles in life history contexts, something that I have tried to do in this study.

Sociologist John Horton's *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California* deals with local politics, too, but captures basic, human responses of urban residents as they confront and make sense of change. The product of an ethnographic team, this study gathered material from interviews with many individuals from diverse segments of the community to illustrate the tensions that occurred when the small city of Monterey Park experienced an influx of Chinese immigration. As with McGovern's work, the focus here is on the relationships between groups of residents who belong to local political networks. However, in this case, the concern is with "old-timers" who talk about "community" as something that has been lost because of newcomers, and immigrants whose versions of history are located in far-off places and who are proud of their successful commercial enterprises that long-time residents disdain. What is uncovered are sources of separateness that have been the prevailing pattern of social relations, as well as practices that are capable of bringing people of disparate backgrounds together. One thing that the team learned, according to Horton, is "...that we have to ground our understanding of diversity in the concrete realities of everyday life."<sup>82</sup>

Timothy Fong, author of *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California*, also finds richness in the cultural issues and conflicts unfolding in that diversifying community. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that joins ethnography, oral history, and sociological imagination [a combination of history, biography, and social context] Fong is more attentive than Horton to the ways

in which changes in the *commercial* landscape have provoked severe reactions, particularly from older white residents. This response has formed largely around Chinese-language business signs that have dotted the major thoroughfares of Monterey Park.<sup>83</sup> Like Horton and McGovern, the author of this work introduces readers to numerous residents of the community—specifically those who have played a role in political struggles—and then depicts them primarily in those roles.

Anthropologist John Hartigan's *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* does a superior job of illustrating cultural conflicts and complexity through his portraits of the people he interviewed. In his introduction he chastises both journalists and academics for condensing the specifics of people's lives into delimited categories, race being one of the most prominent ones, thereby obscuring complexities of identity and meaning systems. To move beyond this, he contends that we need to "dwell more attentively on the disparate and unstable interpretations of racial matters that people develop in the course of their everyday lives."<sup>84</sup> A major way of doing this, according to Hartigan, is to pay attention to what is happening in local settings. This is why he began his research in O'Leary's corner bar and branched out to three distinct white neighborhoods in Detroit.

As his story unfolds, Hartigan moves back and forth between processes that are transforming urban geographies and the experiences of people in neighborhoods as they respond to and in some cases affect those changes.<sup>85</sup> He introduces fewer residents to readers than some of the authors described, and in so doing is able to offer deeper, multi-dimensional sketches of them. Typically he summarizes their life history and how they came to be situated in the place that they are today. He then

recounts how they made sense of specific historical events, such as riots, through the stories they told him and in response to questions including, "What is it like being white in Detroit?"<sup>86</sup> In many ways, Hartigan's sustained interest in the intersections of life history and issues of gentrification and other social change—as well as in the ways people actively construct meaningful lives—is closest to my approach. Yet he does not look at the role that commercial landscapes play in residents' lives or in the identity of a community.

From my ethnographic examination of revitalization it is clear that people do not experience the built environment in uniform ways, something that Hartigan's work demonstrates well, as do other studies on racialized and segregated spaces and places. Residents clearly have different associations with the built environment and pieces of it based in part on their race, ethnicity, or nationality. Here, some of the scholarship that explores topics of race and place from a broad historical perspective has proven useful for this study. One example is historian Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic*.

The focus of Cohen's book is the growth of consumer culture after World War II, New Jersey serving as her focus. Race is one central part of the story. For as Cohen says, equating citizenship with the ability to consume grew during this period, and yet African Americans, many of whom were U.S. soldiers in World War II, still faced barriers when it came to being served in a variety of places of public accommodation. These included restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, department stores, bowling alleys, and swimming pools. Race-based prejudices also prevented them from purchasing homes or renting apartments in many neighborhoods.<sup>87</sup>

Drawing from a wide range of archival sources, Cohen illustrates how pervasive such practices were and then in another chapter details rebellious acts undertaken in New Jersey that led to greater equality of access through the enactment of civil rights legislation. That Cohen chose to focus her research on the depth of these struggles in a northern state is especially important, for it vividly illustrates that racism in the U.S. is not concentrated in any one region. Research needs to be done on similar chapters of other communities' histories to provide a more complete picture of the widespread segregation in this country and the forms of resistance that led to efforts to formally ban such practices. This is one of the contributions of my work on Silver Spring.

Useful documentation of segregation in public accommodations is also provided in older works like Charles Johnson's *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (1943) and Stetson Kennedy's *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.* (1959).<sup>88</sup> While books of this kind detail the practices, they do not go far enough in probing the human impacts of them, something that research from a life history or ethnographic standpoint provides. A particularly vivid piece of writing on the effects of racist practices in places of public accommodation is featured in James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*.<sup>89</sup> Especially as individuals who were targeted by Jim Crow policies age and die, it is vitally important to recover their histories through extensive interviews, one of the things that I have begun to do in this study. Earl Lewis's work on connecting memory, self, and place in African American history is especially useful here. In his studies, Lewis uses oral history to examine what "place" has meant to African Americans, and how memory has configured an understanding of it.<sup>90</sup>

Marc Settles offers a concise, historical overview of how segregation was created and has been sustained in his article, “The Perpetuation of Residential Racial Segregation in America: Historical Discrimination, Modern Forms of Exclusion, and Inclusionary Remedies.” Settles emphasizes the roles played by federal and state governments, including through FHA practices, exclusionary zoning, and the individual actions of realtors and landlords. And he offers examples of how these practices are ongoing.<sup>91</sup> More theoretical is David Delaney’s *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948*. In this book, Delaney is particularly interested in “geographies of power,” which he defines as, “spatial configurations that reflect and reinforce social relations of power.”<sup>92</sup> Specifically, he entertains how geographies of power reflect and reinforce white supremacy. He does this by turning to a variety of sources, including memoirs and court cases. Two of his chapters focus on the geopolitics of Jim Crow as a tool for reinforcing geographies of race and racial power. Scholars who take an ethnographic approach to such topics include Philomena Essed and Steven Gregory. In *Understanding Everyday Racism*, Essed applies ethnography as a way of revealing some of the truths about everyday life that are present in novels but absent in scholarly, social scientific studies.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, Gregory uses ethnographic methods in *Black Corona* as a way of illustrating the diversity of black experiences.<sup>94</sup>

Also relevant to this dissertation and in need of greater attention is the study of race and home ownership in suburbia. As Andrew Wiese notes in *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, suburbs have typically been stereotyped as racially homogeneous, exclusively or primarily white, when in fact they are not. Lipsitz’s *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* and

Massey and Denton's *American Apartheid* illustrate the systemic racism that suburbs grow out of, but Wiese's work complicates the picture by providing numerous examples of enclaves that have existed at the margins of the spatial boundaries of suburbs.<sup>95</sup> Isolated from the larger white population, located in semi-rural surroundings, these sections have generally had primitive services, but functioned as places where African Americans could own homes. Due to their absence from mainstream local histories, I was surprised to learn from people with whom I spoke that enclaves of this kind have had a long presence in Silver Spring, and see this as another important topic for future research. The stories that Wiese recounts in his book, both of real estate patterns in Washington, D.C. suburbs and in other metropolitan areas, parallel stories that were shared with me, including of trailblazers who contributed to breaking of barriers, debates over anti-discrimination legislation, and white resistance that was fueled by change.

Mary Corbin Sies's work on suburbs and the scholarship of suburbia, like Wiese's, emphasizes the range of suburban types and experiences, while at the same time acknowledging ways in which suburban residential environments have been maintained through forms of local control that rely on practices of exclusion.<sup>96</sup> As I explain in greater detail in the next chapter, Silver Spring intrigued me from my first encounters with it because it did not conform to stereotypes I had long held of suburbia. As a physical and social space that straddles lines between "urban" and "suburban," it complicates the notion of what constitutes those categories in the United States in the twenty-first century. In featuring Silver Spring as the basis of this

case study, one of my aims is to challenge stereotypes and explore the actual diversity of suburban forms.

The body of scholarly and historical work on Silver Spring is scant, consisting primarily of shorter articles focused on early retail development. Richard Longstreth has contributed pieces that examine the rise and fall of the community as a regional retail hub and the importance of Hecht's department store's decision to open outside of an urban core.<sup>97</sup> Mark Walston has traced some of this history, too, in "The Commercial Rise and Fall of Silver Spring: A Study of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development of the Suburban Shopping Center in Montgomery County."<sup>98</sup> On the contemporary commercial landscape, Tim Davis's essay on the recycling of commercial structures features a section that delivers a thought-provoking critique both of earlier redevelopment plans for downtown Silver Spring and the local historic preservationist response.<sup>99</sup> These pieces are joined by writings of local historians and commissioned reports that examine the wider scope of Silver Spring's history, normally beginning with Francis Preston Blair's discovery of the spring, which led to the building of the suburb. Because these are written by individuals who have a stake in demonstrating the heritage of the community these accounts are not critical in tone and avoid discussion of those aspects of history that would mar Silver Spring's image.<sup>100</sup>

To date there has been little work done on black enclaves or to record and analyze the history of segregation in suburban Washington, D.C. Mary Church Terrell's autobiographical work, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, offers readers a window into the life of the civil rights pioneer who is widely known for her role in helping to end the most blatant forms of racism in Washington, D.C.'s department

stores and lunch counters. Especially powerful are her descriptions of Jim Crow practices in the D.C. area in the chapter, "The Colored Man's Paradise."<sup>101</sup> Terrell's part in organizing campaigns against downtown department stores in the 1950s, and for enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws is featured in Caplan's "Eat Anywhere!"<sup>102</sup> Constance Green's *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* remains the most comprehensive, albeit outdated, work on the city of D.C.'s racial history, but there is nothing comparable in scope on Montgomery County and Silver Spring.<sup>103</sup> An exception is Steven Lubar's article dealing with one specific neighborhood, "Trolley Lines, Land Speculation and Community-Building: The Early History of Woodside Park, Silver Spring, Maryland."<sup>104</sup>

Lubar's aim is to show that Silver Spring's typicality is important, that it is part of a larger story of suburban growth in the region and throughout the U.S. during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. He does this through tracing transportation developments that led to land development. From there he looks at two of the major development companies and how they appealed to Washingtonians eager to escape the city. A primary appeal, he contends, were restrictions that forbade African Americans to own homes in suburban developments like Woodside Park. Among the blatant evidence of racism he describes is a deed which stated: "that for the purpose of sanitation and health no owner will sell or lease the said land to any one of a race whose death rate is at a higher percentage than the white race."<sup>105</sup> Lubar's article stands alone in confronting these aspects of the community's history. As such, it serves as a foundation for work like mine that moves beyond the spatial boundaries of Woodside Park, considers racial practices in more recent periods, and uses

ethnography to provide a deeper understanding of the life experiences of the subjects of his piece.

Finally, although a handful of articles explore the changing demographics of the D.C. metropolitan area, little has focused on Montgomery County or Silver Spring.<sup>106</sup>

### *My Contribution and what I Found, a Summary*

To summarize, my core interest has been in practices that have emerged as residents struggle to maintain what they consider to be important elements of their community's identity in the midst of its downtown's commercial revitalization. In doing this research I have focused on residents' social and political interactions but within the context of their life histories. Based on my portrayals of individual's life histories and practices I have sought to demonstrate how revitalization gets experienced by real people in their everyday lives, "on the ground," while being attentive to multiple perceptions and histories. John Forester, who takes a similar approach to his studies of urban planning, has been influenced by writers who "have argued that our stories define us in subtle political and social ways, expressing and reshaping who we are, individually and together."<sup>107</sup> As he writes, turning attention to these stories permits exposure of "academic undiscussables," such as fear and courage, outrage and resolve, hope and cynicism.<sup>108</sup> And they teach scholars and their readers in ways that more abstract, scholarly studies do not always do, through prompting readers to empathize and identify with people.

This project puts a human face on social changes that are often discussed in abstract terms. It demonstrates some of the struggle and pain that develop as people

confront change in their social worlds, changes that are not of their own making. It also illustrates the generally un- or under-recognized commitments that many members of society have to local community. It shows how such work provides meaning and a sense of belonging to them; this amidst large societal shifts that have made life more transient, with fewer people than in the past having a sense of being rooted in place. It also conveys the tensions and conflicts that may occur over revitalization and historic preservation issues, even in socially and politically liberal communities, as they become more culturally diverse.

Through ethnographic interviews and participant-observation techniques, I have concluded that although members of the three sets investigated have different orientations and worldviews, they all share a deep commitment to Silver Spring as a community. This shared commitment is evident in common concerns regarding the displacement of small businesses and a diminishing number of units of affordable housing for low- and middle-income residents. Residents belonging to these three sets also find meaning in Silver Spring's informal gathering places, settings such as the Tastee Diner, Kefa Café, the Quarry House, and Mayorga Coffee. Furthermore, in their shared resistance to the revitalization project, the people I spoke with do not identify as winners in the process. Instead, they are more apt to talk in terms of the "fights" or "battles" that they are engaged in. The future that they imagine for Silver Spring is often shaped by disappointments and fears surrounding what already has or may be lost because of revitalization and an attendant recognition that the holders of power will always get the last word.

At the same time, divergent orientations and worldviews often prevent these active residents from seeing where their interests intersect. Different segments of the community have developed and hold on to competing stories that help them to make sense of changes occurring, stories that are shaped by first- and second-hand histories that they carry with them. In turn, these stories lead some members of the community to prioritize maintaining cultural diversity as they think about Silver Spring's future. Others, holding onto visions of a simpler, more socially homogeneous past, privilege the preservation of its built environment, and nostalgic, non-inclusive accounts of the suburb's history. In an increasingly multicultural community, erasures of the history of discrimination from accounts of Silver Spring's past have at times alienated segments of the community and are a continuing source of conflict.

Another conclusion I have reached is that because many of the most active residents cling so tightly to their stories, they prove unable or unwilling to entertain the constructed realities, perceptions, and values of others in the community. Externally, existing political structures accentuate these differences and antagonisms. In this study, the public hearing is a primary example of a competitive model of civic relationship that has had this effect. Internally, there are group dynamics that further hinder identification of common ground and outreach to others in the community. All of this results in a perpetual "us vs. them," "we're right, they're wrong" environment, not unlike what is evident on a larger scale nationally. With few opportunities for active and concerned citizens to come together and engage in dialogue, stereotypes are maintained that are counterproductive to groups who wish to influence decision-makers. Insularity and in some cases hostility prevent different segments from

learning from each other, developing useful skills, and in some cases attracting new voices and visions that could make them a more effective force in conversations around revitalization.

Leaders must come forward who are capable of identifying areas of common ground or concern and serving as bridge-builders between different segments of the community. This would better enable the various groups to work collaboratively and become a more powerful force in confronting affordable housing and small business issues. IMPACT Silver Spring has made progress at doing this with some segments of the community, but others—those that its leaders and participants perceive as "old Silver Spring"—have gotten lost in the process. Meanwhile, members of the Historical Society must develop strategies to reframe the story of Silver Spring's past, to acknowledge the part that racial discrimination has played and to point to successes in recent decades that have made it a more inclusive place to live, work, and shop.

### *Chapter Outline*

Chapter two explores origins, including of Silver Spring itself, its foundations as an integrated community, the tensions over redevelopment and revitalization proposals, the founding of two organizations in response, and my interest in this subject matter.

Chapter three is a geographical tour of the commercial landscape of downtown Silver Spring's central business district (CBD).

Chapter four looks at the worldviews of Silver Spring Historical Society members and that group's efforts to preserve physical traces of the past through protecting the community's older buildings or their facades. It considers how the

backgrounds of members and their distinct worldview have affected their contributions to Silver Spring.

Chapter five focuses on some of the blind spots and insularity that have limited the Historical Society's effectiveness. This is illustrated through a mix of material from interviews and observation at a number of events, as well as writings that are publicly circulated.

Chapter six provides a stark contrast, viewing the commercial landscape and its history primarily through the eyes of older African American residents who were often excluded. In this chapter I recover some of the history that is generally ignored in official and other published and widely circulating histories of the community.

Chapter seven focuses on individuals of diverse backgrounds associated with IMPACT Silver Spring, most of whom are intent on preserving the *social* diversity and small businesses of the community, and who therefore think about the built environment in terms of what needs to be done to limit displacement. Again, material for this chapter comes largely from interviews and participant-observation at several events.

Mainly through the eyes of two local activists, chapter eight examines some of the external political structures that restrict dialogue, and possibilities for the discovery of common ground and alliance-formation.

Chapter nine, my conclusion, reviews my findings. It examines what can be learned from conflicts and misunderstandings that arise in discussions about the built environment, tensions stemming from very different meaning systems and experiences. I offer some thoughts on what these various groups of community

leaders might learn from one another, on where their interests intersect, and how they might effectively form alliances to advance their positions on downtown Silver Spring's evolving identity.

### *Contested Notions of Community Identity*

Mary Reardon, one of the civic activists introduced in the pages that follow, perceives Silver Spring's story as being one of "struggle." She explained to me that people have different ideas of what the identity of Silver Spring is and what it might be. According to Jay Mechling, this is the very essence of "culture." Mechling writes that culture consists of the stories that people tell one another to make sense of their lives, and that these stories are contested when taken into the public sphere. "Culture is not a matter of consensus," he contends, "but of conflict....And because it is a contest, power matters. Some people's stories have a better chance of becoming the official public stories than do others."<sup>109</sup>

One aim of this study is to give voice to some of those stories that are not always heard.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan* (Silver Spring, MD: 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Randall Mason, "Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices," in *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 17.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael A. Burayidi, ed., *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society* (Westport, CT: Praeger, Greenwood Publishing, 2000); Scott Campbell and Susan Fainstein, eds., *Readings in Planning Theory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); John Forester, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); John Forester, *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice: Toward a Critical Pragmatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Richard Peiser, "Who Plans America? Planners or Developers?," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 496-503; Leonie Sandercock, ed., *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silvers, eds., *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Clyde Woods, "Regional Blocs, Regional Planning, and the Blues Epistemology in the Lower Mississippi Delta," in *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 96.

<sup>5</sup> June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 225.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Hudnut III, *Halfway to Everywhere: A Portrait of America's First Tier Suburbs* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2003), 147.

<sup>7</sup> Mason, "Assessing Values," 17.

<sup>8</sup> See Rhoda H. Halperin, *Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Zane L. Miller, *Visions of Place: The City, Neighborhoods, Suburbs, and Cincinnati's Clifton, 1850-2000* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2001); Gordana Rabrenovic, *Community Builders: A Tale of Neighborhood Mobilization in Two Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Leland T. Saito, ed., *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, "Are All Associations Alike?: Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital," in *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, Bob Edwards, Michael W. Foley, and Mario Diani, eds., (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, for Tufts University, 2001), 143-56.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Community in an Urban Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 11.

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- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.
- <sup>11</sup> George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 1990): 616.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 625.
- <sup>13</sup> Gene Wise, "Some Elementary Axioms for an American Cultural Studies," *Prospects: The Annual of American Culture Studies* 4 (1979): 532.
- <sup>14</sup> Jay Mechling, "If They Can Build a Square Tomato: Notes Toward a Holistic Approach to Regional Studies," *Prospects: The Annual of American Culture Studies* 4 (1979): 64.
- <sup>15</sup> Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," trans. Steven Rendall, chapter in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 93.
- <sup>16</sup> Michael Peter Smith, "Postmodernism, Urban Ethnography, and the New Social Space of Identity," *Theory and Society* 21 (1992): 495.
- <sup>17</sup> John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (New York: Verso, 1993), 21.
- <sup>18</sup> Mason, "Assessing Values," 20.
- <sup>19</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, "It Makes Sense to Us: Cultural Identity in Local Legends of Place," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31, no. 5 (October 2002): 526. See also: Joseph A. Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); and Barbara Johnstone, *Stories, Community, and Place: Narratives from Middle America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- <sup>20</sup> Earl Lewis, "Connecting Memory, Self, and the Power of Place in African American Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 348.
- <sup>21</sup> John Forester, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 40.
- <sup>22</sup> Dan Rose, *Living the Ethnographic Life* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 56.
- <sup>23</sup> Michael H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996), 93.
- <sup>24</sup> Keith Hoggart, Loretta Lees, and Anna Davies, *Researching Human Geography* (New York: Arnold, Hodder Headline Group, Oxford University Press, 2002), 263.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 227.

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<sup>26</sup> John L. Caughey, "Methods of Life History Research," chapter in *Cultures and Identities: A Life History Approach to the Study of American Lives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, in press).

<sup>27</sup> David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xv.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>30</sup> See George H. Callcott, *Maryland and America, 1940 to 1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Ray Eldon Hiebert and Richard K. MacMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland* (Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Government and the Montgomery County Historical Society, 1976); Richard Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue, Colesville Road, and the Creation of an Alternative 'Downtown' for Metropolitan Washington," in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, ed. Zeynep Celik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 247-57; Mark Walston, "The Commercial Rise and Fall of Silver Spring: A Study of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development of the Suburban Shopping Center in Montgomery County," *Maryland History* 81, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 330-39.

<sup>31</sup> Manuel T. Ochoa, "Assessment Report for Silver Spring, Maryland's Fenton Street Commercial District (Washington, DC: National Main Street Center, 1997); Urban Land Institute, "Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland" (Washington, DC: ULI, 1992); and Harvard University Graduate School of Design, "Silver Spring Development: A Report on the Urban Development Studio" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1987). Other primary source documents consulted included oral histories of civic leaders conducted by others, historic preservation guidelines and ordinances, minutes and newsletters of prominent civic groups, Sanborn fire maps, project submissions by major developers, business directories, county council studies on proposed development, and minutes from meetings of citizen advisory boards.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Riches Sargent, "Main Street Meets Megastrip: Suburban Downtown Revitalization in Tempe, Arizona" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 88.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> June Manning Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf, eds., *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 8.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Fox Gotham, "Redevelopment for Whom and for What Purpose?: A Research Agenda for Urban Redevelopment in the Twenty First Century," in *Critical Perspectives on Urban Redevelopment*, ed. Kevin Fox Gotham (New York: JAI, 2001), 430-1.

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<sup>37</sup> Urban and Planning Program, School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, *Minimizing Small Business Displacement in a Revitalization Zone: The Case of Silver Spring*, Economic Development Seminar (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2005), 7.

<sup>38</sup> John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (New York, Routledge: 1998), 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>45</sup> Martha K. Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); and M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imaginary and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 196.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>48</sup> Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 1-2; See also, Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Places* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Richard Lloyd and Terry Nichols Clark, "The City as Entertainment Machine," in *Critical Perspectives in Urban Redevelopment*, ed. Kevin Fox Gotham (New York: JAI, 2001), 357-78; George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications, 1999); and Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Zukin, *Cultures of Cities*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>51</sup> Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 192-4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander J. Reichl, *Reconstructing Time Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999). See also, David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania 1940-1980* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Greg Dickinson, "Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 1 (February 1997): 1-27; and David Ley, "The New Urbanism: Building the Convivial City," chapter in *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 298-349.

<sup>59</sup> Forester writes that our theories, "focus our attention very selectively, as a shorthand perhaps, but if we are not careful, too selectively." In *Deliberative Practitioner*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Johnston, "What Is Social Value?," Teaching Heritage, <[http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/view/wlv\\_johnston.html](http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/view/wlv_johnston.html)> (3 December 2005). Other works illustrating developments in the field of historic preservation include: Gail Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman, eds., *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Max Page and Randall Mason, "Rethinking the Roots of the Historic Preservation Movement," in *Giving Preservation a History*, ed. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3-16; Mitchell Schwarzer, "Historic Character and the Representation of a Cultural Diversity," *Historic Preservation Forum*, (November/December 1993): 42-9; and Robert E. Stipe, ed., *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Johnston, "What Is Social Value?"

<sup>62</sup> Mason, "Assessing Values," 19.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> *The Burra Charter*; National Trust of Australia, <<http://www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au/burracharter.html>> (3 December 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Marta de la Torre and Randall Mason, Introduction, *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Burra Charter*.

<sup>68</sup> Johnston, "What Is Social Value?"

<sup>69</sup> de la Torre and Mason, Introduction, 3.

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<sup>70</sup> Johnston, "What Is Social Value?"

<sup>71</sup> Setha M. Low, "Anthropological-Ethnographic Methods for the Assessment of Cultural Values in Heritage Conversation," in *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 31-49.

<sup>72</sup> Lyn H. Lofland, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory* (Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1998), 65. See also, Jeffrey R. Henig, *Gentrification in Adams Morgan: Political and Commercial Consequences of Neighborhood Change* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 1982), 48.

<sup>73</sup> Randy Hester, "Subconscious Places of the Heart," *Places 2* (1985): 10-22.

<sup>74</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* (New York: Verso, 2000), 141.

<sup>75</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get Us Through the Day*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1997). Others who apply the "third place" concept or a similar one in their work include: Brian Fawcett, *Local Matters: A Defence of Dooney's Café and Other Non-Globalized Places, People, and Ideas* (Vancouver, BC: New Star Books, 2003), 34-40; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, Perseus Group, 2002), 225-6; Alex Marshall, *How Cities Work: Suburbs, Sprawl, and the Roads Not Taken* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 202-3; and George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications, 2004), 42-3.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew J. Hurley, "From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture," *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997), 1284.

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> E.E. LeMasters, *Blue-collar Aristocrats: Life-stories at a Working-class Tavern* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

<sup>79</sup> Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> Stephen J. McGovern, *The Politics of Downtown Development: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 58.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>82</sup> John Horton, *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 9.

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<sup>83</sup> Timothy P. Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

<sup>84</sup> John Hartigan, Jr., *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>87</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, Random House, 2003).

<sup>88</sup> Stetson Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.: The Laws, Customs and Etiquette Governing the Conduct of Nonnwhites and Other Minorities as Second-Class Citizens* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1959; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973); Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1943).

<sup>89</sup> James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dial Press, 1963), 83-87.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, "Connecting Memory, Self," 350.

<sup>91</sup> Marc Settles, "The Perpetuation of Residential Racial Segregation in America: Historical Discrimination, Modern Forms of Exclusion, and Inclusionary Remedies," *Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law*, 1996, <<http://www.law.fsu.edu/journals/landuse/Vol141/seit.htm>> (2 December 2005).

<sup>92</sup> David Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 5-6. See also Stephen L. Wasby, Anthony A. D'Amato, and Rosemary Metrailler, *Desegregation from Brown to Alexander: An Exploration of Supreme Court Strategies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

<sup>93</sup> Philomina Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, 1991).

<sup>94</sup> Gregory, *Black Corona*, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>96</sup> Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Suburbs, 1880-1950, Cultural and Social Reconsiderations," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 313-346; and Sies, "Paradise Retained: An Analysis of Persistence in Planned, Exclusive Suburbs, 1880-1980," *Planning Perspectives* 12 (1997): 165-191.

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<sup>97</sup> Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue"; Longstreth, "The Mixed Blessings of Success: The Hecht Company and Department Store Branch Development after World War II," in *Shaping Communities: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, VI*, ed. Carter L. Hudgins and Elizabeth Collins Cromley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 244-62; and Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51 (1992): 5-34.

<sup>98</sup> Mark Walston, "The Commercial Rise and Fall of Silver Spring: A Study of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Development of the Suburban Shopping Center in Montgomery County," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 81 (1986): 330-39.

<sup>99</sup> Timothy Davis, "The Miracle Mile Revisited: Recycling, Renovation, and Simulation along the Commercial Strip," in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VII*, ed. Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 93-114.

<sup>100</sup> See Richard J. Jaffeson, *Silver Spring: An Interactive History of Silver Spring, Maryland*, (Silver Spring, MD: the Author, 1996; and Montgomery County Planning Board, *Silver Spring: Past, Present and Future* (Silver Spring, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, April 1983.)

<sup>101</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, DC: Ransdell, 1940; Salem, NH: Ayer Company, 1986).

<sup>102</sup> Marvin Caplan, "Eat Anywhere! A Personal Recollection of the Thompson's Restaurant Case and the Desegregation of Washington's Eating Places," *Washington History* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

<sup>103</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

<sup>104</sup> Steven Lubar, "Trolley Lines, Land Speculation and Community-Building: The Early History of Woodside Park, Silver Spring, Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 81 (1986): 316-29.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>106</sup> See: Robert D. Manning, "Multicultural Washington, DC: The Changing Social and Economic Landscape of a Post-Industrial Metropolis," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 2 (March 1998): 328-55; Manning, "Washington, D.C.: The Changing Social Landscape of the International Capital City," in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Silvia Pedraza and Ruben G. Bumbaut, 373-89 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996); Audrey Singer and Amelia Brown, "Washington, D.C.," in *The Encyclopedia of American Immigration*, Vol. 3, ed. James Ciment, 974-82 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); and Joseph Wood, "Vietnamese American Place Making in Northern Virginia," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1997): 58-72.

<sup>107</sup> Forester, *Deliberative Practitioner*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

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<sup>109</sup> Jay Mechling, "An American Culture Grid, with Texts," *American Studies International* 27, no. 1 (April 1989): 3-4.

## CHAPTER 2:

### ORIGINS

To assist in explaining conflicts surrounding various revitalization proposals, this chapter provides historical context. It opens with a description of what is known about the earliest history of Silver Spring and surrounding area. From there it looks at the origins of Silver Spring as a suburb—the roots of its contemporary identity—and traces sources of controversies of the revitalization of its downtown. The sections that follow introduce the three sets of subjects of this study: active members of the Silver Spring Historical Society, African American civic activists, and participants in IMPACT Silver Spring. Focus here is on the foundations of their activism and in two cases the organizations that they are affiliated with. In the closing portions of the chapter, I describe origins of my interest in this subject matter and reflect on some of my limitations as an observer of the events being recounted and analyzed.

#### *From Algonquin Indians to Francis Preston Blair*

Prior to the arrival of European colonists in the seventeenth century, Algonquin Indians of the Piscataway Nation hunted and may have had small settlements on land that now comprises Silver Spring. Between the time of colonists' arrival and the mid-1800s the area became sparsely populated, mainly with tobacco plantations. Only after 1840, when Francis Preston Blair, a newspaper publisher and

advisor to U.S. presidents, decided to build a country estate on a portion of the land, would things begin to slowly change.<sup>1</sup>

Given the Silver Spring Historical Society's (SSHS) interest in origins, it is no surprise that Acorn Park has been one of the first and lengthiest stops on president Jerry McCoy and member Karen Kali's monthly walking tours. There, the discovery of the spring in or around 1840 by newspaper publisher Francis Preston Blair—who may or may not have been accompanied by his daughter Elizabeth—is recounted in some detail. Jerry's account of this story also contributes to one of the opening scenes of the widely shown television documentary, *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*. Over McCoy's narration, director Walter Gottlieb adds a dramatic reenactment of Elizabeth being thrown from her horse, Selim, who reportedly was found drinking water from the spring. Viewers hear Jerry say: "The family legend has it that Blair and his daughter Elizabeth rode out from Washington together. Blair was looking for a place to build a summer home to escape the heat of the city." After describing the circumstances of the daughter's fall—Elizabeth reportedly was distracted by a letter from Samuel Phillips Lee, her fiancée, and fell when a low-hanging branch swept her from her horse—McCoy goes on to recount how Blair and the young woman found the horse drinking from a spring:

To Blair's delight he sees that the spring sparkles when the sunlight hits it because of mica flakes that were in the water. So he sees this beautiful spring, the surrounding countryside, and he and Elizabeth are absolutely enchanted. Blair decides right on the spot to buy the land surrounding the spring. This, he feels, would be the perfect place to build his country home, which he would call "Silver Spring."<sup>2</sup>

Other versions of the tale—most notably Francis's grandson Gist Blair's in 1917—have Elizabeth's father being thrown from the horse and no mention of her

having accompanied him on the excursion.<sup>3</sup> There are also several conflicting accounts of when the discovery of the spring occurred, although all agree that it was within the first five years of the 1840s. Regardless of the details, all versions have the politically prominent newspaperman—who had moved from Kentucky to serve as a “kitchen cabinet” advisor to President Andrew Jackson—deciding that this would be a lovely spot for a country home. Initially Blair purchased a 250-acre site and eventually bought more land, a total of 1,000 acres.<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 8. Acorn Park historic panel, Francis Preston Blair and Silver Spring

A slave owner, Blair was known as a "free-soil" Democrat, meaning that he opposed the extension of slavery and believed that it could be eradicated. Driven out of the Democratic Party because of this stance, he became a Republican, and later served as an adviser to Abraham Lincoln.<sup>5</sup> During the Civil War Maryland would be a Union State, but its citizens, and Montgomery County's, were divided on the slave issue. Noted in several county histories is that Josiah Henson, a black slave on a plantation in Montgomery County's North Bethesda, was the basis of Harriet Beecher

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel that became a focal point for the abolitionist movement.<sup>6</sup>

In time, Blair would trade "Blair House," his Washington D.C. home across from The White House, for Montgomery County's "country living." E. Brooke Lee explained in an interview with James H. Scull that there was a strategic advantage in Blair's building where he did. "It was the nearest to the center of Washington that he could live and have a vote and at the same time continue active in his publishing business in Washington."<sup>7</sup> At the time that Blair made his move, the area just south of what was then called "Sligo"—a cluster of shops and homes nestled around what is now the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road—was mainly farmland. A local post office was located at that spot until 1913 when Gist Blair, Silver Spring's first postmaster, closed it down.<sup>8</sup> It was the adjacent land—that which surrounded Blair's estate, from the D.C. line up to or above the railroad overpass on Georgia Avenue—which came to be known as Silver Spring.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, the Blairs and the Lees would remain key players in Silver Spring, both as major developers and as political figures. E. Brooke Lee and his brother Philip Blair Lee were founders of North Washington Realty Company and the Lee Development Company. In addition, as leader of Montgomery County's Democratic Party, E. Brooke Lee had considerable influence at the state level, where he served in the House and as its Speaker. Hiebert and MacMaster write, "Unlike other land developers operating in Montgomery County, his political influence gave him virtual carte blanche to reorganize County government," in ways that benefited his interests as a developer.<sup>10</sup> Owing to his influence, historian George Callcott calls the World

War I hero, “the county’s political boss,” a status which Lee held from 1919 to 1946, around the time a charter was adopted establishing home rule for Montgomery County.<sup>11</sup>

### *Downtown Silver Spring's Origins as a Retail Center*

A B & O railroad stop opened in Silver Spring in 1873, followed by the first train station in 1878. Local historian Robert Oshel writes that the railroad spurred the construction of scattered country estates for the wealthy and the platting of “suburban” developments by real estate developers beginning in 1886. However at that point the area's road and sewer systems were not well developed, making it a less than desirable place to live.<sup>12</sup> A trolley line, which opened in 1908, was one step toward improved accessibility to and from Silver Spring, spurring population growth. But more important were laws enacted in 1912 by the Maryland state legislature that created a state road commission.<sup>13</sup> In 1918, Gist Blair could report that there were seventy-five homes in Silver Spring, and a tiny commercial district with ten or so stores.<sup>14</sup>

The first growth spurt of any real significance occurred when the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission was created in 1919 and began installing sewers. By 1921, with sewers and roads in place, E. Brooke Lee started developing a subdivision on nineteen acres that he owned. In turn, new home and road construction resulted in the opening of a number of commercial enterprises between 1924 and 1927. In 1927 the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) was established to oversee planning of the entire area. It replaced the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which beginning in 1916 had assumed the

authority to plan a permanent system of highways and streets and oversaw plats for subdivisions. By the mid-1930s, maps show that there were over sixty stores, catering to nearly every need, on the stretch of Georgia Avenue from the B & O station to Colesville Road.<sup>15</sup> Originally called Union Turnpike Road, then Brookeville Pike and Seventh Street Pike, before finally being designated “Georgia Avenue,” this was the first road to run through Silver Spring.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1930s and 1940s, large numbers of new federal employees moved to the Washington metropolitan area to work in the Roosevelt Administration. They arrived at a time when mortgage-loan guarantees encouraging real estate purchases in suburbs were becoming widely available to prospective white homebuyers through the Federal Housing Administration (F.H.A.) and Veterans Administration (V.A.). Combined, these developments led to a second chapter of major commercial growth in Silver Spring beginning in 1938. That was the year that the Silver Spring Shopping Center, a strip-mall, a revolutionary form of retail at the time, opened its doors to great fanfare. Not long thereafter, the Hecht Company announced that it would open its first-ever suburban department store in downtown Silver Spring in 1947, a decision that prompted other department stores and retailers to open outlets there as well. These events will be described in greater detail in chapter three. By the end of World War II Silver Spring’s population had grown to around 70,000 and by the 1950s its downtown was the second busiest downtown in the state, exceeded only by Baltimore’s.<sup>17</sup> It was during this period that the M-NCPPC designed its first plan for the CBD.

The golden age of retail spurred by white consumers proved to be short-lived. (Until 1962 African Americans were excluded from much of downtown Silver Spring. That was when ordinances were instituted that outlawed discrimination in “places of public accommodation.” This will be a major topic of chapter six.) Residential sections of the community remained stable after 1960, but the central business district struggled to remain competitive within a new retail environment, one in which shoppers began bypassing downtown Silver Spring for more appealing commercial options in neighboring suburbs. Faced with precipitous declines in their customer base, established retailers like J.C. Penney, Hahn's Shoes, and Jelleff's began closing their stores and others shied away from opening in the now more integrated downtown. This was true even after Silver Spring earned a place on the Washington DC area Metro line, which opened in 1978. The opening of the Metrorail station resulted in new high-rise office complexes and apartment buildings being built near the station, but did not have the desired effect on retail.

### *Everybody's Talking: Origins of Redevelopment Conflicts*

Plans were sought for a major overhaul of the downtown's core beginning in the mid-1980s. Residents were bitterly divided over the first two major proposals, one called the “Silver Triangle,” submitted by regional developer Lloyd Moore and Associates, and the other the “American Dream,” advanced by the Triple Five Group of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. A third proposal, this one submitted by regional firms Foulger-Pratt and The Peterson Companies, that was dubbed "Town Center," now simply "Downtown Silver Spring," has received a more favorable reception and is nearing completion. Many residents, politicians, and reporters speak and write

enthusiastically about Silver Spring's "comeback," and its initial successes have caught the attention of those monitoring strategies being used to revitalize aging, inner-ring suburbs. For example, Mary Ann Barton, in *American City & County*, writes: "Silver Spring, Md. once was written off as a tired inner-suburb in Montgomery County, but, today, it has seen a rebirth through a \$400 million redevelopment effort."<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, others voice concern about some of the potential repercussions of the revitalization project, as depicted in this exchange of dialog in one of George Pelecanos's novels:

Strange, Lattimer and Quinn got a window table at My-Le, a former beer garden, now pho house on Selim. Their view gave to the traffic on Georgia Avenue and the railroad tracks beyond.

'They're doing something over there,' said Quinn, nodding to the station by the tracks. A blue tarp covered the roof, and plywood boards had replaced the windows.

'Looks like they're restoring it,' said Lattimer.

'Either that or tearing it down. They're always tearing down things here now.'

'Get rid of all these pawnshops---'

'Yeah, and the nail and braid parlors, and the barbershops, and the cobbler and the key maker, the speed shops and auto stores...the kinds of places working people use every day. So the yuppie homeowners can brag that they've got the music-and-book superstore, and the boutique grocery store, and the Starbucks, just like their counterparts across town.'

'I take it,' said Strange, 'you're not all the way into the revitalization of Silver Spring.'

'They're erasing all of my memories,' said Quinn. 'And to tell you the truth, I kind of like the decay.'<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 9. My Le Restaurant

That the characters in three recent novels by Pelecanos, a local author with an international audience, comment at length on the revitalization of downtown Silver Spring is somewhat remarkable. Although the author's white male privilege leads him to romanticize Silver Spring's gritty aesthetic, Pelecanos's writings convey how much interest there has been on the part of a variety of residents—both he and everyday people like Strange and Quinn—in the ways that the built environment is being transformed.

Headlines from area newspapers over the course of the past twenty-five years also illustrate the heightened attention given this commercial landscape and some of the debates and conflicts that revitalization proposals have spurred.

"Sprucing Up Silver Spring" is the headline of a 1979 article in which *Washington Post* reporter Jane Seaberry wrote: "Once the shining leader in modern suburban shopping centers, Silver Spring is now a tarnished string of tacky stores and gray, litter-dotted streets."<sup>20</sup>

This represented a striking shift in tone from coverage of an earlier era.

"Silver Spring Shopping Center Opens Today," "Comprises 19 Stores, Gas Station, Movie," and "Designed to Serve Needs of 50,000" were the headlines of a 1938 edition of the *Washington Post* announcing the grand opening of the Art Deco-style strip mall at the intersection of Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue. A program of the day's festivities also graced the page.<sup>21</sup>

And there was this one in 1950: "Silver Spring, Once Quietly Rural, Is Real Estate 'El Dorado.'" The reporter for that piece observed that,

Only six years ago, during the war, a principal marker at the intersection of Colesville Pike and Georgia Avenue was a White Tower hamburger stand with drive-in space....The hamburger stand has been moved from the corner and today it is the site of a Hahn shoe store which did almost a \$500,000 business last year. That is the amazing thing about the Silver Spring retail district. The new stores have exceeded the most optimistic expectations.<sup>22</sup>

Tastee Diner waitress Eunice Ramsey, like other long-time residents of the area, vividly recalls the 1940s and 1950s, "When Silver Spring was *the* place to shop." Eunice describes customers teeming to major department stores like Hecht's, J.C. Penney, and other shops that lined Colesville Road. Richard Longstreth, an architectural historian and historic preservationist, recounts how during that time Silver Spring functioned as an "alternative downtown for metropolitan Washington." He writes: "Silver Spring drew national attention as a business center created to meet the demands of a mobile, prosperous middle class—an entirely new district, with large, modern stores and ample parking, that set the pace for future urban growth."<sup>23</sup>

The most popular explanation for the ensuing "decline" of Silver Spring's central business district is that competition from new forms of retail in neighboring communities began drawing customers away in the 1960s. Rapidly, what had twenty

years earlier been perceived as "modern" had become "obsolete," an explanation that falls within what Isenberg identifies as a nearly universal explanatory framework used by journalists, retailers, and scholars for making sense of "downtown's twentieth-century rise, fall, and possible resurrection."<sup>24</sup> On a practical level, area shoppers found ample free parking in other suburbs, an amenity that Silver Spring's older downtown did not provide. This parking was attached to enclosed malls, which had begun overtaking strip malls in popularity during that period. Further affecting Silver Spring were decisions the County had made during this phase that encouraged growth in the I-270 corridor to Silver Spring's west.<sup>25</sup> As others note, the practice of "redlining" also kept development from occurring in sections of the metropolitan area, specifically those east of the Potomac River. With fewer customers in downtown Silver Spring, department stores that had once attracted droves of shoppers began depleting their stock and leaving town. Hecht's was the last major holdout, remaining until 1987. As retail space opened up, rents became affordable for businesses like pawn shops, but also for new entrepreneurs, including immigrant families and people of color who opened restaurants, groceries, salons, and provided other services.<sup>26</sup>

"Silver Spring: Home of Ethnic Diversity," was the headline of a 1981 article that described Silver Spring as "a working-class suburb where one goes for car repairs or to buy tools and plumbing supplies," but which was changing. "As businesses followed the outward migration, blacks and ethnic minorities started moving in from the District of Columbia, taking advantage of the lower rents." The story reported that

these new residents began establishing businesses, medical practices, and restaurants.<sup>27</sup>

With many officeholders and residents worried about empty storefronts and unhappy about the emerging retail mix, proposals sought for a major overhaul of the downtown's core became the source of widespread media attention beginning in the mid-1980s.

"Silver Spring to Get Plan for 'Superblock'"<sup>28</sup>

"\$250 Million Development Approved for Silver Spring"<sup>29</sup>

Developer Lloyd Moore's firm designed the first major proposal, the "Silver Triangle." This project would have featured an enclosed mall anchored by two department stores, a hotel, and office towers. Many citizens applauded it. For example, Gregory McBride wrote to Montgomery County Council President Rose Crenca: "I believe we are extremely fortunate to have a sensitive developer who shares these views [that downtown is blighted and in need of attractions that will 'pull people together and define a community'] interested in Silver Spring. I also believe we now have a window of opportunity that could easily be lost if those congenitally resistant to change are permitted to frustrate the renewal of Silver Spring."<sup>30</sup>

Such sentiments as these are not surprising. Peirce Lewis has written that, "Reverence for the past...is contrary to the very essence of the American dream, the dream of progress, of growth, and of a better future."<sup>31</sup>

But other residents feared what the Silver Triangle would do to the volume of traffic, the "type of people" it might draw to Silver Spring—veiled racism say Longstreth and others—and the ways that it threatened to diminish the character of

the built environment. To accommodate his project, developer Moore announced that Art Deco structures like the Silver Spring Shopping Center, Silver Theater, and Tastee Diner, sources of fond memories for many residents, would be razed. It was the possibility of such losses that initially sparked debates among residents about Silver Spring's identity, character, and possible futures.

"Theater's Renovation Sparks Angry Protest."<sup>32</sup>

"Silver Spring's Salvation: Is It High-Rises Or Preservation?"<sup>33</sup>

"30's Mall Faces Wrecking Ball."<sup>34</sup>

"Silver Spring Fights to Come Back: Developers Spar with Preservationists"<sup>35</sup>

With the community split between those willing to accept virtually any solution for what they viewed as a crisis, and those incensed that so much of the commercial landscape would likely disappear, the debates grew increasingly intense.

For every resident like Margot Grier who valued existing elements of the landscape, there was a Gerald Olson or Edith Donohue who did not. Grier, in a February 1987 letter to County Executive Sidney Kramer, called the Art Deco buildings that were slated for demolition "gems" and "important pieces of architectural evidence of its [Silver Spring's] former glory." Richard Striner, president of the Art Deco Society of Washington, pleaded that all of the Art Deco structures be saved: "This county has a legacy to protect."<sup>36</sup> To many residents, however, it seemed a dire mistake to refrain from moving forward with some form of redevelopment, which in their view the preservation of older buildings would prohibit. Olson, in a letter to Montgomery County Council President Crenca, wrote: "I really don't see any beauty in those ugly Art Deco buildings."<sup>37</sup> Donohue, also in a letter to Crenca,

stated: "I applaud [developer] Lloyd Moore's vision and dedication to a dream to nudge Silver Spring into the mainstream again. For many years, it has been a dead city, the butt of jokes, an area to travel through but not to visit." She continued: "Silver Spring needs revitalization now, or we are going to end up in a slum area where indigents wet the walls... where repair shops are the main source of income for the area, where landlords cannot maintain properties because of low income from their investments."<sup>38</sup>

While area historic preservationists were mostly concerned about the future of the Art Deco shopping center and theater, there is evidence that the larger community was more concerned with the likely fate of a favorite third place, the Tastee Diner.

“Silver Spring Diner to Close: Long-Standing Restaurant Fights for Preservation.”<sup>39</sup>

“Plan to Shut Landmark Diner Leaves Bitter Taste with Fans,” “Patrons Mount Drive to Prevent Closing of Silver Spring Diner.”<sup>40</sup>

“Silver Spring’s Future: Tastee Diner, Theater Not in Developer’s Plans.”<sup>41</sup>

In letters to and testimony before both the Montgomery County Council and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission even proponents of razing the shopping center and theater called for the Tastee to be spared. Betsy Taylor, testifying on behalf of the East Silver Spring Citizens Association (ESSCA) in February 1987, said that while ESSCA was not supportive of a proposed Silver Spring Retail Historic District, nor of preserving the shopping center and theater, the Tastee Diner and train station did “seem worthy of preservation, although not necessarily on their present sites.” Taylor went on to state: “The Tastee Diner provides a homey atmosphere with good food at a reasonable price and also provides a bit of nostalgia, a living reminder of simpler times.”<sup>42</sup>

Howard Sribnick, testifying before the Council in September of that year, also made a distinction between the shopping center/theater complex, highly regarded by some architectural historians and preservationists—including Striner and Longstreth—and the diner. “I personally feel differently regarding the preservation of the Tastee Diner. I recognize it is in need of some sprucing up and may even have to be relocated, but it is my hope that the Tastee Diner will remain a local institution in the future Silver Spring.”<sup>43</sup>

The debates between those who favored a slow-growth, historic preservationist approach, and those who endorsed large-scale redevelopment came to garner national attention. Among others, prominent architects like Venturi, Rauch, and Brown, students and faculty of Harvard's Graduate School of Design, and a panel from the Urban Land Institute, all became part of the discussion, offering conflicting advice to the community. In addition, the *New York Times* and other national publications featured stories about Silver Spring's preservation/development battles. One consistent question that appeared in the various studies and media coverage concerned how to economically revitalize the community without erasing all of its history and character.

In the introduction to a lengthy document produced by Harvard's Urban Development Studio in 1987, its authors wrote that the hotly contested downtown core was interesting, in part, "because of its pivotal role in defining the image and identity of Silver Spring."<sup>44</sup> However there was disagreement over how to proceed. One group of students concluded that downtown's Art Deco buildings were central to that image and identity, "worthy of preservation because of their historical

significance to the city and...to enhance the marketing image...."<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, another found the downtown's core to be a "visual cacophony," a mishmash of architectural styles, "haphazardly superimposed." That group recommended that the Silver Theater and Silver Spring Shopping Center be sacrificed for new development. "It is our belief that it is more important to capture the values and spirit of Silver Spring's residents than simply preserve old buildings."<sup>46</sup> However, the "Executive Summary" of the report found that, "The architectural and historic significance of these buildings have been well documented, and contribute to the collective memory of the community."<sup>47</sup>

Newspaper columnists also expressed concern over what might happen to Silver Spring's character if redevelopment went forward as planned. In the view of *Washington Post* writer Benjamin Forgey: "The main issue here is not so much architectural style as it is character—the special sense of image and place that central Silver Spring has (and most other suburban places lack)."<sup>48</sup> Reporters for *City Paper*, Washington, D.C.'s alternative weekly, concurred, noting that Silver Spring's character came not strictly from its "pleasingly visible architectural heritage," but also "a less visible but important commercial and social heritage." The reporters commented:

It is full of the kind of unexpected surprises that one should in fact expect when living in a major urban area. It offers dishes of curried goat, gigantic accumulations of secondhand books, shops specializing in old rhythm & blues records or in new reggae albums, places carrying only comic books, and what may be the best Italian deli around here. It even has a diner.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly, however, there were those like Gerald Olson and Edith Donohue who were not charmed and were seeking a new image, finding little in the past of

redeeming value, and certainly nothing worth saving if it meant hindering the progress that they envisioned redevelopment plans would bring.

Therefore, some were pleased, and others not, when after eight years of trying, Lloyd Moore failed to sign the necessary anchor tenants for his project. "The 3-Cornered Question Mark: Problems Stall Silver Spring Triangle Project," read a 1994 headline foreshadowing the demise of Moore's plans.<sup>50</sup>

While historic preservationists are popular targets for those who decry the slow pace at which downtown Silver Spring's business climate has turned around, there are others who attribute it to "redlining" of the racially diverse suburb by retailers and financial institutions. "For years investment only moved west in the city," says Michael Beyard of the Urban Land Institute. "It turned around only when there was nowhere else to go....These are areas that for decades were essentially redlined for commercial development. A lot of those racial prejudices are breaking down in the face of market demand."<sup>51</sup> At the same time, according to geographer Sherman Silverman, downtown Silver Spring had to overcome an image crisis among white middle and upper class consumers. "It was the growing numbers of proletarian ethnics that gave the county's more affluent residents a sense that going into Silver Spring was not a prudent thing to do especially since there were more desirable alternatives throughout the metropolitan region."<sup>52</sup>

Following the collapse of the "Silver Triangle" plan, the \$585 million "American Dream," an entertainment "mega-mall," was proposed by the Triple Five Group. Triple Five is the Canadian firm responsible for designing the largest mall in the world (the Edmonton Mall in Alberta), and in the U.S. (the Mall of America in

Bloomington, Minnesota). Given the firm's track record, some were encouraged by the prospects for this 2.1 million square foot plan. Reflecting what many today think was desperation, not enthusiasm, resident Ann Marie Moriarty, in a letter to the *Washington Post* wrote, "I have little patience with the people who are shouting about the traffic a mall would bring. I would prefer traffic congestion caused by people coming to spend it in my town to some of the foot traffic I've been getting on my street these days...." She concluded by stating that "Silver Spring is dying, and if this project, or a similar one, doesn't happen soon, the hope for keeping the downtown a decent place will die too."<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the Silver Triangle, the American Dream was not to have been a conventional shopping mall with anchor tenants like Macy's and J.C. Penney's, both of which had failed to sign leases with developer Moore. Among other features, this alternative would have included a wave pool, ice rink, IMAX movie theater, nightclubs and restaurants, and a hotel with "fantasy suites," features which many now perceive as laughable. Indicative of the controversy that this entertainment-focused mall stirred, at least eight hundred citizens attended a town meeting forum on the proposal, many of them there to voice their strong disapproval.<sup>54</sup>

Headlines reflected growing problems for the project.

"Silver Spring Residents Tell 'American Dream' Fears" <sup>55</sup> announced one headline, and then, signaling the beginning of the end for a plan that died a much quicker death than Lloyd Moore's Silver Triangle: "Developers Want Help on Silver Spring Project."<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, when Triple Five failed to secure necessary financing its plan was dropped by County Executive Doug Duncan.

Although traffic and parking were frequently cited as concerns, Roger Lewis, professor of architecture at the University of Maryland, reported that many "objected to the fundamental image of the project, which seemed out of character with Silver Spring and unresponsive to the needs of the community."<sup>57</sup> Richard Jaeggi, a civic activist, local newspaper columnist, and third place aficionado, recalls: "Studies had shown that citizens wanted street-facing retail, the old-timey hometown, all that community kind of stuff. And the answer was, 'Those days are gone. That's never going to happen.' All of the wisdom of the consultants is that this is your best bet, an urban entertainment complex, and the American Dream is that, it's got pizzazz."

With the American Dream project halted, a third plan was unveiled in 1997. Regional developers Foulger-Pratt and the Peterson Companies proposed "Town Center," a more modest, less controversial plan.

"'Town Center' Plan Excites Silver Spring," declared one headline.<sup>58</sup> Others with a positive tone followed. "Putting the Luster Back: Master Plan Aims for Downtown Sparkle" said one.<sup>59</sup>

Amidst such upbeat newspaper coverage, an occasional piece echoed earlier concerns about the challenges of preserving local character while at the same time revitalizing the business district. This was the case with, "As Change Begins, Silver Spring Dreams of a Vibrant Future," which asked:

Will Silver Spring become like its western neighbor, Bethesda, dominated by glass-and-steel office towers? Or will it share the down-market chic of Washington's Adams-Morgan to the south? Or even turn into a Burbank-like media center, anchored by Discovery and the American Film Institute?

‘The question now is what do we want to be?’ said Charles Atwell, owner of an interior office design company in Silver Spring and past member of numerous boards charged with revitalizing the dilapidated downtown. ‘Maybe a combination.’

But when the shovel hits the hardscrabble soil at the corner of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street, it will set in motion a series of construction projects that must strike a balance between the modern amenities demanded by wealthier residents and the bottom-line concerns of nearby small businesses. How to restore Silver Spring without removing the urban quirks and smudges that give it character?<sup>60</sup>

The project that has come to be known as "Downtown Silver Spring" consists of a retail core of shops with street level entrances, an outdoor public plaza, office building, parking garages, and a hotel. Soon to follow will be a civic building. The development also incorporates the facades of the Art Deco Silver Spring Shopping Center and a restored Silver Theater managed by the American Film Institute (AFI). In addition to these restorations, a new twenty-screen movie theater complex is a part of the package, as are several familiar chain restaurants and stores.

"Downtown Silver Spring" represents the current paradigm in retail development, one that addresses residents' calls for street-facing retail that will be of primary use to them, not tourists. The first store to open was a Strosnider's Hardware Store and the second a grocery store, Whole Foods. In addition, it illustrates how central chain businesses have become to commercial revitalization projects. Again, as Hannigan points out, investors and lenders do not like surprises.<sup>61</sup> As a result, signing up popular chains like Red Lobster, Borders Books, and Pier One—all part of the new Downtown Silver Spring—became a key step to launching this project. One unanswered question in 2005 is whether existing independently owned businesses

that line the streets outside the downtown core, and which contribute to Silver Spring's local identity, will succeed and whether new ones will continue to open.<sup>62</sup>

As pieces of the project have opened, media coverage has remained mostly positive:

"No Longer a 'Ghost Town,' Silver Spring's Downtown is Changing"<sup>63</sup>

"After Tarnishing for Years, Silver Theater is Shining Again"<sup>64</sup>

"New Hope Has Sprung Downtown: The County Celebrates Renewed Silver Spring."<sup>65</sup>

Although many residents' comments echo the tone of these headlines, not everyone has received this revitalization plan enthusiastically. Newspaper headlines have begun to highlight some of the emerging realities and concerns:

"Inner Suburbs Start to Lose Small Shops: Redevelopment Favors Chains"<sup>66</sup>

"Redevelopment Carries a Price: Rent Increasing in Silver Spring"<sup>67</sup>

"Some Minorities Feeling Left Out: Community Anxious about Its Role"<sup>68</sup>

"The New Silver Spring Isn't Golden to Me"<sup>69</sup>

"Renters Pay the Price of Downtown's Economic Revitalization"<sup>70</sup>

"Some Silver Spring Residents Concerned about Influx of Chains"<sup>71</sup>

"Silver Spring Development Leaves Some Downtrodden: Rising Rents Squeezing Out Small Businesses Downtown."<sup>72</sup>

The *Washington Post* reporter of this last story wrote: "At first, small-business owners, many of them immigrants, were among the biggest boosters. Then, they say, construction of Downtown Silver Spring and the rebuilding of the parking garage drove away their customers. And now they say they won't be able to benefit from all the new foot traffic because their landlords are squeezing them out with higher rents."

*From the Living Room to the Street: Origins of the Historical Society*

The Silver Spring Historical Society was founded in 1998 by Jerry A. McCoy and a small group of fellow local preservationists as a response to redevelopment proposals that threatened to tear at the physical fabric of downtown Silver Spring. It was then that he called a meeting of like-minded people to his home. "March of that year, we actually got a group together in my living room and said we've got to do something. Instead of just being that crazy Jerry McCoy out there, let's have some Society that can back me up."<sup>73</sup> Nancy Urban, one of the founding members, recalls that there were around ten people present that evening, including herself, Jerry, and Judy and Mary Reardon.<sup>74</sup> Unlike some of the others, Jerry was a relatively new resident at the time. Having moved to downtown Silver Spring in 1993, he had not been a participant in the early and fiercest stages of the battles to save the Art Deco theater, shopping center, and diner, all being threatened by the Silver Triangle plan. Also, in contrast with founding members like Judy and Mary Reardon, both of whom identify with the New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Jerry did not have a background as an activist, nor as a trained historian. His undergraduate degree is in visual communications, which led to his first profession as a public relations photographer. Now with a Master's in Library Science, he serves as a librarian and archivist for the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King Library in downtown Washington, D.C. and at the Peabody Room in the Georgetown Branch Library.<sup>75</sup>

Jerry says that his primary interests have always been to teach community history and to entertain—a combination that he intended to put to use as president of

SSHS. "It's that teacher part of me, I guess, that I like educating people about something they would never devote a moment of thought on, because it just to them would be a part of the background and they'd be oblivious to the importance of it." As for entertaining, he comments: "There's that part of being on stage, acting, performing. I guess I've always been a frustrated actor," to which he sings: "It's a show, it's really a show." Jerry also talks a lot about his desire to "create *pride* in the community through teaching of its history," something implicit in the use of the term "heritage" that is a prominent part of the organization's mission statement.

Nancy Urban recalls that there was a significant split during initial meetings over what the primary purpose of the organization would be. "The first two meetings of the Silver Spring Historical Society we had a big battle over whether it should be a preservation organization or an educational organization or what I thought, both." Like Jerry, who fashions himself an educator and entertainer, Nancy dislikes the confrontational aspects of political fights that come with preservation. She says, "I think preservation can be stressful, very stressful...It's more fun to find artifacts and educate the public. That kind of thing is more enjoyable than the stress of testifying and dealing with public officials." Jerry makes it known that conflicts at public hearings and internal strife among SSHS members make him sick to his stomach, leaving him wondering whether he wants to persevere. At times he threatens to disband the SSHS altogether. But in the end, he realizes that if not for the small committed core of SSHS members—around eight of the approximately eighty—no one would lead the charge to protect endangered buildings against the forces of revitalization. As Jerry and others point out, it was with reluctance that he came to

admit that in order to have something to show people and to teach them about, he would have to become actively involved as an historic preservationist. An especially pivotal event for him personally, and for all of those who had been working on preservation issues in the 1980s and 1990s, was the demolition of the Silver Spring Maryland National Guard Armory in 1998.

Built in 1927, it was the second armory to be housed in Silver Spring. The first, constructed in 1911 and located on Georgia Avenue, became Volunteer Fire Department #1, which will soon move to a new building being erected across the street. In unincorporated Silver Spring, the second Armory on Wayne, just off of Georgia, was declared "surplus" by the State of Maryland in 1974 and purchased by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) for community use. Among those functions were shows, exhibits, concerts, receptions, trade and business conventions, civic group meetings, and dances.<sup>76</sup>



Fig. 10. 1927 Silver Spring Armory (Courtesy Silver Spring Historical Society)

It was around the Armory's proposed demolition that residents concerned about preserving other vulnerable older parts of the built environment mobilized. In some ways, its razing functions on a local level much in the way the demolition of Penn Station in Manhattan has on a national one, bringing preservationists together and keeping them focused. As numerous histories recount, New York's Penn Station was demolished in 1964 to make way for Madison Square Garden. The demolition of the early twentieth century landmark and its replacement by a mediocre new station is frequently cited as a catalyst for the historic preservation movement in the U.S. and for new legislation that put restrictions on such decisions.<sup>77</sup> Among other things, the loss of the Armory has served as a bargaining tool in discussions with the County about other endangered buildings. The historic sites survey commissioned in 2002 was part of mitigation required by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and the Maryland Historic Trust following the Armory's leveling, which developers repeatedly described as crucial for revitalizing the CBD.

Jerry puts the Armory's demolition in context, explaining why preservationists did not receive wider support from the community at the time. "Unfortunately, there weren't enough people who were pissed off. I think at that stage people were so desperate and you know, damn, whatever it's going to take to get this project going, sure, sacrifice the Armory. And, um, we had a group that tried up until the last day literally."<sup>78</sup> Part of the problem, as he and others explain, is that historic preservation is normally framed to the public in "either/or" terms. The community can either have needed development or it can have its historic structures preserved, but not both. Joyce, one of the most tireless advocates of preserving the Armory, recounts the

County doing a "dog-and-pony show" for the various civic associations, telling members that the only thing holding up revitalization of the CBD was the Armory. "The way the plan was drawn up made it look like that was true, but a Town Center plan could have been designed in all sorts of other ways," she notes. To her, the Armory was "the heart of the community." "People had weddings there, there were things there every weekend, record shows, antique shows, and it doubled as a historic site."<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Marilyn Praisner, then President of the Montgomery County Council, Joyce wrote: "Neither City Place, nor the proposed Silver Triangle Mall, can fill the civic center role that Silver Spring Armory now serves."<sup>80</sup> Joyce and others remain so angry about what happened to the Armory that they refuse to have anything to do with the new civic building that is being built.

Describing how hard a blow the demolition of the Armory was, Mary Reardon remembers a vigil that she and others participated in, the week it came down. "There was only one wall left standing and we had this vigil. It was horrible. It was awful. We looked across and there was only one wall left of the Armory. It was like a war zone....And we had these candles. There were twenty-some people. Judy [her sister] was too depressed to come." Especially painful for Mary were comments development proponents aimed at vigil participants. "I walked into this Allied [Civic Association] meeting, and this guy said...and he was one of the American Dream supporters...said something to the effect, 'I hope there won't be more candle vigils,' or something like that. He was really vicious."<sup>81</sup> That the Armory was torn down to become a parking garage is, to Jerry, "the ultimate slap across the face."

While earlier groups such as Citizens to Preserve Old Silver Spring (CSPOSS) and the Silver Spring-Takoma Park Traffic Coalition had formed in response to specific threats—Lloyd Moore's Silver Triangle, the American Dream, and demolition of the Armory—the Silver Spring Historical Society was from the outset intended to be more permanent. Silver Spring Historical Society members would monitor what buildings and other spaces were being threatened and try to be proactive in their actions. After convincing an existing, largely inactive group with a similar name to fold, Jerry filed for and received 501(c)3 non-profit status for SSSH. The organization's membership then voted on a board of elected officers and drafted a two-tiered mission. That mission is: "To create and promote awareness and appreciation of Silver Spring's heritage through sponsorship of educational activities and the preservation and protection of historical sites, structures, artifacts and archives."<sup>82</sup>

Several years later, it is still the educational part of the mission that Jerry enjoys. Asked in the summer of 2003 what pleasures he receives from serving as SSSH president, he replied, "Well, I love giving those tours." And then, "That's about the only pleasure I derive anymore from the whole thing." Thinking back to the initial planning meetings for SSSH he says, "And now I understand why most historical societies don't go anywhere near that portion [of the mission statement devoted to preservation]." Prompted, Jerry recalls having enjoyed working on one specific project. Combining three of his passions—history, education, and entertaining—he served as chief historical consultant for the documentary *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*.<sup>83</sup>

## *Origins of a Less Segregated Silver Spring*

The heritage that the Silver Spring Historical Society and Gottlieb's film celebrate and aim to preserve is frequently at odds with the community's history remembered by older African American residents. They recall a Silver Spring that was highly segregated until the 1970s, although former resident Virginia Mahoney and others are quick to point out that black enclaves were always present. As we will see in chapter six, those African Americans who lived in or near the suburb during those years explain that it was clear to them that blacks were expected to abide by different sets of rules than whites. In the small portion of Walter Gottlieb's film devoted to the subject, Allison Claggett, Charlotte Annieperry Coffield, and Nina Honemond Clarke tell of having to go to movies and restaurants and to shop for clothing in the District of Columbia. They also note that African Americans who worked in downtown Silver Spring lived in outlying communities.<sup>84</sup>

While the film suggests that the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision requiring the integration of schools somehow seamlessly led to desegregation of Silver Spring's stores, the change in policy had more to do with a county-wide public accommodations ordinance that passed on January 16, 1962. This ordinance forbade discrimination based on race in all forms of public accommodations, including restaurants, stores, and places of recreation. It then became possible for African Americans like Roscoe Nix to enter, be seated, and served at downtown restaurants, diners, and cafes, or if not, to file a complaint against the owner with the county, as Nix and a small group of others became the first to do.<sup>85</sup> Fair Housing laws passed in 1968 outlawed blatantly discriminatory practices in

the realm of home sales and apartment rentals. This meant that if they were enforced, African Americans like Ruby Rubens, who with her husband had had the bewildering and humiliating experience of having a real estate agent disappear rather than show them a home, could now move from across the District line or elsewhere.

Preceding the passage of the ordinance that banned discrimination in public accommodations, members of the county's Commission on Human Relations visited numerous local sites to see what practices were being followed. They discovered that many of the area restaurants and places of recreation they checked continued to refuse service to African Americans. A list printed by the Commission in December 1961 featured such popular Silver Spring restaurants as Crisfield, Captain Jerry's, Fred & Harry's, and Crivella's, and several area bowling alleys, roller rinks, barber shops, motels, and golf courses. Compiled in conjunction with public hearings on the ordinance that were occurring that month, the commission's findings *did* suggest that change was in the air; numerous restaurants, stores, theaters, and places of recreation had begun to change their policies. Among those places identified as having begun to serve customers regardless of their race were Gifford's Ice Cream, the Hot Shoppes, Silver Theater, the Little Tavern on Georgia, the Hecht Company (department store), and Peoples Drug. Meanwhile, several other businesses were now found to be serving "mixed race," though not exclusively "Negro groups." The Tastee Diner was one of a number of places listed in that category.<sup>86</sup>

Ann Brown, elected to head the County Commission on Interracial Problems, said shortly after the body was formed: "We know that some clubs and housing projects refuse to admit not only Negroes, but Jews and other persons considered

'undesirable.' ...However the biggest problem seems to be discrimination due to color. Nobody seems to be aware of a great problem in any other area."<sup>87</sup>

By December 1961 several local, regional, and national events had occurred, all of which had some bearing on policies of racial discrimination in public gathering places. One was that Washington, D.C., which shares a border with Silver Spring and other Montgomery County suburbs, had banned such race-based exclusions several years earlier. In 1949 a coalition of civic, religious, labor, and charitable organizations had formed a Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the District Anti-Discrimination Laws, with Mary Church Terrell, one of Washington D.C.'s most prominent African American citizens, serving as its chairperson. While the District's anti-discrimination laws had been on the books since the early 1870s, they were not being enforced. This was true in the realms of housing, education, hospital care, hiring practices, lodging, entertainment, and recreation facilities, but the committee opted to begin with segregation of eating places.<sup>88</sup> Historian Lizabeth Cohen describes Washington, D.C. immediately following World War II as still a "segregated southern city," adding: "Disgraceful incidents in the nation's capital were legion. Richard Wright, in town for the opening of the stage adaptation of his novel *Native Son*, was prevented from entering a restaurant with his white producers and was forced to eat in the car."<sup>89</sup>

As would later occur in Montgomery County, members of the anti-discrimination committee in D.C. assembled data highlighting how many of the city's downtown's ninety-nine restaurants denied service to blacks or racially mixed groups

and how many accepted them. Committee members also sought to find out owners' reasons for those practices and what white patrons thought about them.

According to Constance Green's *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* and Marvin Caplan's "Eat Anywhere: A Personal Recollection of the Thompson's Restaurant Case and the Desegregation of Washington's Eating Places," organized sit-ins did more than anything to reverse policies of segregation in D.C. As a result of these acts, the Hecht Company would open its lunchroom to African Americans by the end of 1951 and other department stores and drugstores would quickly follow.<sup>90</sup> A year and a half later, in 1953, the courts affirmed the validity of Washington D.C.'s eighty-year-old Equal Services Act.

Continuing to allow discriminatory practices across the D.C./Maryland border in Montgomery County suburbs like Silver Spring was at odds with the county's progressive political reputation, especially at a time in which public awareness of segregation in public places had grown. The first annual report of the Commission on Human Relations to the Montgomery County Council stated: "...that as long as any discrimination continues to exist in public places it is a blight on our County."<sup>91</sup> In tandem with reports of similar acts of resistance occurring in other towns and cities across the country, local sit-ins and picketing of restaurants and places of entertainment and recreation were heightening residents' racial consciousness. It was these demonstrations and boycotts—most notably those held at Glen Echo Amusement Park in suburban Bethesda—that had led to the establishment of the county's commission, the first such body to form outside of Baltimore.<sup>92</sup>

A 1960 annual report of the statewide commission observed that: "Racial practices in Maryland substantiate the contention that the most demoralizing of all denials of human rights in this country is found in the area of so-called 'public accommodations.'"<sup>93</sup> Restaurants throughout the state, the report found, still refused to serve "minority group citizens," and "exclusion remains total in bathing beaches, bowling alleys, and other forms of commercial amusement and entertainment."<sup>94</sup> Citing an incident involving a restaurant's refusal to serve the ambassador from Ghana, the state commission's report observed that the continued practice of such policies was proving an embarrassment to the United States' international image.<sup>95</sup> Based on a range of similar occurrences, the first annual report of the county's commission concluded that, "Such discriminatory practices jeopardize the standing of the United States in the family of nations, most of whose citizens are not white."<sup>96</sup>

At the time that Montgomery County had begun taking steps to address these kinds of human rights violations, agencies had already been set up in nineteen states—all northern except for New Mexico—to enforce laws prohibiting one or more forms of discrimination. Nine other states—again all northern—had enacted laws prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation, but without enforcement powers.<sup>97</sup> In part because of its geographical location, bordering the South, it was widely considered a bold step on the part of Montgomery County, in 1962, to enact a countywide ban on segregation. It was the first jurisdiction in Maryland to do so, and it did so in the midst of some dissent. The council passed the measure by a vote of four to two, and newspapers reported that the Silver Spring Board of Trade and a number of area Chambers of Commerce chapters had voiced

strong opposition.<sup>98</sup> The basic argument of the trade and commerce groups was that such a law would "impair and destroy the basic right of individuals in private business to deal and associate with whomever they chose."<sup>99</sup>

While some residents remained vehemently opposed to integration or at least to having it governmentally mandated, the majority of residents who took a public stance did so in favor of the ordinance. This is borne out in archival letters and testimony, and in newspaper coverage. Testimony at a public hearing on the proposal on December 14, 1961 shows that eighty-five speakers spoke in favor of the ordinance, with only nine against. The *Montgomery Sentinel* was to report: "At its first public hearing, held a week ago Thursday, several hundred private citizens and representatives of civic and church groups voiced a 'unanimous recommendation' that the Commission urge the Council to enact 'an effective public accommodations ordinance.'" Supporters, the majority of whom were either affiliated with religious institutions (twenty-seven) or speaking on their own behalf (twenty-nine), talked of fairness, justice, and equality.<sup>100</sup>

One resident, Lise Kasmir, told of attending a public dance in Silver Spring with a white female friend and a black male friend. The three were "quite shocked and humiliated" by their treatment. "Five minutes away from the Nation's Capital, Americans were being refused rights to talk to one another at a public place." As a result of that and similar incidents, she "wholeheartedly" supported the ordinance. Kasmir was followed by Montgomery Blair Senior High School student Michael Teitelbaum. In his statement, Teitelbaum said: "The Student Council feels it represents the majority of Blair students when it expresses its indignation at the

thought of any of its fellow students being denied service in a public place solely on the basis of their race." Another speaker, Mrs. Alfred Yankauer, described her frustration as a mother who wanted to take her children roller skating, but would not because her children's black peers were being arrested when they attempted to do so. "My children feel as I do, we would like to go to a place which seems to be so thoroughly American." A teacher, Frederick E. Eschbach, told of instances in which teachers who worked together all morning could not have lunch together at restaurants near their schools.<sup>101</sup>

Opponents frequently spoke of constitutional rights and used anti-Communist rhetoric. Typical was this handwritten missive by Dewey C. King of Rockville: "Dear Sirs, I am very disturbed by recent pressure by radical groups to circumvent fundamental constitutional rights of businessmen and, in fact, all property owners within our state...."<sup>102</sup> Another, Virginia Hurt, claimed that under the Constitution "any private business person in the County should have the right to refuse whomever he wishes—be he black, red, yellow, or white."<sup>103</sup> More outspoken was Thomas Tinsley who called the plan "outrageous." He wrote Council President David Cahoon that, "They [Negroes] are not being persecuted or discriminated against. WE ARE THE ONES, AND BY WHOM, THE COMMUNISTS!" He concluded, "Why should we stand by unaware of these diabolical measures they are advocating."<sup>104</sup>

As for timing, the urgency of instituting a ban on discriminatory practices in Montgomery County, and specifically Silver Spring, was tied in part to the federal government's decision to relocate some of its offices to two new buildings in Silver Spring's business district. This, the *Washington Star* reported in October 1961, would

mean that "several hundred white-collar Negroes" would be working in Silver Spring rather than in the District. The paper went on to note that, "Presence of the Negroes in the overwhelmingly white suburb may have an important social impact on Montgomery County, which has an anti-discrimination ordinance under consideration." The reporter added: "The Negroes presumably will seek service in Silver Spring restaurants, and some of them eventually may try to buy or rent housing near their work to avoid long-distance commuting to and from the District." It was estimated that 240 African Americans working for the Labor Department would be part of the relocation, this at a time when, according to the 1960 census, only 1.1 per cent of the combined population of Silver Spring and Wheaton was African American.<sup>105</sup>

Roscoe Nix, a pension administrator, was one of the Labor Department employees who learned that he would be working in downtown Silver Spring beginning in 1962. Nix's story, along with those of other longtime African American residents I spoke with, reveals how intertwined Silver Spring and Washington, D.C. are in many residents' minds.<sup>106</sup>

### *Origins of IMPACT Silver Spring and More Diverse Community Leadership*

Like the Silver Spring Historical Society, the Silver Spring Community Leadership Initiative (SSCLI)—which would be renamed IMPACT Silver Spring in 2001—emerged from specific concerns about the effects revitalization would have on the community. As an organization, it is greatly concerned with issues of race, ethnicity, cultural differences, and inclusive civic participation. Whereas the

Historical Society was formally launched in response to the destruction of major pieces of the built environment, SSCLI, incorporated in 1999, originated in discussions about social and cultural diversity that began in 1997. As a *Washington Post* article notes, "The organization grew out of the need to broaden participation in an area transformed from a majority to minority white community in two short decades."<sup>107</sup>

It was in February 1997 that County Executive Doug Duncan appointed twenty-nine members to a newly established Silver Spring Redevelopment Steering Committee, joining two co-chairs (Steve Silverman and Laura Steinberg) that he had named the previous month. Among those appointed were local architects, past Chamber of Commerce officers, civic group leaders, planners, small business owners, a Takoma Park council member, housing advocates, and representatives of Montgomery Blair High School and Montgomery College. Frankie Blackburn was one of the people named.<sup>108</sup> At the time, she was vice president of Montgomery Housing Partnership, a private non-profit, "which works in partnership with the entire spectrum of the community to preserve and expand affordable housing in Montgomery County and to strengthen neighborhoods through housing and community revitalization activities."<sup>109</sup> She was also a founding member of Silver Spring Vision, a facility for homeless people.

Frankie was one of the steering committee members who spoke up to express her concern that leadership in the community was not reflective of its changing demographics. Others agreed, including County Executive Duncan. As a result, "a group of concerned citizens from the general and business community met for over a

year to develop a common plan towards ensuring that the diversity of the community's population would be reflected in the life and leadership of a newly revitalized Silver Spring."<sup>110</sup> One of the group's primary, agreed upon aims for SSCLI/IMPACT was that it provide training and support for people who had been excluded from the civic process. Another central aim was to strive to bridge divides that had formed, fostering understanding between various communities.

When I was first introduced to what was then SSCLI, the organization was run out of Frankie's Woodside neighborhood home, much as the Silver Spring Historical Society is headquartered in Jerry McCoy's to this day. SSCLI meetings would take place in other settings, including the offices of the Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association (MVMA), but mainly in local coffeehouses like Kefa and in area restaurants. Although meetings of SSHS now occur in the refurbished train station, instead of around Jerry's dining room table, that organization's archives continue to be stored in the basement of Jerry's home. While Jerry and others say that they would like to find something more permanent and public, there are no funds to make that possible. By contrast, in 2002, IMPACT relocated to the first floor of one of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) buildings on heavily trafficked East-West Highway, near Colesville Road.

It becomes clear that one of many things that distinguishes this organization from SSHS is that it is more formally intertwined in the institutional structures of Montgomery County and with the business community. Although both organizations are set up as 501(c) 3 non-profits, the primary source of SSHS's funding is through negligible annual membership fees. SSHS's budget shows that for the period June 28,

2002 to June 30, 2003 it had debits of slightly over \$1,000, credits of nearly \$2500, for a balance of approximately \$1400.<sup>111</sup> By contrast, IMPACT's 2003 operating budget was \$180,000, funding coming from a variety of sources. Listed as funders are Montgomery County, Discovery Communications, Inc., the Gazette newspapers, Community Foundation of the National Capital Area Region, the Meyer Foundation, the Montgomery County Community Foundation, Cafritz Foundation, and City Place Mall. In addition, Foulger-Pratt Management, Inc., the major development firm and a key player in the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring, donates office space to IMPACT.<sup>112</sup>

In part because of this arrangement with the developer, but also because the county is a source of funding, IMPACT finds itself in a somewhat tenuous position when it comes to taking a critical or oppositional stance on revitalization. While this does not mean that the organization shies away from asking hard questions about development, it does mean that it can expect to hear from the County Executive's office after it does so. This happened following a town hall style meeting on revitalization's effects on small businesses, after Frankie participated in a *Washington Post* forum on revitalization, and again when IMPACT teamed up with Council Member Tom Perez's office to survey small business owners about their experiences with the project to date.<sup>113</sup> Perez and his chief aide, Dan Parr, are preparing a report based on the survey data and discussing possible next steps to pursue. And members of IMPACT's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) training, including Gateway's David Fogel, are interested in exploring ways that Silver Spring could

distinguish itself as a leader nationally through the development of new policies that would be fairer to independently owned small businesses.



Fig. 11. Frankie Blackburn, second from right, with *Washington Post* roundtable participants: Sidney Kramer, left, Gustavo Torres, Gus Bauman, Steve Silverman, Donell Peterman and Bryant Foulger (Courtesy *Washington Post*)

Because IMPACT maintains communication with elected officials, developers, and other players—e.g. Discovery Communications—it is also in a potentially much more effective position than SSHS when it comes to having leverage. Of the two groups, input is much more likely to be sought from Frankie and IMPACT on matters under discussion, than it is from Jerry or other officers or members of SSHS. Although SSHS's choices in terms of how it functions have prevented it from being compromised by relations with developers, corporations, or the County, those choices have also contributed to the organization's marginalization.

Just as the two groups have contrasting origins and funding sources, they also have very different missions. The Historical Society's mission is "to create and promote awareness and appreciation of Silver Spring's heritage through sponsorship of educational activities and the preservation and protection of historical sites, structures, artifacts and archives." By contrast, the original mission statement of IMPACT Silver Spring illustrates how IMPACT is rooted in an awareness of the need

to address power imbalances and to forge alliances through the elimination of socially constructed barriers. It states: "Our mission is to provide training for community members of diverse backgrounds in order to develop skills and awareness needed to share power and build relationships that cross race, class and cultural lines." A more recent, streamlined version introduced in 2004 maintains the emphasis on diversity, leadership, and the forging of relationships for action: "Our mission is to create the capacity needed to build and sustain Silver Spring as a thriving, multicultural community. We do this by: raising awareness; developing leadership; building relationships; fostering dialogue; facilitating collaborative action." Its new "vision statement" and a list of "sustaining principles" see and call for a community that shares many of the values identified in this mission statement.<sup>114</sup>

There are also significant differences in the two organizations' governing structures. Whereas four elected officers—a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer—govern SSHS with little turnover, IMPACT Silver Spring is structured around a board of directors, each member of which serves a defined term length. Its much larger board consists of four officers and eleven additional members. Several members of the board have taken the Community Empowerment training program and/or served as mentors. Among the more prominent 2004-05 board members were Isiah Leggett, the former Montgomery County Councilman—who has announced that he is running to replace County Executive Doug Duncan, who is campaigning for governor—and Maryland State Delegate Garreth Murray, both prominent African American leaders. Also in contrast to SSHS's officers, the composition of IMPACT's board reflects the diversity of the organization and the larger community. Reflecting

its membership, all of SSHS's officers are white, while most of IMPACT's are people of color.

Finally, another difference between the two organizations is that SSHS is strictly a volunteer organization, while IMPACT has a small paid staff. In addition to Frankie Blackburn, IMPACT's Executive Director, Mark Robinson has been hired to serve as Director of Leadership Development and Community Building, and Linda Kahn is its Administrative Director. Silver Spring Historical Society officeholders hold full time jobs elsewhere, and in most cases sacrifice much of their free time on evenings and weekends to research, testify at public hearings, write newspaper columns, guide tours, and so forth.

If preservation efforts are the main activities of SSHS, the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) is IMPACT's signature program. Since the fall of 1999 close to ninety community members have participated in the training program, which stresses leadership development, community action, and relationship-building. At its inception, what was then CEIP (Community Empowerment and Involvement Program) was a nine-month program that required participants to attend three weekend retreats, six weeknight sessions, and six Saturday sessions. Facilitating those meetings were professionals, experienced in the fields of leadership training, organizational development, outreach, and diversity awareness. In addition to those group sessions, participants initiated and worked on a community project or action plan of their design that matched their interests, and met with mentors whom they had selected. After some recent changes, Community Empowerment now begins in the winter, rather than the fall, and is divided into two parts. The first, "Foundations,"

consists of an orientation and six additional sessions, two of which are full weekend retreats, between February and June. Three interim sessions occur in the summer and early fall. The second major portion is called "Action," and is comprised of two weekend retreats and five additional sessions.

While information about the program is widely disseminated—frequent notices are published in the *Gazette*, brochures are dropped off at third places like Kefa Café—IMPACT Silver Spring has also, from its inception, done outreach to community churches as a way of attracting new participants. As a result, religion as a frame of reference—in particular the motivation to work on behalf of the "common good" that guides liberal and progressive congregations—is something shared by many who are drawn to IMPACT. As part of the process for identifying participants for the 2005 class of Community Empowerment, a number of people with ties to IMPACT, including me, were identified as "community resources," and invited to be part of the recruiting process. A mailing to past CEP participants and friends of the organization included packets of information, flyers to post, and applications for those who were recruited. All of this led to an orientation meeting that interested parties were urged to attend.

At the outset of the training program, all incoming participants identify a "passion," a community issue or concern that they wish to exert effective leadership on. The groups of approximately twenty are comprised of people who have already chosen work that in some way affects the lives of residents of Silver Spring or the surrounding area. For example, some are employed by or volunteer in the schools or are involved in other capacities with area youth. Many work on affordable housing

issues. Several are active with services that assist immigrants or specific ethnic populations. Of recent graduates, one devoted her attention to becoming a more effective advocate for wheelchair accessibility in downtown Silver Spring, another to developing a multicultural arts center for children and families, and still another with the revitalization and economic development of the Long Branch community in East Silver Spring.

Each year a public graduation ceremony recognizes finishing groups for their achievements, allowing individuals to tell their stories of what they gained from the experience and the group to recount its history together. The event features food and culminates with dancing.

Lasting IMPACT (LI) is the name given to what is described as "the continuing support network initiated by and for graduates of the training program to support their continuing work on personal and community action plans."<sup>115</sup> Begun in January 2003, meetings of Lasting IMPACT take place one evening a month usually at Kefa Café or Mayorga Coffee Factory. Given access to those meetings, I learned that the number of attendees varies considerably from meeting to meeting—from five to fifteen—that Lasting IMPACT members rotate facilitation, and that L.I. has proven an effective way of keeping people involved in IMPACT Silver Spring through regular contact and collaboration on specific initiatives. When I became active in a subgroup that formed to sponsor a town meeting on the effects revitalization was having on small businesses, Lasting IMPACT provided a forum from which I was able to seek assistance and support.

Two other initiatives reflect the interests of many with ties to IMPACT. One is IMPACT in the Schools, which is working to develop a model approach to addressing the impact of race, class, and culture on achievement gaps in the public schools. A pilot program has been implemented at one of the local elementary schools to bring those parents typically underrepresented in school matters—people of color and immigrants—into the process. Ruby Rubens and Cynthia Rubenstein, both interviewed for this project, are members of the IMPACT in the Schools team.

The other major, ongoing initiative is Neighborhood IMPACT, which provides leadership development and diversity awareness training and support to existing community endeavors on a case-by-case basis. One project has Neighborhood IMPACT working with citizen members of the Long Branch Redevelopment Task Force on its efforts to broaden participation and to make their work more inclusive of the diverse population of that community.

### *Personal Geography: I Enter the Scene*

It was in the midst of the later chapters of this story that I arrived on the scene. I was in Silver Spring to witness the demise of what is now commonly perceived as a debacle, the American Dream plan, and the approval of the alternative "Town Center"/"Downtown Silver Spring" revitalization proposal and its construction. However, this study is partly an outgrowth of some of my own life-long interests.

As I explain in more detail below, it was my move to Montgomery County that challenged the stereotypes of suburbia that I carried with me. Mary Corbin Sies observes that recent scholarship demonstrates that "suburbs come in a diverse range of densities, planning forms, land use mixes, and relationships to nearby urbanized

areas and they boast a confusing array of dwelling types and costs."<sup>116</sup> Because this was not something I had known to be true earlier in my life, it is worth saying something about Roseville, Minnesota, my central point of reference up to the time that I relocated.

Prior to my move, and as long as I can recall, I have been drawn to urban commercial landscapes that in my mind have more character and history than the post-World War II suburb where I grew up. Based on my experience in Roseville—an inner-ring suburb of St. Paul—and other post-World War II suburbs of Minneapolis and St. Paul, my impression was that suburbs lacked a center or heart, that they had no downtown. In Roseville, shopping complexes, mainly strip malls, and rows or circles of franchised and chain restaurants are dispersed throughout. Besides the lack of a downtown, there are no sidewalks in Roseville.<sup>117</sup> Even though people walk, jog, and bicycle there, it is clear that this space was designed for cars and not any other type of traffic.

While its origins date back to the late 1940s and 1950s, most of the single-family dwellings that fill Roseville's streets were built in the 1960s and 1970s. In my family's neighborhood these homes were mainly ranch- or rambler-style, with a split-level thrown in from time-to-time. Still, with its scattered lot development, William Hudnut notes that first-tier suburb Roseville has more diversity in housing styles than do most of the large-scale subdivisions that surround it.<sup>118</sup>

Things have begun to change slightly, but people of color were nearly invisible in Roseville in the 1960s and 1970s when I was growing up, not surprising given the policies responsible for the development of U.S. suburbs to begin with. Any

diversity that existed in the years that I lived there was due to class, although it was never talked about in those terms. Certain neighborhoods were viewed as highly desirable, others like ours somewhat less so, and then there were those that we rarely saw. Based on our fleeting glances of the small, plain houses that comprised the latter set of neighborhoods, we had a vague idea that the families living there were not as good as others of us. First-grade classmates who were immediately placed in the lower reading groups tended to live in those sections, reinforcing those perceptions of social inferiority.



Fig. 12. My childhood home

Also missing in this suburban landscape were “third places,” the label that sociologist Ray Oldenburg has given informal community gathering spots like neighborhood cafés, bars, or coffeehouses, separate from but in proximity to home (“first place”) and work (“second place”).<sup>119</sup> Overall, the suburban lifestyle of Roseville was, and still is, fragmented and private. Third place settings were never part of Roseville's planning scheme, which was zoned in such a way that domestic,

work, and consumer spaces are kept separate. Men and women commute by car to work, return home at the end of their day, and several times each week drive to a mall or a supermarket to shop. Roseville was where the state's first McDonald's and the nation's first Target opened, and today it has virtually every chain store that might come to mind. Only within the past decade, with the appearance of Barnes & Noble superstores and Starbucks Coffee outlets, have businesses opened that function in some ways like a third place, offering settings where people gather in public. The new Roseville Public Library houses a Dunn Bros. Coffee, part of a local chain. Meanwhile, other public settings have been appropriated as informal gathering places. For my father and other retirees a nearby local enclosed shopping mall with benches and an array of corridors functions both as a place to walk and to socialize.<sup>120</sup>

What pleased my parents and most of my peers never fully satisfied me. I began seeking alternatives at a young age and by eleven was regularly biking or busing to downtown Minneapolis, where Bridgeman's Ice Cream Parlor, with its expansive lunch counter, made it a favorite stop. Before the construction of extensive skyway systems, the hustle and bustle of downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul streets was an appealing change of pace from the subdued atmosphere of my neighborhood. As I reached adolescence, downtown Minneapolis's 'Block E' with Shinder's Newsstands at either end, the legendary Moby Dick's bar ("Serving a Whale of a Drink") at the center, and porn shops and the Rife Sport Arcade mixed in, became a source of fascination. Also alluring were the ethnic restaurants and independent bookstores that I discovered downtown and surrounding the University of Minnesota campus in commercial sections called "Dinkytown" and the "West Bank." More

wholesome, but equally enjoyable, were summer trips to Park Rapids and Worthington, small towns in the northern and southern parts of the state that had Main Streets, bakeries, and soda fountains. People would greet each other by name and engage in conversation, at lunch counters, grocery and hardware stores, or on the street. What tied all of these settings together, the rural and the urban as opposed to the suburb I knew, were the many commercial establishments that were unique to their locales.

In college, I found myself gravitating toward professors who shared my interests in urban history and cultures, particularly an urban sociologist, a native of Brooklyn. For my senior seminar in American studies I submitted a final paper entitled "American Cities and Human Needs: The Importance of Considering the Novelist's Viewpoint," which began by citing Sam Bass Warner. One of Warner's contentions was that U.S. cities are failures because of their dependence on the decisions of a number of private capitalists. "Under the American tradition, the first purpose of the citizen is the private search for wealth; the goal of the city is to be a community of private money makers." As a result, the historian argued, despite the protection of unions for some and despite affluence for others, "the mass of city dwellers lacked any effective means to humanize their lives."<sup>121</sup> Observing that novelists were more prone to entertain human needs, and to contemplate the human effects of the physical forms of cities, I turned to writers spanning the birth of U.S. cities (e.g. Howells, Dreiser) to the modern age (e.g. Malamud, Baldwin) to consider what insights they might offer. In developing my case I was drawn to urbanists like

Jane Jacobs, and was working out of a humanities tradition that had me turning to a range of texts: fiction, poetry, memoir, music, painting, philosophy, and sociology.<sup>122</sup>

As a young adult, part of the workforce, my appreciation of third places and urban commercial landscapes matured. Saying goodbye to suburbia, I moved first to St. Paul, where I attended college, and then to various south Minneapolis neighborhoods more convenient to my first job in the downtown warehouse district. Daily pleasure there came from joining co-workers for lunch at B & J's Diner, a tiny place seating perhaps eight or ten, a block from where we worked. Bill, the African American proprietor who was married to a white attorney, flipped burgers and assembled sandwiches in front of his regular customers, most of whom were white, male, and working-class, talking and joking all the while. After work frequently meant going for beers at Archie's Bunker or the 301, dark, unpretentious, workingmen's hangouts on Washington Avenue, a former skid row. Meanwhile, Saturday mornings were reserved for leisurely breakfasts with my friend Maggie at the Key's, the Egg & I, and any number of other such places that thrive in Midwestern cities. These breakfast spots provided endless pots of coffee and offered the requisite hash browns, omelets, and pancakes. Often the lengthy wait for a table seemed to double the time of the leisurely meal. The motto of Al's Breakfast, once a favorite hangout of musician Bob Dylan, is: "So many friends, so few seats."

To walk inside third places gave me countless opportunities to step into cultural realities that were not part of daily life where I grew up. They also provided windows into the local environments that they were a part of. In addition to the food—or in some cases in *spite* of the food—the attractions of these hangouts were

many. Generally family-owned and run, each had its own feel, grounded in the culture and history of the surrounding neighborhood.



figure 13. Al's Breakfast (Courtesy Kelly Povo)

While I have come to learn that these are not welcoming settings for everyone, they are often comfortable especially for white men. This comfort level may be attributed in part to their decors, which rarely change, lending a certain funky appeal, and to a culture that encourages customers to linger. Also, with a counter or bar as a central feature, patrons are more likely to talk with each other than they are at the franchised, family-oriented restaurants in Roseville, although this may happen less frequently than Oldenburg suggests. People who consume third places do so for a variety of reasons, sometimes preferring to be alone in the company of others, and at other times for reasons less virtuous than those identified by *The Great Good Place* author.

Like Erving Goffman, sociologist David Grazian observes that "all interpersonal encounters represent elaborate theatrical performances, each of us

playing a series of roles as we move through life."<sup>123</sup> While Grazian makes the point that this refutes their "authenticity," third place patrons often say that part of the appeal of their favorite hangouts is precisely that they function like theater. One frequent customer of a the Florida Avenue Grill in Washington, D.C. told me, "I love the rhythm of the place, the sounds; the spatulas on the grill, the cooking of eggs. It's like music." Others commented on the entertainment they received from interactions with the wait staff.



Fig. 13. Band Box Diner (Courtesy Kelly Povo)



Fig. 14. Mickey's Diner, St. Paul

Looking back, perhaps it is not surprising that my quest for my own ideal third place led to frequent trips from Minneapolis to Chicago, often with my younger brother. Beginning in my twenties, I enjoyed exploring neighborhoods and commercial districts there, all of which seemed to have distinct characters and histories. Most visits focused on scouting out the city's best third places; places like the Green Mill Lounge, the Heartland Café, Lou Mitchell's, the Billy Goat Tavern, and neighborhoods spanning both North and South Sides.

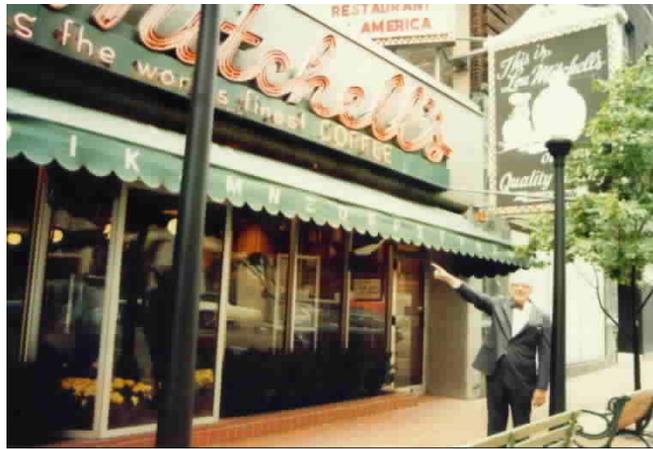


Fig. 15. Lou Mitchell in front of his restaurant in Chicago (Courtesy David Johansen)



Fig. 16. Polish Bakery on Milwaukee Avenue (Courtesy David Johansen)

Over time, I have come to recognize that the quest for this type of urban "authenticity" is problematic, and reveals how I, like the author of *Blue Chicago* and other people I know, consume places that are often far removed from the regular social worlds through which we move. Grazian notes that what has come to fascinate him most is how people's searches are embedded in "hopes of living out their fantasies of experiencing the dream world of authenticity through the medium of tourism and cultural consumption."<sup>124</sup> I have learned that I can become unsettled when forced into more direct, less detached relationships with "locals," i.e. the regulars of such places. That the backgrounds of the people who patronize and work in these settings are often very different from my own has proven to be one of the sources of their appeal, but also of various challenges.

Class, race, and sexual orientation sometimes intervened to make these less than comfortable places for me, a middle-class, college-educated, politically progressive, white male, to spend time in. I vividly remember stopping with my brother for a beer at Schaller's Pump in Bridgeport, the first Mayor Daley's neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. The patron seated next to me, a white, working-class male, likely as a means of testing me, engaged me in conversation, curious to know if I shared his negative views of "that nigger mayor," the late Harold Washington. When I responded that I did not, things became very tense. Race also became a factor whenever my brother and I visited Gladys' Luncheonette, a soul food restaurant also on the South Side that catered to a mostly black clientele. That the wait staff was quick to seat us ahead of others who were waiting led to detectable and

understandable hostility on the part of other patrons, something that had not been present until then.



Fig. 17. Schaller's Pump (Courtesy David Johansen)

As disconcerting as such third place encounters could be I decided that they were still good indicators of the cultures of the locales in which they were grounded and avenues to learn about different kinds of Americans. The extent to which these places survived and thrived or failed to do so in various communities seemed to me revealing of a number of factors, not strictly economic, but cultural as well, and I sought to understand them more fully. However, I came to approach them with more caution, and to appreciate why many people, some of whom I know well, are much more reluctant than I to engage in such explorations, often because of their gender, race, nationality, or sexual orientation. Anthropologist James Clifford notes that, "The traveler, by definition, is someone who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways."<sup>125</sup>



Fig. 18. Jim's Sausage Stand on Maxwell Street (Courtesy David Johansen)



Fig. 19. Maxwell Street (Courtesy David Johansen)

In the mid-1990s, after making my first major move across country, I began exploring neighborhoods and downtown areas in Washington, D.C. and its Maryland suburbs, looking for places that had maintained some of their local culture. A project on the Florida Grill, which touts itself as D.C.'s oldest black-owned restaurant, was my introduction to ethnography and to the U Street section of the city, a

neighborhood undergoing gentrification. While pondering whether to expand my research, I became increasingly intrigued by funky downtown Silver Spring, its diner and other third places.

### *My Discovery of Silver Spring*

Bordering Takoma Park, Maryland, where I live, Silver Spring's downtown captured my interest for several reasons. I liked its gritty aesthetic. Fond of third places, I was drawn to it because it housed a diner, neighborhood bar, and coffeehouse, all independently owned and unique to Silver Spring. Also, Silver Spring and Takoma Park were places where my mother had spent her childhood and adolescence, yet I had had little exposure to either before coming to the area to attend graduate school. Finally, its downtown piqued my interest because I had read that plans for its redevelopment had provoked tremendous local, regional, and even national controversy. Massive changes set to occur were prompting more than the usual amount of discussion and debate among residents about the nature of Silver Spring's identity.

When I was growing up, Silver Spring was a place I vaguely knew of but had never visited. Family vacations typically took us to the lakes of northern Minnesota, the plains of North Dakota (where my father had grown up on a farm) or sometimes farther west where some of his relatives had settled. Occasionally my mother would make reference to a childhood spent outside of Washington, D.C., in Silver Spring and neighboring Takoma Park, or to Montgomery Blair, the high school from which she had graduated in the 1940s. But I lacked firm mental images of those places until my first visit well after graduating from college. Familiar only with the newer brand

of suburbs surrounding Minneapolis and St. Paul, I was surprised to discover through my early encounters with Silver Spring, that suburbs built during an earlier period had been designed with actual downtowns. It was also a new experience to see a suburb that had truly aged.



Fig. 20. One of my mother's childhood homes



Fig. 21. Former Montgomery Blair High School

One sight that caught my eye was a small diner, but I received mere glimpses of it and the rest of the downtown area on those early trips, mainly as a passenger in a moving car. It was only after deciding to relocate to the area to work on a Master's Degree that I was provided with opportunities to do a more thorough investigation of

Silver Spring and that diner. First through personal encounters, and then through more scholarly ones, time spent in and reading about Silver Spring and the vicinity gave me a window into unexplored parts of my family history as well as into long-standing social and intellectual concerns. Among other things I began to learn that suburbs have the potential to be at least as diverse as the urban areas of which they are a part. Encountering Silver Spring, Wheaton, Langley Park, and the suburbs of Prince George's County led to a major shift in my thinking and a rejection of many stereotypes about suburbia.



Fig. 22. Exterior Tastee Diner, Georgia Avenue location on closing day

While I did not know it at the time, an event I attended a year after arriving in the area was linked to the diner, which I later was to learn had been caught up in the swirl of debates about historic preservation and revitalization. In the fall of 1995 I crowded into a meeting hall at the old Armory, joining over seven hundred residents for a citizen forum on the proposed American Dream mega-mall. Due to lack of

space, another hundred people stood outside. The presence of the developers, two Iranian Canadian brothers, the Ghermazians, was part of what caught my interest. I knew that they were the driving force behind the Mall of America, located just south of Minneapolis in Bloomington, and that that mega-mall had drawn customers away from established downtowns, making many of the stores there vulnerable to closure. Also intriguing to me were the many yard signs I had seen in Silver Spring and Takoma Park voicing opposition to the project. Based on media reports my impression was that there had not been this level of dissent in Minneapolis and St. Paul over a mall that was expected and has proven to attract huge numbers of tourists. Standing throughout the evening at the Armory, listening to citizen concerns and complaints, served as a vivid introduction to how deeply many in Silver Spring cared about the future of their community's commercial landscape, and how tumultuous the discussions had become.<sup>126</sup> But it was not the American Dream debate so much as it was the Tastee Diner that became my chief entry point into the history and cultures of the community.

I was so steeped in studies when I began the master's program that more than a year elapsed before I stepped inside the Tastee, thanks to my friend Greg's urgings. An article in the D.C. *City Paper* about an eccentric-sounding young filmmaker named Sujewa, who had made the diner his second home, created a zine about it, and was planning a film inspired by encounters there, had also intrigued me. When I finally ventured in, near the end of what I planned on being the culmination of my graduate school experience, I found the diner to be a bit unkempt, shabby even, but comfortable, homey, just the kind of place I like. I remember thinking that the

blueberry pancakes, home fries, and coffee I had ordered did not quite meet the standards of the breakfast spots I had frequented in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Chicago. But there were other qualities—the Tastee's atmosphere, history, and its intimacy—which more than made up for the food. Surveying the scene, I immediately became curious about the staff and customers, most of whom seemed very much at home there. Eventually I would come to know some of them through informal conversations and interviews.



Fig. 23. Eunice Ramsey serves customers (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)

Something else caught my attention on those early visits as well, something that I became increasingly interested in exploring. At either ends of the counter were two display cases, each containing items that offered a hint of the intertwined histories of the Tastee and downtown Silver Spring. Yellowed newspaper clippings, letters, political cartoons, and other memorabilia from the mid- to -late 1980s captured the outrage and sorrow many members of the community had expressed when developer Lloyd Moore announced his intention to demolish the diner along

with several other prominent buildings to make way for his "Silver Triangle." One of the items, a cartoon from the *Montgomery Journal*, featured a salivating developer, mouth wide open, ready to bite into his sandwich, two slices of bread surrounding the Tastee Diner.<sup>127</sup> Further research revealed that the diner would almost certainly have disappeared if not for steps taken by staff members, none of whom had prior political experience, and customers who had responded to the call to action. As they had in response to the American Dream project, hundreds of citizens filled public meeting halls to air their opinions, and many wrote letters to council members and to area newspapers. Close to 9,000 people signed petitions circulated by the staff.<sup>128</sup>



Fig. 24. Display case at the Tastee Diner on Georgia Avenue



Fig. 25. Editorial cartoon on redevelopment and Tastee Diner (Courtesy Montgomery Journal)

It was through researching the controversies surrounding the diner that I found myself broadening my focus, placing the contests of meaning confronting it within the context of larger conflicts about community identity.

While the "do-whatever-it-takes," everything-is-expendable position of developers, many elected officials, and some residents did not surprise me, what struck me as unusual was the amount of resistance to proposals that promised to drastically alter the commercial landscape. As architecture critic Larry Millett observes, "Buildings come and go with blinding speed in American cities," adding: "To observe a city over time is to see, for better or worse, the remorseless power of change."<sup>129</sup> My experiences had told me that when it comes to urban landscapes, Americans have become increasingly accustomed to "the remorseless power of change" and hence are less and less likely to resist. Left unchallenged, the change that results is often something worse, or so it seemed to me.

For example, the vibrant street life of Minneapolis's Hennepin Avenue of my youth was decimated when a large, centrally located enclosed mall replaced the movie theaters, small shops and restaurants, including Bridgeman's Ice Cream, that patrons had formerly entered from the sidewalk. The fortress-style mall, City Center, has struggled to maintain tenants and customers, and has recently been overhauled, with much of its prime retail space transformed into offices. Across the street, the notorious "Block E," was also leveled and sat empty for fifteen years before the decision was made to replace it with yet another mall. Minneapolis-St. Paul's alternative weekly *City Pages* reports that that dining and entertainment complex is proving to be another failure.<sup>130</sup> Yet, I do not remember hearing of any outpouring of

public opposition to any of those plans, nor tales of packed city council rooms or petitions. Examples like this made me even more curious to learn why it was that some residents in Silver Spring had been so vocal, what it was about revitalization and historic preservation that had been sources of conflict, and whether there appeared to be any common ground among civic players.

### *A Partial Account*

What I have produced is an admittedly partial account, something that will be most apparent to the people I spoke with and others who have been especially active in Silver Spring's civic affairs. Throughout the process of researching and writing this study there was one thing that became clearest to me. Regardless of how much I had learned about my topic, the extent of my knowledge could not equal that possessed by members of the community who had been at the center of discussion, debate, and action over the past twenty years. Whenever one of them casually made reference to a person or event that they assumed I knew, I could not help but think about how much more deeply informed their accounts were than mine. I also realized that for each person I spoke with there were at least ten others I had hoped to have similar exchanges with but could not due to time and other restraints.

Because I had not been as immersed in the community as the people I met, I could only gain a limited sense of the insider's point of view. Whereas they were committed to whatever civic actions they were working on, my ultimate commitment was to shaping the material I was collecting into a dissertation for an academic degree. I was entering an existing scene and was only able to commit a set amount of time to this project. Because of such limitations, Loretta Lees cautions that academics

not overestimate what they bring to the table in such work. "For the most part, a gathering of international critical geographers has relatively little of value to tell local activists about how to petition City Hall."<sup>131</sup> Lees also stresses the importance of academics learning to communicate in such a way that they will be understood as partners in dialogues in communities outside of academia, something that I have aimed to do in this study.

How I positioned myself affected the amount and quality of information I was able to glean. Because I was aware at the outset of antagonisms between segments of the community, I decided that it would be detrimental to my aim of hearing and understanding divergent viewpoints if I became too closely identified with any one group. The more familiar I became with Silver Spring Historical Society members' views about others in the community, and as my sense grew of how some African American residents and IMPACT participants perceived SSHS members, the more convinced I became that this was the right decision. The role I adopted was what ethnographers refer to as "peripheral membership." According to Patricia and Peter Adler, this stance seeks to acquire "an insider's perspective on the people, activities, and structure of the social world, and...the best way to acquire this is through direct, first-hand experience. They [peripheral members] interact closely, significantly, and frequently enough to acquire recognition by members as insiders. They do not, however, interact in the role of central members, refraining from participating in activities that stand at the core of group membership and identification."<sup>132</sup> The Adlers go on to observe that there is a "bifurcation of involvement and detachment" in this role, and that "when things become too confusing or pressured, they can leave

the setting to regenerate.”<sup>133</sup> The temptation to withdraw in this way might exist for people like Jerry McCoy and Virginia Mahoney, of this study, but it is generally not an option for them in the way it was for me.

Making an alternate choice and fully immersing myself in either the Silver Spring Historical Society or in IMPACT Silver Spring would likely have produced a deeper account of one or the other group. But that depth of understanding of one group, I feared, would have come at the exclusion of the other. Perhaps had I been able to negotiate it, and had there been sufficient time, the ideal arrangement would have allowed me to become a more complete member of both organizations. This would have required me to take a leadership position around an issue that the Silver Spring Historical Society was working on. For example I could have researched and testified on structures that were being considered for the County Locational Atlas and Index. Then, at a given point I might then have enrolled in IMPACT’s CEP training and/or taken the lead on a major project that would have allowed me to work with Frankie Blackburn and others affiliated with that organization more intimately and for an extended period of time.

One of the drawbacks of being in a peripheral position was that I was alternately brought into planning sessions, email exchanges, or other activities and then soon after either forgotten or intentionally left out. This contributed to some confusion on the part of members and me about my status within these groups. Because I had sincerely communicated my respect for the missions of people I was interacting with, I initially received a warm welcome. However, as participants came to see that I was exploring other perspectives, often with members of the community

that they viewed antagonistically, and as I chose to limit my involvements by refusing invitations to do certain things, such as testifying on behalf of preservationists at public hearings or taking part in IMPACT's annual planning sessions, there was a distancing process that followed. At times I sensed that I was viewed somewhat suspiciously, and internally I had questions about the validity or ethics of what I was doing to earn people's trust, which in the end might be shattered by my written assessment.

My academic frame of reference may also have contributed to a distancing or detachment, a lingering sense on my part and on theirs that I was not truly one of the group, but instead was someone studying them. On the one hand my identification as a "scholar" lent me credibility and an "in" with most groups and individuals I approached, but on the other it added to my nebulous status. Had I been more actively involved with the people I interviewed and the organizations with which they were associated, prior to beginning my research, I would likely have been viewed as more of an insider, someone committed to the same causes that these individuals were, and hence more trustworthy. The main drawback, of course, is that I would not have come to the project with the same "fresh eyes" that I did.

Related to all of this was my growing awareness of a potential conflict. Eventually I would be analyzing and writing about people who had trusted me, been generous with their time and resources. Some I had become close to, and many I hoped to work with in the future. I respected all of them for their passion and determination to make a difference in their community and in the world. As someone who would enjoy being more deeply involved in community life, it became difficult

for me not to consider the risks involved in producing an account that, if read, is sure to offend people and groups that I would like to maintain relationships with. This also points to a broader discomfort that I now have with ethnographic representations. For, even though I see benefit in attempting to convey the humanness and multiple dimensions of people who are involved in community debates about historic preservation and related issues, I realize that based on the contact I had with subjects of this study, that I am capable of partial sketches. And that therefore these sketches may be unfair or perceived that way.

Personality is also an issue that resulted in limiting what I was able to do. As John L. Jackson writes so honestly in *Harlemworld*, “I had a specific and personal problem that—although undertheorized in anthropological discussions about fieldwork methodology—seemed to be my biggest ethnographic Achilles heel: I was terribly shy, and shyness is a self-inflicted deathblow to any self-respecting anthropologist.”<sup>134</sup> For introverts ethnographic fieldwork is incredibly demanding. It requires contacting strangers, often out of the blue, to ask if they will take time to meet with you. If they accept, this leads to nervous anticipation of how you will be received, whether you will be sufficiently prepared, or be seen as the imposter that you may view yourself to be. Even if things go well and you leave feeling satisfied with the level of trust that evolved and the material the session provided, it can be a draining experience. One consequence for the introvert, as Jackson describes, is that he or she may delay beginning the process of fieldwork and then refrain from doing the amount that an extrovert might.

Regardless of personality type, the total numbers of hours a person may interview is restricted by the more practical consideration of transcription, an incredibly time-consuming and tiring process. Many of my choices were purely pragmatic, based on which of my contacts were first to respond and how time-consuming the transcription process was.

Finally, it became clear that just as the individuals profiled filter what they see transpiring in Silver Spring through their lenses, so have I. Each of them has constructed stories about the community, its identity, its past, present, and future that are very real to them and that guide their actions. As we will see, it is often difficult for them to step away from those lenses and to entertain realities constructed by others. I have struggled with the same thing, finding it more challenging than expected to fully appreciate residents', developers', and elected officials' perspectives that differ from my own. For example, my biases would appear when I tried to entertain why someone would find ubiquitous chain businesses in downtown Silver Spring's core to be more appealing than its independent businesses. My understanding is beginning to grow, although this project limited my contact with those who might have helped in that regard. Among my pool of interviewees a high value was placed on such enterprises.

There were other issues, however, where I did come face to face with viewpoints that were starkly at odds with mine. For example, there were those who expressed little if any interest in preserving anything of the built environment. There were also those I came in contact with who displayed obliviousness or resistance to the importance of recovering and telling unpleasant truths about Silver Spring history.

In each case it took work to remind myself that my goal was to place myself inside their head, to view the world through their eyes, and to understand the cultural underpinnings of their perspectives on the topics we discussed.

### *Time to Hit the Streets*

Having introduced my topic, the groups I learned from, the literature that informs my discussion, the history of Silver Spring, and my background, it is time now to look more closely at the built environment itself.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Oshel, "The Development of Silver Spring," <<http://users.starpower.net/oshel/H02.htm>> (4 December 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Walter J. Gottlieb, *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb* (Arlington, VA: WETA, 2002), videorecording.

<sup>3</sup> Gist Blair, "Annals of Silver Spring," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 21 (1918): 159-61.

<sup>4</sup> Oshel, "Development of Silver Spring." The tale of Blair and the horse appears in abbreviated forms in several official government documents and commissioned reports. Among them are M-NCPPC sector plans; "Silver Spring: Past, Present and Future," prepared by a Blue Ribbon Committee appointed by the Silver Spring Revitalization Task Force; and Richard C. Jaffeson's "Silver Spring Success: An Interactive History," commissioned by the Lee family in 1996 for a special presentation at the annual meeting of the Board of Directors of the Lee Development Group. E. Brooke Lee also recounts the story of his great-grandfather, his grandmother, and the horse, in great detail to James Sculle, in an interview conducted in 1977. Combined, these and other retellings of Silver Spring's story of origin lend a sense that the community, long struggling with its identity, does have something of a heritage. These narratives also firmly establish the Blairs and the Lees—the family Elizabeth was to marry into—as the community's two most prominent families.

<sup>5</sup> Blair, "Annals," 162.

<sup>6</sup> Hiebert and MacMaster, *Grateful Remembrance*, 153-54.

<sup>7</sup> E. Brooke Lee, interview by James H. Scull, transcript, Damascus, MD, 3 February 1977, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Jaffeson, "Silver Spring Success," 45-6.

<sup>9</sup> Hiebert and MacMaster, *Grateful Remembrance*, 124. The authors write that because of soil enrichment, land values in Silver Spring and Olney were among the area's highest at that time. See also, Oshel, who writes that the earliest known sign of white American development in the area appears to have been a short-lived post office, "Simpsonville," which records show was established in 1816. Oshel's history also reveals an ongoing rivalry between Sligo and Silver Spring, particularly as Blair attempted to make the latter more prominent through the establishment of a post office. At various times, Silver Spring and Sligo each had had their own post offices and they remained rivals until after the turn of the twentieth century when Silver Spring, no doubt because of the political clout of the Blairs and Lees, won out.

<sup>10</sup> Hiebert and MacMaster, *Grateful Remembrance*, 264.

<sup>11</sup> Callcott, *Maryland and America*, 24.

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- <sup>12</sup> Oshel, "Development of Silver Spring."
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Blair, "Annals," 185.
- <sup>15</sup> Longstreth, "Neighborhood Shopping Center," 28.
- <sup>16</sup> T.H.S. Boyd, *History of Montgomery County, Maryland, from Its Earliest Settlement in 1605 to 1879* (Baltimore: Regional Publishing, 1972), 76. Cited in Stephanie Ryberg, "Silver Spring's Georgia Avenue: The Development of a Twentieth Century Business District," unpublished paper (College Park MD: University of Maryland, 2002), Maryland Room, University of Maryland.
- <sup>17</sup> Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue," 248.
- <sup>18</sup> Mary Ann Barton, "A New Lease On Life: Neglected Inner-Ring Suburbs Finally Receive Attention They Need to Thrive," *American City & Country* 119, no. 3, <<http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=12612342>> (2 April 2005).
- <sup>19</sup> George P. Pelecanos, *Right as Rain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001), 153.
- <sup>20</sup> Jane Seaberry, "Sprucing Up Silver Spring," *Washington Post*, 9 October 1979, sec. F, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> "Silver Spring Shopping Center Opens Today," *Washington Post* 27 October 1938, special sec., p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> George Kennedy, "Silver Spring, Once Quietly Rural, Is Real Estate 'El Dorado,'" *Washington Post*, 6 November 1950, sec. B, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue," 248.
- <sup>24</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 1.
- <sup>25</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 130.
- <sup>26</sup> Susan Riches Sargent, "Main Street Meets Megastrip: Suburban Downtown Revitalization in Tempe, Arizona" (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2002). Sargent illustrates that this pattern is common to other downtown retail districts.
- <sup>27</sup> Keith B. Richburg, "Silver Spring: Home of Ethnic Diversity," *Washington Post*, 14 November 1981, sec. B, p.1.
- <sup>28</sup> Molly Sinclair, "Silver Spring to Get Plan for 'Superblock,'" *Washington Post*, 18 December 1986, sec. B, p.1.
- <sup>29</sup> Jo-Ann Armao, "\$250 Million Development Approved for Silver Spring," *Washington Post*, 30 September 1988, sec. A, p.1.

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory B. McBride, Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President Rose Crenca, Rockville, 6 April 1987, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>31</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, "The Future of the Past: Our Clouded Vision of Historic Preservation," *Pioneer America* 7 (1975): 1-20.

<sup>32</sup> Wayne Goldstein, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 22 June 2003. Excerpts from "Theater's Renovation Sparks Angry Protest," *The Prince George's Journal*, 30 August 1984.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Forgey, "Silver Spring's Salvation: Is It High-Rises Or Preservation?," *Washington Post*, 9 March 1985, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Victor Wright, "30's Mall Faces Wrecking Ball," *New York Times*, 24 May 1987, sec. RE, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ted Shelsby, "Silver Spring Fights to Come Back: Developers Spar with Preservationists," *Baltimore Sun*, 18 February 1987, sec. G, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Molly Sinclair, "Silver Spring Renewal Debated: Planning Board Asked to Save Art Deco," *Washington Post*, 3 February 1987, sec. B, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald W. Olson, Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President Rose Crenca, Rockville, 20 March 1987, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>38</sup> Edith Donohue, Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President Rose Crenca, Rockville, 30 October 1987, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>39</sup> Debbie Stone, "Silver Spring Diner to Close: Long-Standing Restaurant Fights for Preservation," *Montgomery Journal*, 26 November 1986, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Eugene L. Meyer, "Plan to Shut Landmark Diner Leaves Bitter Taste with Fans," *Washington Post*, 11 December 1986, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Matt Hamblen, "Silver Spring's Future: Tastee Diner, Theater Not in Developer's Plans," *Montgomery Journal*, 22 December 1986, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Betsy Taylor, Silver Spring, testimony on behalf of the East Silver Spring Citizens Association, presented at the annual growth policy meeting of the Montgomery County Council, 17 February 1987, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>43</sup> Howard Sribnick, Silver Spring, testimony before the Montgomery County Council, Rockville, Maryland, 17 September 1987, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>44</sup> Harvard University Graduate School of Design, "Silver Spring Development," 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 2. The study conducted by the Urban Land Institute in 1992 observed that recent building trends, including some structures designed by Lloyd Moore's firm, had "largely changed the architectural character of the downtown from 1930s Art Deco to 1990s 'Anywhere USA.'" Its authors concluded: "The community identity should emerge from Silver Spring's distinctive qualities. The city's stock of Art Deco buildings, and the dedication of many of its citizens to the preservation and restoration of this stock, provide a potentially handsome and highly effective overall theme for the CBD and the project."

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Forgey, "Silver Spring's Salvation: Is It High-Rises or Preservation?" *Washington Post*, 9 March 1985, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> C.P. Freund and Bill Rice, "Sprung Out," *City Paper*, 3 April 1987, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kevin Sullivan, "The 3-Cornered Question Mark: Problems Stall Silver Spring Triangle Project," *Washington Post*, 13 March 1994, sec. B, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> Diane Grant, "Springing Back," *Washingtonian*, June 2003, p. 48.

<sup>52</sup> Sherman Silverman, "Arresting Suburban Blight in Silver Spring, Maryland," *The Pennsylvania Geographer* 60, no. 1 (2002): 52-82.

<sup>53</sup> Ann Marie Moriarty, "Silver Spring Needs This Project," *Washington Post*, 17 September 1995, sec. C, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Louis Aguilar and Jackie Spinner, "Silver Spring Residents Tell 'American Dream' Fears," *Washington Post*, 6 September 1995, sec. D, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Webb Pressler, "Developers Want Help on Silver Spring Project," *Washington Post*, 9 September 1995, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Roger K. Lewis, "Latest Silver Spring Plan Shows Considerable Promise," *Washington Post*, 25 July 1998, sec. R, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Amy Klein, "'Town Center' Plan Excites Silver Spring: In a Declining Downtown, Hope for the Future," *Washington Post*, 6 November 1997, sec. ME, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Susan DeFord, "Putting the Luster Back: Master Plan Aims for Downtown Sparkle," *Washington Post*, 9 December 1999, sec. ME, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Scott Wilson, "As Change Begins, Silver Spring Dreams of a Vibrant Future," *Washington Post*, 17 April 1999, sec. B, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 107.

<sup>62</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, "Minimizing Small Business Displacement in a Revitalization Zone: The Case of Silver Spring, Maryland" (College Park, MD: School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, University of Maryland, 2005).

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<sup>63</sup> Meredith Hooker, "No Longer a 'Ghost Town,' Silver Spring's Downtown is Changing," *Gazette*, 5 November 2003, sec. A, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Karen Schafer, "After Tarnishing for Years, Silver Theater is Shining Again," *Gazette*, 2 April 2003, sec. B, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> Cameron W. Barr, "New Hope Has Sprung Downtown: The County Celebrates Renewed Silver Spring," *Washington Post*, 20 May 2004, sec. ME, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ann O'Hanlon, "Inner Suburbs Start to Lose Small Shops: Redevelopment Favors Chains," *Washington Post*, 29 October 1999, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Dana Hedgpeth, "Redevelopment Carries a Price: Rent Increasing in Silver Spring," *Washington Post*, 30 November 2000, sec. ME, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Michael H. Cottman, "Some Minorities Feeling Left Out: Community Anxious about Its Role," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2003, sec. B, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Boudreaux, Jr., "The New Silver Spring Isn't Golden to Me," *Washington Post*, 5 October 2003, sec. B, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> Tina Peng, "Renters Pay the Price of Downtown's Economic Revitalization," *Gazette*, 7 July 2004, sec. A, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Megan McIlroy, "Some Silver Spring Residents Concerned about Influx of Chains," *Silver Spring Voice*, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> Annys Shin, "Silver Spring Development Leaves Some Downtrodden: Rising Rents Squeezing Out Small Businesses Downtown," *Washington Post*, 21 June 2004, sec. E, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 27 July 1999.

<sup>74</sup> Nancy Urban, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 8 November 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Jerry A. McCoy is author of the forthcoming book, *Historic Silver Spring* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, in press).

<sup>76</sup> Jennings and Murray Architects, for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, "The Silver Theater and the Armory: Preservation, Restoration and Preliminary Budget Study," 10 November 1992, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG 15.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Wallace, "Reflections on the History of Historic Preservation," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 187.

<sup>78</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, interview with author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 27 July 1999.

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<sup>79</sup> Joyce E. Nalewajk, interview with author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 8 March 2003.

<sup>80</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President Marilyn Praisner, Rockville, 15 March 1993, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Reardon, interview with author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 31 July 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Silver Spring Historical Society Home Page, <<http://www.homestead.com/silverspringhistory/>> (22 November 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, interview with author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 13 August 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Gottlieb, *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*.

<sup>85</sup> Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations, "Complaint, No. 1," in "Second Annual Report of the Commission on Human Relations, 1 July 1963, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>86</sup> Unpublished findings, "Places of Public Accommodation Which Serve Without Racial Discrimination and Places of Accommodation Which Discriminate," 12 December 1961, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland, RG15.

<sup>87</sup> "Commission on Race to Study Discrimination in Public Places," unidentified newspaper source, July 1960, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland, RG15.

<sup>88</sup> Marvin Caplan, "Eat Anywhere! A Personal Recollection of the Thompson's Restaurant Case and the Desegregation of Washington's Eating Places," *Washington History* 1 (1989): 24-39.

<sup>89</sup> Cohen, *Consumer Republic*, 98.

<sup>90</sup> Caplan, "Eat Anywhere," 33-4; and Green, *Secret City*, 297.

<sup>91</sup> Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations, "First Annual Report of the Commission on Human Relations," 12 September 1961, p. 10, Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations Papers, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland.

<sup>92</sup> David Brack, "Twenty Years of Civil Rights Progress: A History of the Human Relations Commission of Montgomery County, Maryland," 1981, p. 2, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD. Original commission members, appointees of the County Council, came from the Urban League, the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, the Chamber of Commerce, the Washington Board of Rabbis, the Democratic State Central Committee, and the Montgomery County Ministerial Association. The Republican State Central Committee declined to participate.

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<sup>93</sup> The Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, "Annual Report of the Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations to the Governor and General Assembly of Maryland," January 1960, p.12, Maryland Room, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations, "First Annual Report," p. 11, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>97</sup> Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, "Annual Report of the Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations to the Governor and General Assembly of Maryland," January 1962, 28-9, Special Collections, Maryland Room, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

<sup>98</sup> "Race Bill Meets New Opposition, *The Record*, 25 May 1961, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> "County Council Awaits Report of Human Relations Commission," *Montgomery Sentinel*, 4 July 1961, p. 2; and Montgomery County Civic Federation, "Fact Sheet Concerning the Montgomery County Public Accommodations Ordinance," 25 March 1963.

<sup>101</sup> Lise Kasmir, Silver Spring, Michael Teitelbaum, Silver Spring, and Mrs. Alfred Yankaur, Chevy Chase, testimony to Montgomery County Council members, 18 December 1961; and letter by Frederick E. Eschbach, Silver Spring, 14 December 1961, to Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>102</sup> Dewey C. King, Rockville, to Montgomery County Council members, 20 December 1961, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>103</sup> Virginia Hurt, Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President David Cahoon, Rockville, 20 December 1961, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas L. Tinsley, Sr., Silver Spring, to Montgomery County Council President David Cahoon and members, Rockville, 21 December 1961, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland, RG15.

<sup>105</sup> "U.S. Shifting Many Negroes to Offices in Silver Spring," *Washington Star*, 16 October 1961, sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> The federal government would pass a law banning discrimination in places of public accommodation two years later, in 1964. In 1968 the county council also passed a fair housing law.

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<sup>107</sup> "How IMPACT Has Made an Impact," *Washington Post*, 14 August 2003, sec. ME, p. 4. See also: Manuel Perez-Rivas, "Developing New Voices: Project Aims to Bring More Diversity to Civic Leadership," *Washington Post*, 1 February 2001, sec. ME, p. 14; Jo Becker, "Looking to Give Minorities a Voice: As County's Demographics Shift, Activists and Politicians Court Untapped Power Base," *Washington Post*, 26 April 2001, sec. ME, p. 16; David Fishlowitz, "Community Leaders Celebrate Completion of Training," *Gazette*, 20 June 2001, sec. A, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> David Weaver, "Duncan Names Members of New Steering Committee on Silver Spring Redevelopment," Montgomery County Government, 11 February 1997, <[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc/news/press/97-36.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc/news/press/97-36.html)> (20 October 2004).

<sup>109</sup> Montgomery Housing Partnership, <<http://mpa.gmu.edu/opportunities/montgomeryhousingpartnership.pdf>> (10 June 2005).

<sup>110</sup> IMPACT Silver Spring; Home Page, <<http://www.impactsilverspring.org>> (3 December 2005).

<sup>111</sup> Silver Spring Historical Society membership meeting hand-out, 4 November 2003.

<sup>112</sup> IMPACT Silver Spring newsletters.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew Mosk and Michael Cottman, "A Look at the Past, Present and Future: New Issues Arise On the Long Road to Revitalization," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2003, sec. ME, p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> "Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles," IMPACT Silver Spring Home Page, <<http://www.impactsilverspring.org/>> (2 December 2005).

<sup>115</sup> Community Empowerment Program, IMPACT Silver Spring, <<http://www.impactsilverspring.org/cep6cover.htm>> (2 December 2005).

<sup>116</sup> Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Suburbs, 1880-1950, Cultural and Social Reconsiderations," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 313-46.

<sup>117</sup> William H. Hudnut III, *Halfway to Everywhere: A Portrait of America's First Tier Suburbs* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 2003), 37. Author describes the lack of planning behind Roseville, in contrast to what Longstreth says about Silver Spring. See Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue," 48.

<sup>118</sup> Hudnut, *Halfway to Everywhere*, 36-7.

<sup>119</sup> Oldenburg, *Great Good Place*, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Many, including Ritzer, Oldenburg, and Fawcett, would argue that these are not true third places. They would say that such corporately-owned and controlled places de-localize culture, supplanting the idiosyncratic and particular with, in Fawcett's words, "artificial environments...designed to obliterate particularity." This is something that increasingly occurs in all types of communities, not just suburbs.

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<sup>121</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), ix-x.

<sup>122</sup> J. Nicholas Entrikin, "Geographer as Humanist," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul C. Adams, Steve Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 426-40. Commenting on Yi-Fu Tuan, Entrikin writes: "The humanist, such as Tuan, speaks to what it is to be a geographer and a human being, a fully dimensional human being, one that requires consideration of economic and social agency, biological constraint, and moral and aesthetic judgment." The author also points to a number of criticisms leveled against this approach by contemporary geographers. (433)

<sup>123</sup> David Grazian, *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11. In contrast to places like the Florida Avenue Grill or Silver Spring's Taste Diner, there is a common perception that encounters at large chain businesses have a more predictable, scripted quality to them. There, employees are more likely to have been trained on how to greet customers, instructed on what dishes to recommend, and systematically coached on how to be a positive reflection of the restaurant, bar, club, or store. However, sociologist George Ritzer observes that a significant source of the appeal of corporate chain and franchised businesses is traceable to the standardized experiences that customers receive in them. Consumers who choose such places have greater confidence that they know what to expect, eliminating a series of risk factors. In *The McDonaldization of Society*, Ritzer identifies four dimensions of the pervasive "McDonaldization" model that he argues explain its success. Such businesses offer: 1) efficiency, 2) food and services that are easily quantified and calculated financially and in terms of time, 3) predictability, with identical services being provided in all locations, and 4) control. That encounters at non-chain businesses are likely to be more spontaneous, and not comply with the "McDonaldization" model means that they can arouse discomfort in potential consumers. See Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications, 1993), 9-11.

<sup>124</sup> Grazian, *Blue Chicago*, 9.

<sup>125</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 34.

<sup>126</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*, 130-34.

<sup>127</sup> Jenkins, cartoon, *Montgomery Journal*, 2 December 1986, sec. A, p. 6.

<sup>128</sup> Matt Hamblen, "Silver Spring Taste Diner Gets Reprieve," *Montgomery Journal*, 29 January 1987, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Larry Millett, *Twin Cities Then & Now* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>130</sup> Steve Marsh, "When is a Mall Not Really a Mall? When It's Block E," *City Pages*, 21 April 2004, <[www.citypages.com/databank/25/1220/article12071.asp](http://www.citypages.com/databank/25/1220/article12071.asp)> (30 April 2004).

<sup>131</sup> Laura Lees, "Critical Geography and the Opening Up of the Academy: Lessons from 'Real Life' Attempts," *Area* 31 (1999): 377-83.

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<sup>132</sup> Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1987), 36.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>134</sup> John L. Jackson, Jr., *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), x.

## CHAPTER 3:

### AN IMAGINARY WALKING TOUR OF SILVER SPRING

In this chapter I provide a descriptive and analytical overview of the commercial landscape of downtown Silver Spring's central business district in the form of an imaginary walking tour. My intent is to focus primarily on the built environment, beginning on a street that borders the most intense revitalization, branching out from there into neighboring streets and other portions of downtown. Planners have divided the central business district into several sectors, all viewed as having a particular character and central function, and therefore designated for specific types of use and development. Before introducing in detail individuals and groups who have voiced various concerns about the possible outcomes of revitalization, it is important to have a sense of what it is that they have been reacting to. Therefore, the tour will highlight structures and portions of the landscape that have been central to the "preservation wars" and revitalization debates. Through pausing to look at these sites, several issues emerge that remain most pressing to those currently wondering how downtown revitalization will affect their community's identity. These include issues like gentrification, "placelessness," and multiple histories.

*Welcome to Silver Spring, Maryland, a “Census-Designated Place”*

From the Metro platform, Acorn Park, the Tastee Diner, and countless other sites, an assessment of downtown Silver Spring as "neither urban nor suburban" seems fitting. It is, as the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's (M-NCPPC) sector plan reports, "a hybrid of the two."<sup>1</sup> While many of Silver Spring's *residential* neighborhoods have a more stereotypically suburban look and feel to them, its downtown has been designated one of Montgomery County, Maryland's three "urban districts." Bethesda and Wheaton are the other two.

When asked to describe its overall character to someone who has never been to Silver Spring, Suzanne Copping, a resident of neighboring Takoma Park and an active member of its historical society says, "I think it has multiple characters that aren't connected. They're kind of like dots on a piece of paper that could be linked, either through stories or through landscaping, or in some other way."<sup>2</sup> In this way the aging, inner-ring suburb is characterized by the kind of "unevenness" that Jennifer Jordan claims is typical of cities today. Rather than becoming homogeneous, Jordan argues, "Place and community have the potential to persist—and to emerge in new configurations—even amidst the undeniably powerful forces of globalization."<sup>3</sup>

Asked the same question about "character," resident Mary Ann Zimmerman will tell you that Silver Spring "doesn't exist."<sup>4</sup> That is because Silver Spring, like much of Montgomery County, is an unincorporated area. Lacking local governance, Silver Spring is represented by a County Council and policed by a County force. The County is the source of other services, while decisions affecting planning and zoning are determined by the M-NCPPC, a regional body. Because its boundaries are not

officially defined, the United States Census Bureau labels Silver Spring not a city, a town, or suburb, but rather a "census-designated place." It is one of thirty-two unincorporated places in Montgomery County. Gaithersburg, Rockville (the County Seat), and Takoma Park are the only incorporated cities in the county, joining twelve towns and four villages that are also incorporated.

Although unincorporated, Silver Spring is sizable, both demographically and spatially. The 2000 U.S. Census shows that Silver Spring, with its 76,540 residents, ranks third most populous in the state, following only the city of Baltimore and Columbia, which is also unincorporated. Also significant, and a reflection of the variety of U.S. suburban types, Silver Spring's population went from being majority white to minority white in the 1990s. A Brookings Institution report based on the 2000 U.S. Census shows that the number of non-Hispanic whites living in the community dropped from 62.2 percent to 45.5 percent during that ten-year period and that the black population grew 38.4 percent. The African American population now accounts for 24.8 percent of the total, Hispanic for 16.5 percent, Asian 10.5 percent, and "other" and multi-racial categories for 2.7 percent.<sup>5</sup>

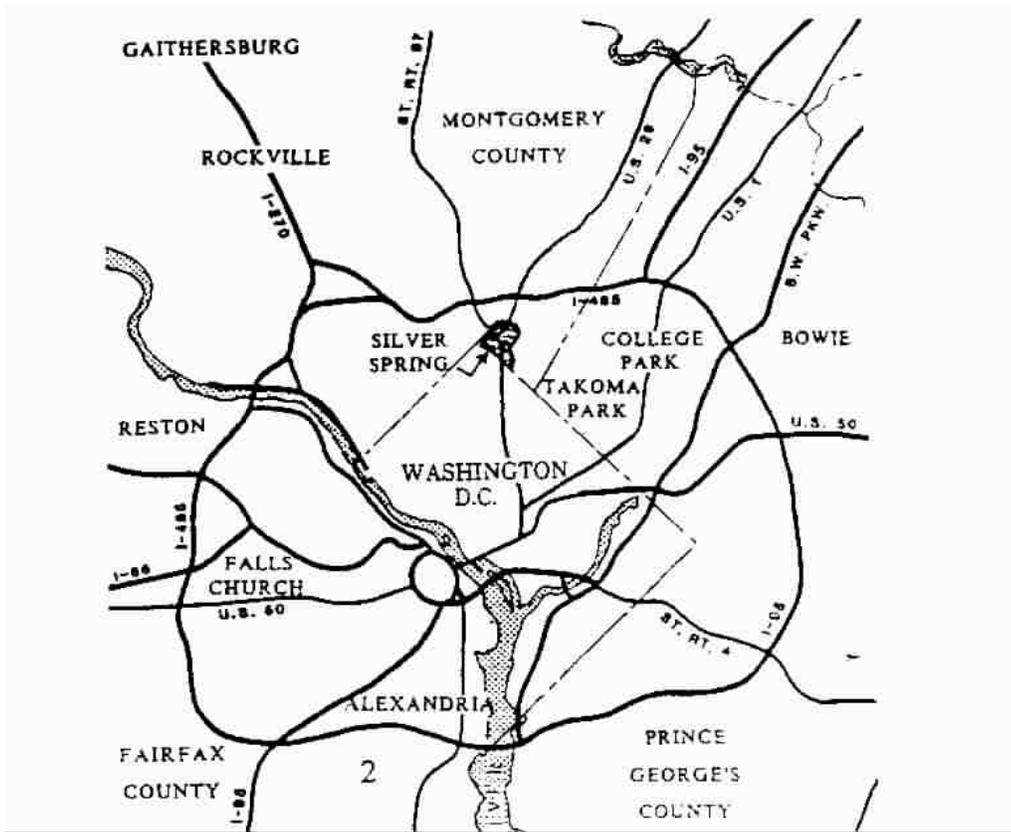
Because it is changing so dramatically, both physically and socially, nearly everyone I spoke with found it challenging to say what exactly Silver Spring is. More frequently they would define it through what it is not, as in "It's not Bethesda," or "It's not Takoma Park," both neighboring suburbs with more clearly defined identities. Silver Spring's size and amorphous boundaries may also contribute to this difficulty in definition. Comprised of 9.425 miles of land, Silver Spring is the second largest geographical place in the state of Maryland, exceeded only by the city of

Baltimore. Covering so much space it possesses multiple characters, differing from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some people I spoke with had a very defined sense of what boundaries for them constituted the "real" or "true" Silver Spring. Generally these boundaries were determined by streets and local landmarks. For example, Mike, a former regular at the old Tastee Diner, told me: "To me, Silver Spring proper is from the District line, maybe up to Spring Street. Then you start getting into residential. It's still Silver Spring, Montgomery Hills is Silver Spring, but if you have a thing that Silver Spring people remember...it would be this area, the downtown area."<sup>6</sup> As Mike notes, Silver Spring shares boundaries with Washington, D.C., as well as with Takoma Park to its south, Prince George's County to its east, Forest Glen to its west, and Wheaton-Glenmont to its north. Its central business district comprises 360 acres of that land, twenty-two of which make up its core.<sup>7</sup>

Located inside the Capital Beltway, Silver Spring is situated in the southeastern part of Montgomery County, six miles from the center of downtown Washington D.C., and thirty-five miles south of Baltimore. It is connected to the rest of the metropolitan area both by Interstate 495—the Capital Beltway—and by a network of regional mass transportation options, including D.C. Metrorail and Metrobuses, Montgomery County Ride-On busses, and MARC commuter trains.

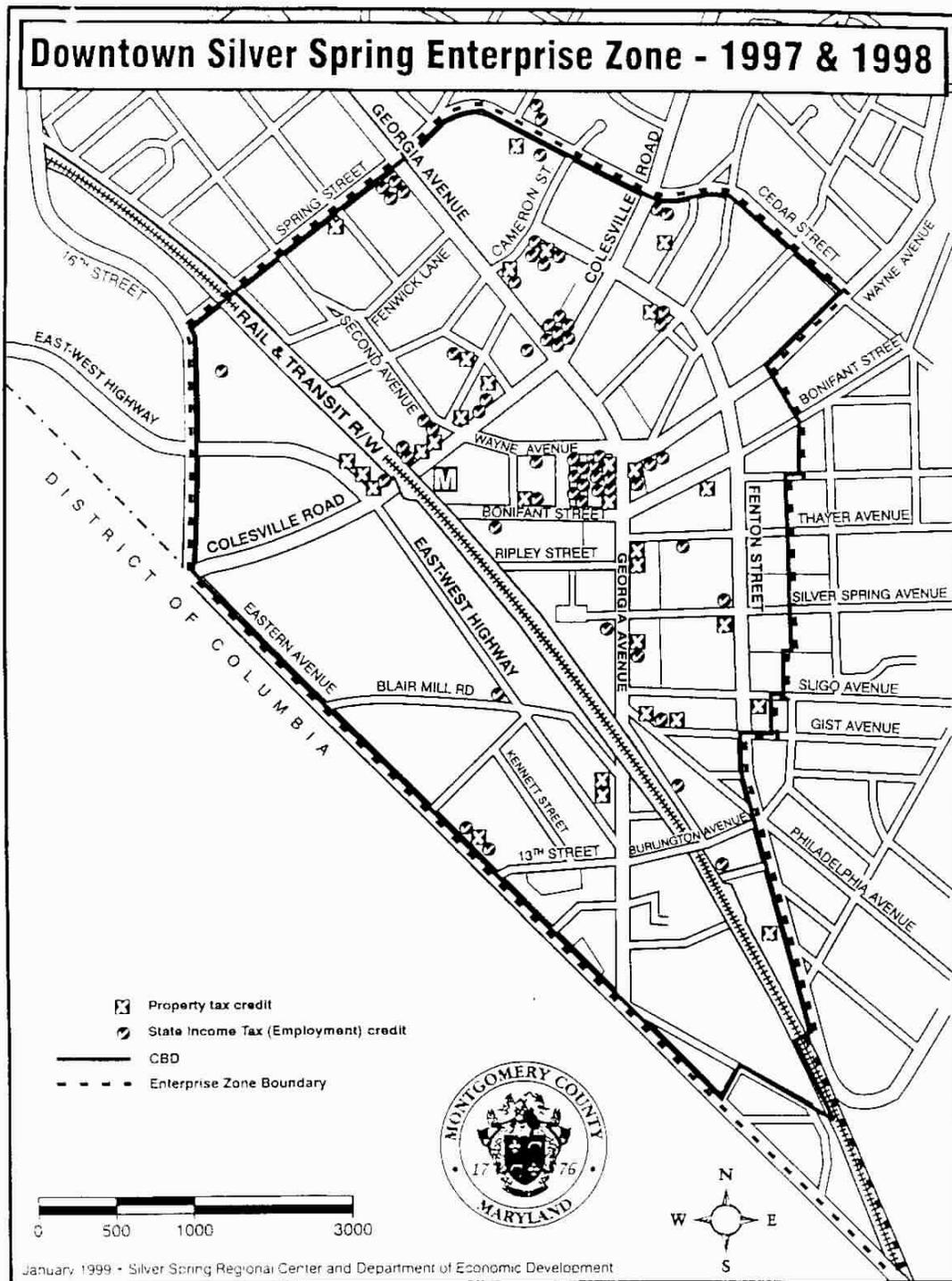
This project focuses on Silver Spring's Central Business District (CBD), what people like Mike and Silver Spring Historical Society President Jerry McCoy recognize as the "true" Silver Spring. The CBD's boundaries, established by the

M-NPPC are Eastern Avenue to the west, Spring and Cedar Streets to the north, and Grove and Fenton Streets to the east. The southernmost tip is where Eastern Avenue and the rail and transit tracks intersect, below Blair Road.



map 1. Washington, D.C. metro area (Courtesy Silver Spring Regional Center)

The entire CBD has been designated an “enterprise zone,” a designation which was granted by the State of Maryland on December 15, 1996. As an incentive for businesses to locate or expand facilities there, businesses and owners of commercial property within the boundaries of the Silver Spring Enterprise Zone (SSEZ) may be eligible for employment and property tax credits under the Maryland Enterprise Zone Program if they meet certain requirements.<sup>8</sup>



map 2. Downtown Silver Spring Enterprise Zone (Courtesy Silver Spring Regional Center)

This designation has been a crucial impetus for attracting companies like Discovery Communications, the American Film Institute, and Whole Foods to downtown Silver Spring. In February 2002, much of the area was also designated an "arts and entertainment district" by the State of Maryland. Since that time, the boundaries of that district have been enlarged to encompass the entire CBD as well. The arts and entertainment designation offers similar tax credit incentives for artists and arts organizations to move to the area.<sup>9</sup>

### *Walking Up Bonifant Street*

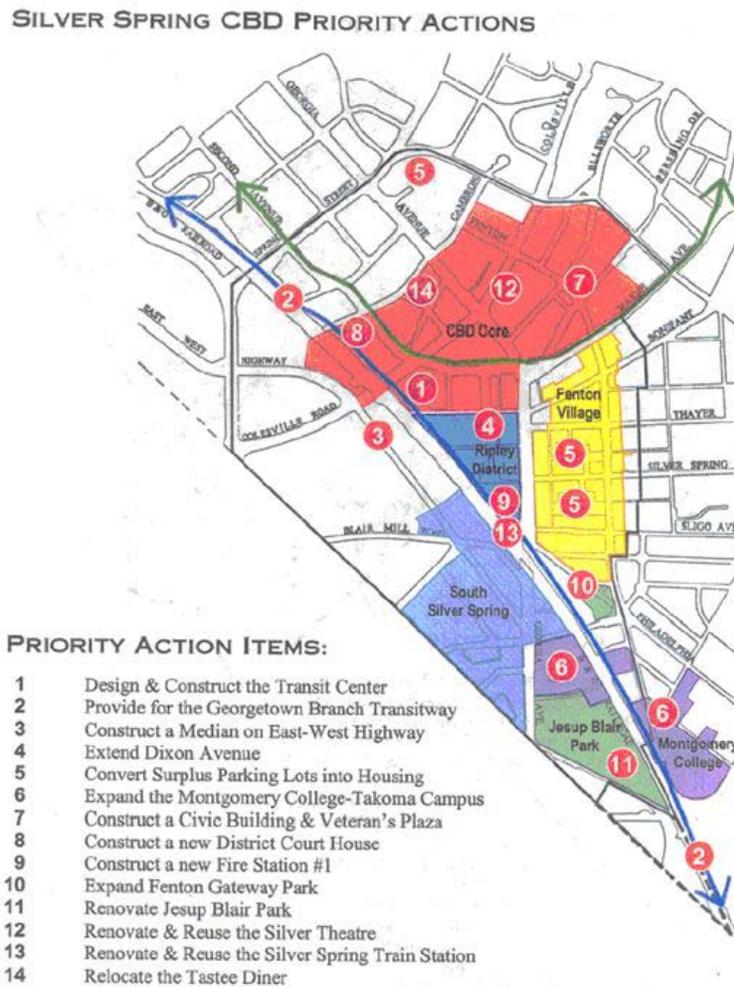
The rain was coming down hard that early October afternoon as I walked up Bonifant Street, first to meet Joyce Nalewajk, and then to visit with Eva Jianos, the proprietor of Eva's Alterations. While normally I would have given anything to stay inside on such a day, I had been sent an urgent email from Joyce earlier in the week. She and I had met several months earlier at an event celebrating the State of Maryland's designation of downtown Silver Spring as an "Arts District." A small business owner with husband Steve, and once an active member of the historical society, Joyce was among several attendees that evening who had voiced skepticism about what this designation and other recent changes would mean for small business owners, historic sites, residents of modest financial means, and artists. Especially intriguing to me was that she was voicing her concerns not only as a preservationist, local history buff, or as someone operating a small business, but instead from all three frames of reference. Because she was someone I had intended to contact once the University had approved my "human subjects review" application, I was pleased that Joyce had emailed me. So powerful was the content and tone of her message that I

knew that a visit to Eva's shop was something I had to do, even though I was still awaiting approval of my application.

I begin my tour of downtown Silver Spring on Bonfiant Street for a number of reasons. One is that it has long been filled with small independently owned shops, several of which—restaurants, cafes, barbershops, and salons—function as third places. Also, many of the business owners, including Eva, are immigrants. Now in her early sixties, Eva emigrated to the United States from Greece as a young woman, while others on the block are young entrepreneurs, in their twenties and thirties, who have come more recently from Thailand, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Korea, and a number of other countries. Some of the shop owners on Bonfiant are African American. This placed Joyce and Steve, who are white, clearly in the minority. (Due to a landlord dispute, the couple has since relocated Cuneiform and Wayside Records to another downtown location.)

A second reason for starting here is that Bonifant is situated a mere block away from Wayne Avenue, the boundary of the central business district's core. Standing at the corner of Bonifant and Georgia a person can view some of the new construction. On one side of Georgia, where the Tastee Diner used to be, is the mammoth and architecturally distinct Discovery Communications complex. Opposite it is an office tower with huge new parking garage attached, and the renovated Silver Spring Shopping Center, a major entry point to the Foulger-Pratt and Peterson Company's redevelopment project. With the exception of the restored Art Deco facades of the strip mall on Georgia and Colesville, newly built components of this instantly successful retail complex are architecturally undistinguished and house well-

known chain restaurants and shops, such as Red Lobster, Borders Books, and Pier One that could be anywhere. As such the core stands in marked contrast to nearly everything outside its boundaries, giving downtown Silver Spring a fragmented quality. Abutting the new development are streets like Bonifant which to date have maintained their distinctiveness. Distinguishing "place" from generic "non-place" sociologist George Ritzer writes that, "The greater the number of distinctive components, the richer and more complex the phenomena."<sup>10</sup> And in this landscape a plethora of unique, local elements persist.



map 3. Silver Spring Planning Districts (Courtesy M-NCPPC)

That Bonifant still possesses unique and distinctive qualities, points to a third reason for beginning my tour on this particular street. Civic activists of various stripes, who are often in conflict with one another, have formed attachments to Bonifant, understand its vulnerability because of its close proximity to the redeveloping core, and therefore are monitoring closely what is transpiring there. Historic preservationists, for example, have fought to protect and/or relocate buildings of distinction, including one of the oldest homes in Silver Spring.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, people associated with IMPACT Silver Spring, Gateway Revitalization Corporation, and Council Member Tom Perez's office have begun interviewing business owners up and down this and surrounding streets about their experiences with revitalization. When they are finished, they will prepare a report of their findings to share with Perez's fellow council members and others in the community.

Finally, I begin on Bonifant because stories like Eva's are all too common. Boosters of revitalization, including staff members of the Silver Spring Regional Center—the Montgomery County agency in charge of overseeing the entire process—like to appease community groups by assuring them that what is good for the core will trickle down to many, though not all, of the downtown's existing businesses. It is basically a "survival of the fittest" worldview. Major proponents, like Gary Stith and Mel Tull of the Regional Center, often say that services being offered by some businesses are so marginal that they will not survive in the new environment, while others will thrive. Consumers will eventually expand their boundaries, they optimistically proclaim, and discover that Silver Spring has even more to offer than the riches found at the center. While there is some indication that this is beginning to

happen, in many cases proprietors of small shops beyond the borders of revitalization are doubtful. In their eyes, decision-makers that have had no contact with them *have* simultaneously provided huge incentives to corporations to locate in Silver Spring. Many of these small business owners—along Bonifant, Thayer, and parts of Georgia, Colesville, and Fenton—are left with the impression that those pulling the strings would prefer that they simply fade away.<sup>12</sup>

But all of that is taking us into the present. Let us return now to October 2002.

In the midst of doing archival research at the time, this is part of the message I received from Joyce that prompted me to begin my fieldwork at Eva's Alterations on that rainy Friday afternoon:

Eva of Eva's Alterations, a Silver Spring business for over 27 years, is being evicted...Her landlord—the same as ours—had refused to fix several huge holes in her roof. Rivers of water were pouring into her space every time it rained—a health risk for her and a risk for the clothing she was fixing for other people...Her entire store was covered in plastic, interspersed by pans and buckets to catch the worst of the water. On weekends, she would have to visit her store to bail if it rained. Phone calls to the landlord were not returned and ignored. After months of living like this, she began to put her rent money in an escrow account, holding it until the landlord fixed the problem—or at least talked with her. She just received her eviction notice. She must be out by the end of the month. Her store is her entire life. She is shy, and widowed, and definitely does not want to make a fuss. I called the County and told them Eva's plight. They were very sympathetic, but basically there is nothing that could be done—unlike us, she does not have the money to wage a legal fight with the landlord. AND it seems like the County sees our landlord as a shining star in Silver Spring's redevelopment, that he is probably hoping to bring in a tenant 'more in keeping with Silver Spring's redevelopment'...who could pay more money for rent....<sup>13</sup>

Then, two days later, another email message arrived from Joyce: "It's raining today and tomorrow—the perfect time to really see the conditions that she's living in."<sup>14</sup>

Joyce, who with her blond hair and boundless energy appears to be in her forties, suggested that the two of us meet first at Cuniform Records, the business that

she and her husband Steve were operating down the street from Eva. From there we would go for a quick cup of coffee at Kefa Café, my favorite local coffeehouse, just a couple of doors down, giving Joyce a chance to tell me more about Eva. While there, Joyce cautioned me that Eva was very shy and might not be very forthcoming, that she wanted her presence in downtown Silver Spring documented for posterity, but was torn about what to do about her present situation. Eva was trying to figure out how to let her customers know that she was leaving, Joyce said. She wanted to thank them and say good-bye, but without stirring up conflict; in other words, without sharing with the media and community the messy details behind her departure. Complicating her situation was the fact that her landlord was also Greek and a member of her church.

Eva's Alterations blended in well with the neighboring storefronts. Single story retail spaces are the dominant form on Bonifant, including on the west side of the street, the stretch closest to Georgia where Eva had her shop.



Fig. 26. Bonifant Street, former location of Eva's Alterations

If you enter Bonifant from Georgia, one of the first things you will notice is a sign on a green shingle background attached to an old two-story white building indicating that the Quarry House Tavern, open for business since the 1930s, is below street level. The long flight of covered stairs leading to the classic neighborhood bar is actually off of Georgia, right below Bombay Gaylord, an Indian restaurant. The building housing those two businesses runs right into another, leading to a long stretch of multi-colored brick storefronts. Kefa Café's façade is a light, cheerful shade of yellow. Windows covering the entire expanse of the coffeehouse make it fairly easy to see who is in the two small rooms at any given time, and to catch the eye of Abeba or Lene, the young Ethiopian sisters who have been its hospitable proprietors for eight years. IMPACT Silver Spring's Lasting IMPACT groups have worked out an arrangement to hold half of their monthly meetings there. Informally, it has long been a regular place for IMPACT staff and board members to meet as well. An alleyway on the opposite side of Kefa connects Bonifant to Wayne Avenue, providing a pathway to the Silver Spring Regional Center.

The bricks of Jim Dandy Formal Wear are painted black. Its owner, an African American man, soon to turn ninety and a devout Christian, fits men for tuxes and takes care of people's dry cleaning and laundry. He has been on the block since 1988, and in business in Silver Spring for a total of thirty-one years. He says that whatever happens to him in life is "God's will." Next to Jim Dandy's is the white brick storefront of another long time business, Martinez Jewelers, a father-son operation on Bonifant for the past twenty years. The windows of the Martinez's shop are covered with plastic on the inside. To enter a person must be buzzed in. The elder

man speaks very little English, but his bilingual son does and in conversation reveals his awareness of issues surrounding the revitalization project. He might recount for you that the developers and County would not return his calls about relocating to one of the new spaces in the core.

In October 2002, Eva's Alterations with its pinkish brown storefront, was next. It now houses Theresa's African American Braiding Salon. Proportionately, hair and nail salons have come to stand out as among the best-represented businesses in this section of the central business district. Pennyworth Thrift Store, a church-run bargain clothing store, and C.C. Balloons and More round out this stretch of Bonifant. The formerly homeless African American woman who owns the balloon shop is, like Eva and many of the other independent business owners on Bonifant, on a month-to-month lease. She has a difficult time holding back tears as she talks about how downtown's revitalization is affecting her ten-year-old business.

Cunieform Records, Joyce and Steve's business, used to be located in the buff colored, two-story brick U.S. Industries Building that during World War II was the site of major robotics developments. Because of that history, an independent consultant who had surveyed all structures fifty years or older in the CBD, recommended that it be added to the County's *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*. The staff of the Historic Preservation Committee for the Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning concurred. This meant that they agreed that the building had historic significance and merited further study before any decisions were made about its future in Silver Spring. As in many such cases, the landlord disagreed. Gus Bauman, former head of the planning commission, now a member of the

Beverage and Diamond Law Firm, was accompanied to the hearing by the building's owner and Brian Shepherd of Tezra Development, a firm planning to acquire the site and turn it into a mixed-use retail and residential project. Designating the property an historic site, Bauman asserted, would deter the possibility for development of the site. Slides shown at the public hearing were received with a smattering of laughter, and several speakers who testified against placing the structure in the Locational Atlas emphasized how ugly it was. At a July 2003 hearing, the Planning Board voted against the Historic Preservation staff recommendation, stressing that the lack of architectural value overrode any historic significance.



Fig. 27. Bonifant Street, former site of Cunieform Records

The next grouping of storefronts is more distinctive. Set back from the street on a small grassy incline, the two-story stretch of dark-brick buildings looks like the string of row houses that it was originally designed to be. These buildings house a number of salons—one owned by a young female Vietnamese American proprietor—and restaurants. Roger Miller Restaurant, a popular third place for African

immigrants, is here. So is Thai Derm, one of two restaurants that immigrant Suton Thumprasert has owned in downtown Silver Spring over the course of the past twenty-plus years. Suton, in his mid-sixties, is still bitter about how the County prematurely closed down Thai Orchid, his other restaurant, to clear the way for a new parking garage on Fenton. "They [the County] killed me," he says. In his view, the \$10,000 he was offered for relocation was very little compared to the investment he had put into Thai Orchid. "That might be enough for other types of businesses, like a travel agency, but not for a restaurant with expensive equipment." IMPACT Silver Spring's Frankie Blackburn has encouraged Suton, formally a member of the county's citizen advisory groups and who had convened a discussion circle at IMPACT's open space diversity conference, to enroll in the Community Empowerment Program. He has not, but is supportive of the organization and has catered some of its events. Suton traces his reluctance to re-engage in civic affairs to his treatment as a business owner of longstanding. "In Thailand I would have a lot of honor. But here, nothing."



Fig. 28. Bonifant Street, site of Thai Derm Restaurant

Also set back from the street is an expansive three-story dark brick apartment building, the one where Eva once lived. Long boarded up, its future remains in doubt. It and a two-story white brick building housing a martial arts school, an audio clinic, and framing shop at the end of the block, sit on what is likely to be part of the site for a new public library.

On the opposite side of Bonifant, land has been cleared for a new four-story two-toned brick townhouse development. A web site for "Lofts 24" features the faces of young women and men of various nationalities. It describes the twenty-four units as "Manhattan-style" two-bedroom condominium lofts with sixteen-foot ceilings, starting in the upper \$300,000 range. Some small business owners on the street wonder what effect that development will have on their futures, while historic preservationists are upset that this project resulted in the loss of one of the community's oldest houses.<sup>15</sup>

Next to where the lofts will be built are several single-story retail spaces, including Ecology Mart, a vitamin and health food store, and Luisa's Hair Salon and Spa, which is owned by a young Dominican immigrant. Luisa says that she invested all of her life savings into the remodeling of this space after hers and a number of other restaurants and stores on Colesville Road were destroyed by fire. She is angry that she received no support from the County for her efforts. Also on this stretch are Ebony Barbers, Silver Spring Books, the used bookstore where Pelecanos's detective Quinn works part-time, Ambrosia's Tattoo Parlor, and Atlantic Gun Shop. Mandalay, a Burmese restaurant, has since relocated from College Park to this side of Bonifant.

## *Talking With Eva*

As soon as we step inside the tiny shop I had passed many times, usually on my way to Kefa, it is clear that Joyce had not exaggerated its condition. The storefront, like others on the block, consists of two levels, meaning that the shops are higher in the back than they are in the front. Customers enter a square room at street level, but at least in Eva's case most of the work took place up a short flight of stairs, open to the lower room. This is where she had her sewing machine, supplies, and worktables. When she heard us come in, Eva, a petite woman, peered down from the top of the stairway and then came to show us around. In her Greek accent she invited me to take pictures of the gaping holes in the lower-level ceiling, the plastic tarps covering tables, and the buckets filling with water from the heavy rains. Other than the damage, little about this part of the interior was impressive. The walls were covered with dark, plywood paneling, and there was little light. A map and some photos of Greece were scattered here and there. Eva then invited us to come upstairs, to sit and visit.

Eva was the only person I interviewed for my project who refused to be tape-recorded. Although she has been in this country since 1966 she maintains an accent, which she admits to being self-conscious about. Against several assurances that no one but I would ever hear the tapes, she gave a firm "no" to requests to having our conversations recorded. As a result, I took copious notes, but was unable to capture word-for-word what she said. In part because of her painful situation, but also due to personality, Eva was also the least verbal of any of the people I spoke with. While others typically inundated me with information and opinions, often veering off on a

variety of tangents, Eva was more likely to respond to questions with a word or two, maybe a short sentence, leaving me to prod for more.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 29. Eva Jianos, proprietor of Eva's Alterations

Like many who have lived in Silver Spring for the past several decades, Eva spoke fondly about how things used to be, when it was a "warm" community and the business that she and her husband ran together was doing well. It was a "good family neighborhood" in the 1960s and through much of the '70s, she recalled. It always felt "safe." People were "friendly" and would greet each other on the streets. There were things to do at various hours of the day, including at night with two movie theaters nearby. The long boarded-up apartment building down the street was "beautiful," she told me. Located only a block away from Georgia Avenue, where her uncle worked as a florist for seventy years, it was the first place that Eva lived in Silver Spring. So

familiar with and fond of this neighborhood were she and her husband, that they decided to open a retail clothing and alterations shop on Bonifant. This would offer the couple an opportunity to work together and perhaps provide a business to pass on to their daughter. Until then her husband had been a painter and wallpaperer, who had always worked for himself. When they opened their shop, he became a tailor, something that he did for over ten years. Eva described to me those early years as her favorite time, husband and wife working side-by-side, friends coming in, and their daughter at school nearby.

Things began to change around 1976, however. The shop was broken into several times, beginning in 1980, and her husband became ill, dying in 1989. Because of the break-ins, the couple had decided to stop selling clothes, continuing only the alterations part of their business, which Eva did, mostly on her own. Much of the downtown became a "ghost town," as the movie theaters closed, along with People's Drug, J.C. Penney, and later Hecht's department store. As their daughter grew up, it became clear that she had no interest in being involved with the business. Amidst all of these challenges, Eva, like other small business owners, hung on in hope that promised "revitalization" would bring new customers her way.

Joyce, who has long worn the hat of civic activist/historic preservationist, and who maintains her own extensive personal archives on Silver Spring, interjects at one point to offer her account of what has happened to small businesses. The whole thrust of redevelopment, she says, is to raise the value of real estate, so that owners will get more money in rents and more for the re-sale of their properties. In the process, "It doesn't matter what happens to the community," she explains. Joyce, like others I will

talk to, refers to articles in which county officials tout Starbucks as a "sign of rejuvenation," as well as a quote from former lieutenant governor and failed Democratic gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, stating that "chain stores are the backbone of redevelopment." "No value," Joyce concludes, "is placed on sense of place or culture." The people in power and in charge of redevelopment simply "don't see independent businesses as key to the long-term future of Silver Spring."

While the three of us talk, customers come in. At one point, Peter, an attorney who has been a regular patron of Eva's for twenty-six years, appears with his second wife Kay. He expresses sadness that Eva is leaving and seems frustrated that she is doing so with so little fight. He asks permission to read her lease and offers that he would like to help her legally, at no cost. Here, Eva's situation again is complicated by her position within the Greek community. As mentioned, her long-time attorney, like her landlord, is a member of her church. It is unclear to her how to proceed.

Beyond offering his professional advice, Peter says a number of times that he and Kay are hoping to take their friendship with Eva to a "new level." They would like to have her for dinner at their house and take her to the opera, to which each time she replies, "I don't know, we'll see." After the couple leaves, Eva confesses that in the past Peter has gotten upset with her for her refusal to accept his offers of friendship. But she thought it inappropriate, given the nature of their business relationship, to accept. One time, she said, he got so angry over her decline to go to the opera with the couple, that he stopped coming in. But the relationships with customers are important to her, she assures me. Many of her customers, like Peter,

have been bringing their clothes in for years. "This was my life. Even if I don't make no money, it's something for me to come here and see people."

On this and a subsequent visit, Eva cries, recalling how hard it has been to tell her young grandson and her customers that she is closing her business. "My customers, they are my family." When I visit again, a week and a half later, she tells me that it was especially difficult to take her signs down, with her son-in-law's help. Also upsetting her, she said, was the lack of outreach from neighboring shop owners, many of whose businesses are at least as vulnerable as hers was.

### *Deteriorating or Intriguing?: Conflicting Perceptions of Fenton Village*

Bonifant Street falls just a block south of the central business district's "core," within the boundaries of a planning district referred to as the "Fenton Village Revitalization Area."<sup>17</sup> Wayne Avenue functions as one of the key planning and experiential boundaries, separating the extensively redeveloped core from this and other sections of the CBD that in 2002 have been relatively untouched. At the western edge is Georgia Avenue and on the south, Philadelphia Avenue. The eastern boundary falls one block past Fenton Avenue. Other main streets that fall within this district are Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring Avenue, and Sligo Avenue.

In its 1999 "Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan," the M-NCPPC described Fenton Village as having the potential to become a vibrant, multicultural area. Specifically it said that: "With an upgraded streetscape, new housing, and lively mix of multi-cultural, specialty, and convenience shops serving local and regional customers, the neighborhood-scale commercial uses along Fenton street and its cross streets can become Silver Spring's own global village."<sup>18</sup> The

report proceeded to spell out in greater detail the vision the regional planning commission had for it:

Fenton Village is envisioned as a diverse community of people living and working together to create a tightly-knit urban neighborhood, conducive to strolling and browsing; its businesses providing personal services and a traditional town atmosphere not found in shopping centers or malls. Fenton Village has many strengths, including multi-cultural shops and restaurants, unique small businesses, a pedestrian-scaled physical environment, clusters of complementary businesses, 'captive' market demand from surrounding neighborhoods, and proximity to Washington, D.C. Many of these specialty businesses already draw customers from a regional market, and by capitalizing on redevelopment in the Core, can begin to fill an unserved market niche.<sup>19</sup>

For those who continue reading, the clearer it becomes that the writers see a wide gap between Fenton Village in its present state and its promise. Highlighted are a "deteriorating visual image," and a decline in pedestrian traffic resulting from "a variety of real and perceived problems including lack of demand for the goods and services offered in Fenton Village."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the recommendations that the plan goes on to make seem at odds with preceding statements about a vision for a neighborhood defined by multicultural character and independently owned small businesses. Stated goals stress actions that instead would prove beneficial to landlords, investors, and real estate market values. These are, to: 1) heighten investor interest, 2) improve investment climate, 3) strengthen its economic vitality and the CBD's, 4) position the area to take advantage of land use options supported by the current real estate market, and 5) remain sensitive to the transition between the commercial district and the adjacent single-family neighborhood.<sup>21</sup>

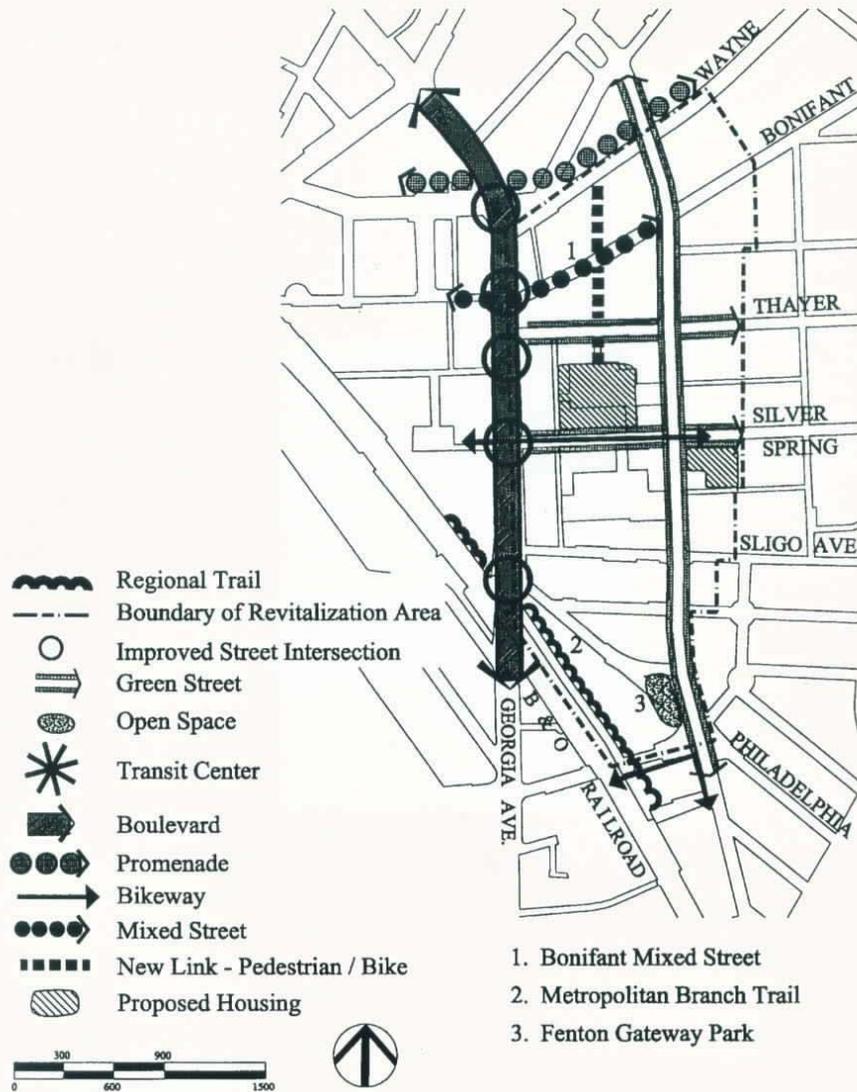
Offering a very different set of observations and conclusions about Fenton Village is an assessment report produced in 1997 by the National Main Street Center,

part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Not only did the Main Street team foresee a potentially promising future for this portion of the central business district it also found much to appreciate in the commercial district's present state.

Immediately, the team noted the differences in architectural style and scale from the rest of the central business district. Indeed, the types of neighborhood-serving stores, small businesses, offices, and restaurants offer a unique concentration not found elsewhere in Silver Spring. The way the Fenton Street commercial district functions, the team determined that it is not necessarily or inherently dependent on the rest of downtown Silver Spring.<sup>22</sup>

The authors of the report proceeded to debunk several myths about real estate in the Fenton Street Commercial District, the first being that "these old buildings are functionally obsolete." Main Street countered that the concept of functional obsolescence is "part of the language of the real estate appraiser." By contrast, its team found that the types of buildings in Fenton Village were being put to good use, as they are in successful neighborhood districts around the country.<sup>23</sup> This, according to the report produced by the assessment team, means that Main Street is aware that other values exist besides purely economic ones, all of which must be considered when making decisions about the built environment. These include physical/design, organizational/political, and promotional/social.<sup>24</sup> A key reason for these differences in perspective appears to be that the Main Street team conducted numerous on-site visits, allowing its members sufficient opportunities to speak with merchants, property owners, and customers. Also, Main Street recognizes that commercial redevelopment must occur "comprehensively."

Map 23 Fenton Village Concept Plan



map 4. Fenton Village (Courtesy M-NCPPC)

With a broader range of values serving as its foundation, the team identified several strengths upon which this particular commercial district could build. The main ones were its small-scale physical environment, its ethnic diversity, its intriguing

businesses (examples were Kefa Café, Negil Bakery, and Dale Music), and clusters of complementary businesses (e.g., automotive maintenance and service, restaurants, food, and groceries, and a neighborhood convenience cluster that includes a locksmith, dry cleaners, and florist). If there were any problems in the Fenton Street District, the team concluded, they were mostly in the realm of planning, zoning, and community dynamics. "By far the single most important issue," the report stated, was the "hostility and mistrust among various camps and factions." The authors noted that these factions prevent collaboration and stymie "formation of a serious revitalization effort."<sup>25</sup>

### *Fenton Village and the Quest for Local Character*

As I walk along the various streets that fall within the boundaries of the "Fenton Village Revitalization District"—Bonifant, Fenton, Thayer, Silver Spring, Silo, Gist, Philadelphia, Selim, and Georgia—various exchanges between novelist and Silver Spring resident George Pelecanos's characters come back to me. Irish American detective Quinn lives in this part of town and Pelecanos often uses his walks and conversations as vehicles for capturing the changes occurring within its landscape, as in this scene from *Soul Circus*:

Silver Spring had beer gardens and restaurants within walking distance of Quinn's, and live music if you wanted it, and you could leave the house and go to any of those places wearing whatever you had on without thinking twice. The city was starting to take on the concrete sterility of white-bread Bethesda, and it was getting the same upscale chains, and the fake Mexican cantinas, and the grocery store where people could be 'seen' eating over-priced sushi in the window booths and overpaying for vegetables in the checkout lines. But Silver Spring hadn't lost its personality or its mix of working immigrants and blue-collar eccentrics yet.<sup>26</sup>

The transformation of downtown Silver Spring is also the basis of numerous conversations between Quinn and other characters, as in this scene from *Hell to Pay*:

Sue Tracy sat in a window deuce, watching the foot traffic on Bonifant Street in downtown Silver Spring, as Terry Quinn arrived at the table carrying two coffees. They were in the Ethiopian place (Kefa Café) close to the Quarry House, the local basement bar where Quinn sometimes drank.

'That good?' said Quinn, watching her take her first sip. She had asked for one sugar to take the edge off.

'Yeah, it's great. I guess I don't need the sugar.'

'They don't let the coffee sit out too long in this place. These people here, they take pride in their business.'

'That bookstore you work in, it's on this street, isn't it?'

'Down the block,' said Quinn.

'Near the gun shop.'

'Yeah, and the apartments, the Thai and African restaurants, the tattoo parlor. Except for the gun place, it's a nice strip. There aren't any chain stores on this block, it's still small businesses. Most of which have been wrecking-balled or moved, tucked under the rug to make way for the New Downtown Silver Spring. But this street here, they haven't managed to mess with it too much yet.'

'You got something against progress?'

'Progress? You mean the privilege of paying five bucks for a tomato at our new designer supermarket, just like all those suckers on the other side of town? Is that the kind of progress you're talking about?'

'You can always stick to Safeway.'

'Look, I grew up here. I know a lot of these shop owners; they've made a life here and they won't be able to afford it when the landlords up the square-foot price. And where are all these working people who live in the apartments going to go when their rents skyrocket?'

'I guess it's great if you own real estate.'

'I don't own a house, so I couldn't really give a rat's ass if the property values go up. I walk through this city and every week something changes, you know? So maybe you can understand how I don't feel all warm and fuzzy about it, man. I mean, they're killing my past, one day at a time.'<sup>27</sup>

If you take the opportunity to walk through Fenton Village in 2005, you will see that each street surrounding Bonifant has its share of one-of-a-kind locally owned stores. Fenton Street features a comic book shop, although the electric shaver repair is now gone, Addis Ababa, a new Ethiopian restaurant, and populuxe-designed Weller's Dry Cleaning, among others. On Thayer you will pass a large Thai market, Roadhouse Oldies, purveyor of vinyl records, and Negral, a Jamaican eatery. Walking the streets on the southern end you will run into numerous auto repairs, My-Le, the Vietnamese restaurant, and Vicino's, an Italian spot. Jackie's, an upscale restaurant, is a new addition around the corner from My-Le. One side of Georgia Avenue falls within the boundaries of this planning district, too, adding a wide range of ethnic restaurants, two of my favorite third places—the Half Moon and the Quarry House—and various service-oriented stores, especially hair and nail salons.

Perhaps because of its proximity to the core, civic activists often single out Bonifant as a street that especially concerns them. Judy Reardon, vice president of the Silver Spring Historical Society and a resident of over twenty years, told me that Bonifant was one of the sites that the organization wanted listed in its entirety on the Locational Atlas. At least up to and including the brick row house storefronts and abandoned apartment building on the north side of the street and the commercial strip across from it, the one housing the bookstore and gun shop. But she agreed with her sister Mary and fellow preservationist Jerry McCoy, that most of the structures there would likely be destroyed. "You just can't stop it," Mary tells me.



Fig. 30. Jackie's Restaurant

Richard Jaeggi, local columnist and Civic Building Citizens Advisory Committee member, expands on the preservationists' observations, noting: "Unless it's protected, it's all geared toward tearing down, putting up something bigger. A single-story store, it doesn't financially [fit into the aims of redevelopment proponents]. I mean, I would love to see a Main Street, do you know the Main Street Program? I would love to see something like that."<sup>28</sup> Frankie Blackburn, executive director of IMPACT Silver Spring, concurs: "I think we're going to see a lot of tearing stuff down, with some pretty big [buildings coming in], it's going to look similar to what you see on the streets in Bethesda. I'm worried about that." She adds, "Expensive condos with high-priced retail. It's going to be all new. Yeah, I think we're going to lose Fenton Village. We probably already have."<sup>29</sup>

Cynthia Rubenstein, former president of the Allied Civic Association, a long-time Long Branch community activist who once ran for the Montgomery County Council, has this to say:

The other thing that I'm concerned about, of course, is the pressure on small businesses around the core Foulger-Pratt project, places like the one we're sitting in now [Kefa Café]. Small businesses that are just quintessential Silver Spring. And a concern that they will be displaced by pressures of profit. The business owners in all cases are at the mercy of the property-owners, and the onus is on the property owners to have some, an altruistic backbone and to continue to want to have businesses like Kefa Café and the secondhand bookstore, and Roadhouse Oldies, and Negril, Quarry House, and Bombay Gaylord. Those kinds of businesses. The electric shaver repair shop. Some of those really community businesses, niche businesses.<sup>30</sup>

Distributing flyers for a town meeting on the effects of redevelopment in October 2003, then surveying individual small business, face-to-face, in July 2004, and talking at length with people like Eva and Sutton of Thai Derm, it becomes clear that most feel neglected in the "New Silver Spring." Shop owners along Fenton, Bonifant, and the other streets express surprise that someone has come by to check in on and talk with them. Contrary to what Regional Center staff members say, these owners note that they are kept uninformed about what is happening and unaware of what resources are available that might help them. My observations are echoed in the University of Maryland's small business displacement report published in 2005.<sup>31</sup> This leaves them with the impression that they are an unwanted presence in the new Silver Spring.

*From Auto Repairs to Art Walks, the Changing Face of the Ripley/South Silver Spring Overlay Zone*

In November 2002, a month after my last visit with Eva, I find myself walking up Georgia Avenue toward the D.C. line and the B & O Railroad Station. I brace the wind on what has turned out to be a blustery morning. Again, I find myself thinking of Quinn:

He came up here to the tracks nearly every night. The platform reminded him of a western set, and he liked the solitude, and the view. A construction crew had been working on the station, probably converting it into a museum or something, a thing to be looked at but not used, another change in the name of redevelopment and gentrification. Of course, he didn't know for sure what they were doing to the station, but recent history convinced him that it was something he would not like. In the last year Quinn's breakfast house, the Tastee Diner, had been moved to a location off Georgia, and he rarely ate there anymore as it was out of his foot range. Also, with its new faux-deco sign out front, it now looked like the Disney version of a diner. He wondered when the small pleasure of his nightly walk would be taken from him, too.<sup>32</sup>

Out of the corner of my eye I glance a ragtag assortment of small restaurants and shops, very similar to the types of businesses housed in the squat, one- and two-story structures which line Bonifant, Fenton, and Thayer. Like Quinn and most of the people I have been speaking with, I think of these storefronts and not the chain stores coming in, as the "real" Silver Spring. I pass Langano, an Ethiopian restaurant, La Bamba, specializing in Latin American fare, and the Half Moon Barbecue, serving up ribs and rockabilly most nights. Interspersed are Tijuana's, Crown Wigs, a pawnshop, and an African braiding salon, as well as a small walkway featuring a memorial to Norman Lane. Because Silver Spring is unincorporated, the homeless man, who for years played the part of what Jane Jacobs calls a "public character," would acquire the nickname "The Mayor of Silver Spring" and be honored by this statue.<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 31. Silver Spring's "Unofficial Mayor"



Fig. 32. Half Moon Bar-B-Que



Fig. 33. Bell Flowers

Crossing the busy six-lane thoroughfare near the 1911 firehouse and Bell Flowers ("Since 1947") I peer into the plate glass windows of Dor-ne Corset Shoppe—which after seventy years in D.C. moved to Silver Spring in 2001—and a martial arts center. Next to it is a large, vacant lot, its blacktop buckled and dominated

by weed-filled cracks and crevices. Eventually a new firehouse will be built there. On this chilly day, the open gate of a chain-link fence at the south end of the lot provides a cold welcome to my destination. Set at an angle, several feet in front of me, back upon the lot, is the small, brick, single-story structure that replaced the original train station on this site in 1945. This is the building that Pelecanos's characters speculate about in two recent novels, wondering if it is being transformed into something that will only be "looked at but not used." Those who sought to preserve it will tell you that this is one of the most important pieces of downtown Silver Spring's built environment; that back in the 1870s it was the railroad that put this first-ring suburb on the map. They may also note that the Silver Spring station was sometimes preferred by U.S. presidents, who could more inconspicuously slip in and out from it than they could D.C.'s Union Station. Now, physically removed from the other buildings in the landscape and for several years sitting idle, it seems as though it could be almost anywhere, even a part of a western set.

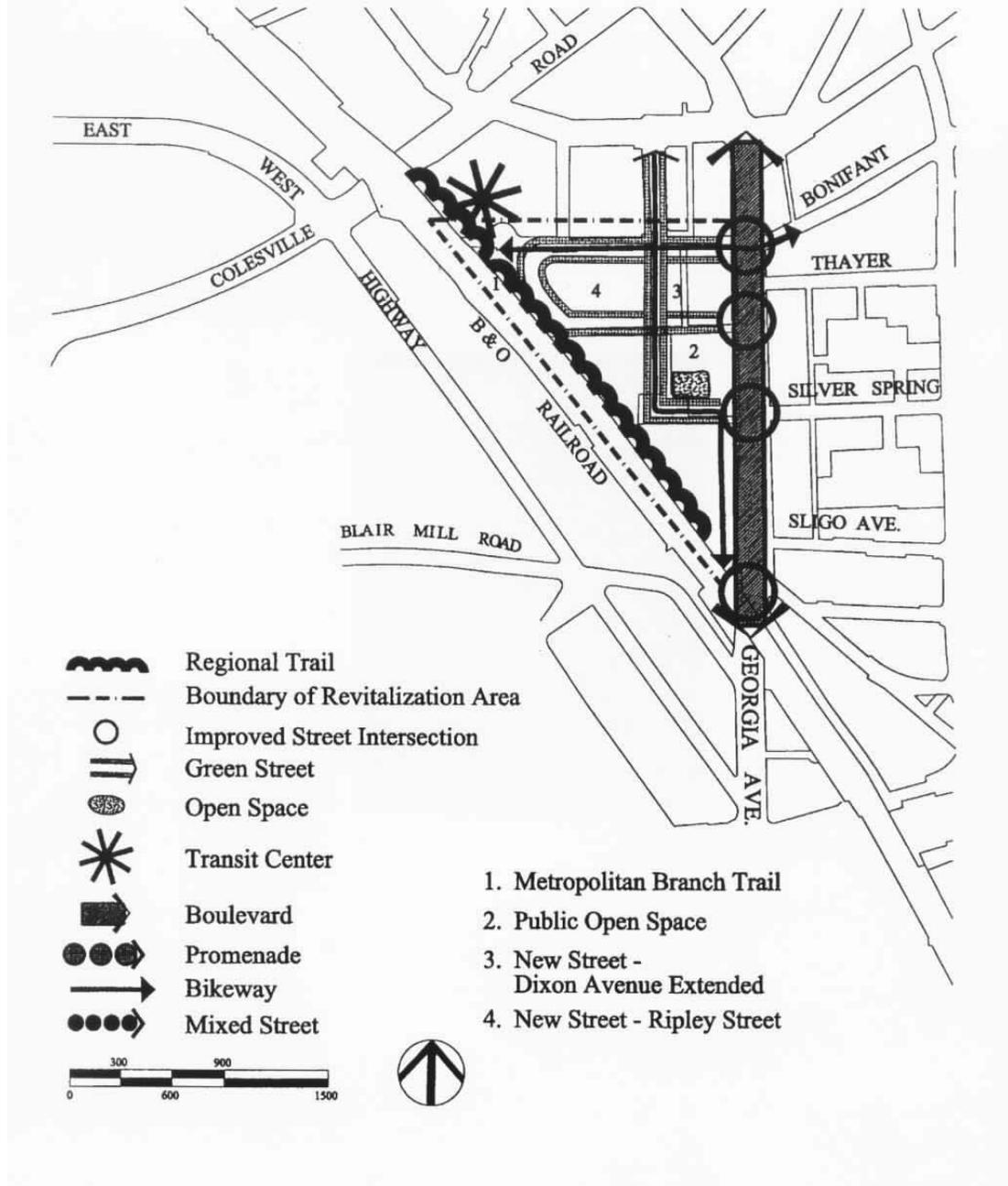


Fig. 34. Recently restored Silver Spring train station

That over time the old B & O station had acquired a mostly unassuming presence in this landscape may explain why in the late 1990s its then-owner, CSX Transportation, thought it could get away with demolishing the building after it was, some would say suspiciously, crashed into by a car. However, there were people, including those working for Montgomery Preservation, Inc. (MPI) who took notice of CSX's plans. MPI nominated the site for protection under the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation and then, after it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places went into action to repair and restore it. For Nancy Urban, MPI treasurer and one of the founding members of the Silver Spring Historical Society, the B & O station's restoration has been her life's work since that time.

In its 1999 Silver Spring CBD Sector Plan, the M-NCPPC merges the Ripley District and South Silver Spring into what it calls the "Ripley/South Silver Spring Overlay Zone." The Ripley District is the triangular segment of the central business district just to the south of the Core. Georgia Avenue—which runs straight north and south in this part of Silver Spring—is its eastern boundary, Bonifant Avenue its northern one. The railway and transit tracks, which cut in at a 45-degree angle, form the third and western edge of the triangle. Little is said in the sector plan of the Ripley District, home to the B & O Station at one end and a handful of businesses and other historic structures nearer the core. Currently, it is dominated by automotive repair shops, parking lots, and small warehouse facilities. This, notes the recent University of Maryland revitalization study, “does not reflect highest and best use, especially considering its adjacency to the Metro stop and transit area.”<sup>34</sup>

Map 14 Ripley District Concept Plan



map 5. Ripley Planning District (Courtesy M-NCPPC)

These days, if you walk from the train station to the core, you will see that this side of Georgia Avenue is similar to the side that falls within the boundary of Fenton Village. Belonging to the mix are the corset shop, Champion Billiards (now closed), Pyramid Atlantic (a community arts center), Dale Music, and Bethel World Outreach Church, which occupies the former Seco Theater and Silver Spring Bank buildings. Until July 2003 a Little Tavern hamburger stand was part of the site that area arts organization Pyramid Atlantic has relocated to from Riverdale in Prince George's County. Pyramid Atlantic had initially planned to renovate and use both the small fast food stand and the fast food operation's headquarters building, but eventually opted to utilize only the latter. As a result, the more eye-catching white-with-red-trim building that had been on the site since the mid-1930s was removed from the premises. Pyramid Atlantic's decision to auction the Little Tavern shop on e-bay stirred up a good deal of controversy, something I will look at in detail in coming chapters.



Fig. 35. Former Little Tavern, dismantled in 2003

Less controversial so far—though a bone of contention among preservationists—is a decision by the Montgomery County Planning Commission to deny the 1925 bank building, just down the street from Pyramid Atlantic, placement on the Locational Atlas. This decision makes it easier for the growing Bethel World Outreach Church, a congregation of African immigrants partially housed in the old bank, to replace the building with a new one. That conflict will also be examined.



Fig. 36. Pyramid Atlantic Building



Fig. 37. Bethel World Outreach Church, former Seco Theater building

On Wayne Avenue, also in the Ripley District, are nondescript high rise office buildings, built by developer Lloyd Moore's firm to coincide with the opening of the Silver Spring Metro Station in 1987. Mary Reardon of the Silver Spring Historical Society wistfully describes a string of quaint, brick row houses, formerly located there that were leveled to make room for the visually stark office towers. Behind Georgia and Bonifant Avenues is Progress Place, a facility serving the needs of the area's homeless population. Its future in downtown Silver Spring has recently been in jeopardy, signifying to some that homeless people do not fit the image of the rapidly transforming downtown.

Walking through downtown Silver Spring there is little if anything which indicates the division of the central business district into the smaller districts that planners refer to. Experientially, the Ripley and South Silver Spring districts meld into one, multi-faceted area. Located at the southwestern edge of the CBD, bordering Washington, D.C., the intersection of Eastern and Georgia Avenues comprises South Silver Spring's eastern boundary and Blair Mill Road its western edge. Running through South Silver Spring are East-West Highway, Kennett and Thirteenth Streets.

As with the Fenton Village District, the 1999 *Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan* noted the great promise of this area, stating that: "South Silver Spring has the potential to become a unique, varied, and pleasant neighborhood." But at least in 1999, it found that South Silver Spring was far from reaching that potential: "The area is characterized by mixed building types and disparate commercial uses including aging industrial, neighborhood convenience and service retail, offices, motels, a postal facility, and the former Canada Dry bottling plant."<sup>35</sup> At that stage,

housing was "a desired goal," although the authors pessimistically stated that that "may be difficult to realize," in part because of "the poor image of the area's vacant buildings."<sup>36</sup> Envisioning the future, the authors of the report concluded that: "While public investment will create incentives and structure for revitalizing South Silver Spring, the neighborhood's character and shape must ultimately be determined by the market."<sup>37</sup>

Jumping ahead to 2005 it seems increasingly clear where the market is taking South Silver Spring. Highrise and lowrise condominiums, townhouses, and apartment complexes seem to be springing up everywhere. The arts are also becoming a key component of the district's newfound identity. Together, these developments point to socioeconomic shifts that are beginning to occur in Silver Spring. In 2000, the median household income was reported to be approximately \$45,000. The Peterson Companies show that in 2002 the *average* household income within a one-mile radius of the core was over \$69,000. By 2001, households with incomes of less than \$25,000 were expected to have declined over a ten year period by approximately twenty-five percent and those with incomes between \$35,000 and \$50,000 to have declined by around eighteen percent. Largest growth was anticipated to be among residents with incomes of \$100,000-150,000 (rising by about 198 percent) and \$150,000 and above, increasing by something like 179.8 percent.<sup>38</sup>

As in surrounding Maryland and Virginia suburbs, a significant increase in wealthy residents has led to growing fears that more modest homes will be purchased for the lots they sit on, torn down, and replaced with "McMansions." All of this leads Manny Hidalgo, former development director of CASA de Maryland, to observe that

what Silver Spring increasingly lacks is economic or class diversity. "Silver Spring is diverse, culturally very diverse. What we're lacking is a working-class that one would find in New York and other cities." This is the message he had hoped to convey, but which was cut from Walter Gottlieb's documentary.<sup>39</sup>

### *Uneven Development, Continuing My Walk in South Silver Spring*

The closed-mouth kiss of gentrification and the replacement of mom-and-pops by national chains had not yet reached this far south in Silver Spring. Quinn generally stayed in this part of town. He turned left on Selim, crossed the street at the My-Le, the Vietnamese restaurant there, and went over the pedestrian bridge spanning Georgia Avenue that led to the commuter train station and the B & O and Metro tracks.<sup>40</sup>

With some regularity I find myself taking a similar walk, trekking up Georgia Avenue to My-Le, then using the pedestrian bridge to cross that busy thoroughfare. Descending the stairs on the other side of the street, I take the underpass, which comes to an end nearly at the doorstep of Mayorga Coffee Factory, my main South Silver Spring destination these days. For as long as most people can remember, this pedestrian tunnel has functioned as an experiential boundary, the stench of urine emanating from it preventing many people from wandering into this part of Silver Spring. Geoff Durham, former Urban District Manager for the Silver Spring Regional Center, says: "It's the closest thing you can get to barbed wire fencing. People aren't going to want to explore down there."<sup>41</sup> Given how removed this section of downtown has been, it is something of a surprise that an enterprising young businessman risked opening up a shop here. But perhaps even more unexpected was the instant success of Mayorga.



Fig. 38. Auto repair shops, Selim Road



Fig. 39. My Le Restaurant

While independently owned, "mom-and-pop" businesses remain staples nearly everywhere outside the downtown's core, signs of gentrification are beginning to appear elsewhere, including in this former "no-man's-land." Most evident are the expensive condominiums and townhouses springing up on and near East-West

Highway, but Mayorga is one sign that the commercial landscape is starting to keep pace. With new and prospective residents seeking places to gather and things to do in a part of downtown historically dominated by light industry and auto repair shops and showrooms, South Silver Spring is at an early phase of its reinvention. "When it's done," writes one reporter, south Silver Spring will be a whole new world, with a plethora of residential units, restaurants, retail and decorated alleyways that will make it easier for pedestrians to navigate the city blocks."<sup>42</sup>

South Silver Spring used to be so marginal, says Randy Boehm, co-chair of the Gateway Coalition, an organization dedicated to the revitalization and partnership of Silver Spring, Washington, D.C. and Takoma Park, that "the police didn't know where the boundary was for D.C."<sup>43</sup>

Let's step inside Mayorga for a cup of coffee before resuming this leg of our tour. As always, I glance around the expansive space—6,200 square feet divided into three main seating areas—for familiar faces, while heading towards the counter to order a "coffee of the day." With some frequency I see Frankie Blackburn of IMPACT Silver Spring here or David Fogel of Gateway, the organization which sponsors monthly art walks through this part of the CBD. It is not uncommon to find my Takoma Park neighbors working or socializing here. Staff and committee members from the Washington Ethical Society, the humanist church I belong to, regularly hold meetings here too. Anthropologist Michael Agar is a regular, generally alone with his laptop. And on occasion, if it is his day off from his job as a librarian for the Washington D.C. Library System, I will run into Jerry McCoy from the Silver Spring Historical Society.



Fig. 40. Mayorga Coffee Factory

When one is available, I prefer to take a seat at one of a half-dozen or so tall, round, glass-topped tables near the tall windows that span the entire front of the brick building. From this spot, my gaze alternates between passing Metro trains and the people and setting that surround me. With its dramatic color scheme—walls of green, orange, and brown, strips of red here and there, and one entire expanse featuring a mural depicting Central American coffee growers—the space is visually stunning. Adding to the atmosphere is live music in the evenings and a nice selection of recorded Motown, jazz, reggae, blues, or Latin during the day. Several patrons are typically typing away on laptops, while others are seated in groupings of plush brown leather couches and chairs, some here for business, others for pleasure. Many more sit in wooden chairs at low, square tables that fill most of the floor, sipping their coffee and visiting with friends, while still others entertain their kids.

Reflecting the changing demographics of the area, the clientele of this café-by-day, lounge-by-night, is racially and ethnically mixed, and it is clearly a draw for

the classes of people developers and elected officials hope to attract to the new downtown that they are marketing. This means that in terms of class, Mayorga is not nearly as diverse as older local hangouts like the Tastee Diner. As I look around I realize that it is inconceivable, for example, to imagine Martha or Eunice, veteran Tastee Diner waitresses (both are in their seventies) stopping by. Nor can I picture Gene, a regular patron of the diner who works at one of the community's many auto repair shops, dropping in for his morning coffee. I flash back to August 2003: Seated at the counter next to Martha, who is eating lunch before beginning her shift, I ask what she thinks about downtown Silver Spring's revitalization. "It [downtown Silver Spring] used to be a nice place, a place where you could buy the things you need," she tells me. "There were shoe stores, pharmacies, grocery stores." Now, she says, "it's just a mess."

Down the short flight of stairs and onto the sidewalk, I pass what was a vacuum cleaner store, now an ice cream shop, before arriving at the original Crisfield seafood restaurant. Peering into the restaurant's windows I see that the seats at the wrap-around, blond wood lunch counter are nearly full, as are most of the tables in the small room off to the side. A line at the cash register crowds the cramped space and tiled floor, with customers paying bills and picking up take-out orders. With its homey charm, dollar tap beers, and the counter occupying the center of its space, Crisfield has been a popular third place for many residents over the course of its sixty-year history. Judging by photos on the wall it also appears to be a frequent stop for celebrities, including local newscasters, sports stars, and musicians. As the neighborhood around it begins to change, this restaurant offers balance to Mayorga,

its new neighbor, a setting inviting to many of those who may feel out of place with the coffeehouse crowd down the street.

In *Right as Rain*, Pelecanos offers this description of Crisfield:

All the stools at the U-shaped bar were occupied, and the dining room to the right was filled. The atmosphere was no atmosphere: white tiled walls with photographs of local celebrities framed and mounted above the tiles, wood tables topped with paper place mats, grocery store-bought salad dressing displayed on a bracketed shelf...and still the place was packed nearly every night, despite the fact that management was giving nothing away. Crisfield's was a D.C. landmark, where generations of Washingtonians had met and shared food and conversation for years.<sup>44</sup>

Over cups of chowder or crab cake sandwiches I often find myself impressed by the mix of people who frequent this spot for lunch: working-class and professional, black and white, older residents, and a smattering of students from nearby Montgomery College.

Crisfield, like the Tastee Diner, is one of those increasingly rare public places in this and other communities that Samuel Delaney describes in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, where people experience and engage in “cross-class contact.” Delaney, a professor of comparative literature at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but most widely known as the most prominent black and gay science fiction writer, claims that this type of “contact”-based interaction happens much less frequently in chain businesses than it does in independently-owned ones. In the chains, social relations are generally based on the calculated mode of “networking,” the more prominent mode practiced in society-at-large, while small businesses thrive and depend on the kinds of more intimate interactions, bonds, and histories that customers form with them.<sup>45</sup>



Fig. 41. Crisfield Seafood Restaurant

Leaving Crisfield and rounding the corner onto East-West Highway—a busy four-lane that juts diagonally across Georgia Avenue—my gaze is drawn to activity taking place in the parking lot of Tires of Silver Spring.

Throughout its history, this and the adjoining portions of the CBD have been home to automobile sales and service outlets. A 1974 Sector Plan identifies such businesses as "the largest single type of non-residential activity in Silver Spring."<sup>46</sup> While automobile sales showrooms are no longer a part of the landscape, service shops like this one are. Squat and worn-at-the-edges, the white brick building that houses Tires of Silver Spring has enveloped this corner since 1936. Cutting through the lot, I spot owner Ken Lubel, a white man in his fifties or sixties. Lubel expressed bewilderment at public hearings in the spring of 2003 that anyone would find his building to be of architectural or historic value. "I can't for the life of me understand why people would want to preserve my building," he testified at a Montgomery County Historic Preservation (HPC) hearing in May 2003, adding that historic

designation would “pose extreme hardship for me.” And yet, the consultant contracted by the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to provide an assessment of National Register eligibility of historic resources within the CBD, cited Lubel’s building as one of thirteen out of 205 properties at least fifty years old with such potential. As it turned out, the HPC for the Montgomery County Department of Parks and Planning recommended against adding this property to the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites, which means that additional review will not be required if alteration or demolition is sought.



Fig. 42. Tires of Silver Spring

If things are beginning to change in South Silver Spring, they are mainly doing so, as noted, in the realm of housing, though the arts identification is growing stronger. This stands in marked contrast to the core, where attention has focused exclusively on the commercial landscape, with expensive condominium, apartment, and townhouse projects still at the planning stages. With the core fast becoming established as an entertainment district—it houses the AFI Silver Theater, the Round

House Theatre Black Box, Discovery Communications, and a twenty-screen Majestic Theater—attention is now turning to refashioning South Silver Spring, including its alleyways, into an arts hub. A glossy brochure published by the County describes South Silver Spring as an emerging "new urban neighborhood" and maps out close to 1500 residential units in projects that are underway or soon will be. However, even more attention is devoted in the brochure to plans for a system of "pedestrian-friendly alleys" similar to ones that exist in D.C.'s Georgetown, Rehobeth Beach, Seattle, and Montreal. Photos of present-day South Silver Spring are juxtaposed with artists' renderings of what is to come, showing canopies, banners, planters, and decorative lighting, among other features.



Fig. 43. Silver Spring Historical Society member Karen Kali, Arts Alley

These projected physical changes will complement monthly art walks sponsored by the Gateway Georgia Avenue Revitalization Corporation (GGARC) since the summer of 2003. David Fogel, who organizes those walks, tells me that it is not uncommon to have 150 participants. One of the most intriguing aspects of these

art walks is that they match local artists with existing small businesses, not just Mayorga, but others that area residents may be less familiar with, such as Los Arrieros Restaurant. Fogel explains that this is part of Gateway's mission: "If they [the art walks] bring residents onto the streets, they will be introduced to businesses," that in turn, he hopes, they will begin to frequent. Both the arts and small businesses, he says, help to create stable communities.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 44. David Fogel, right, speaks with Gary Stith of Silver Spring Regional Center

Continuing my walk, I glance to the left and find my eyes drawn to the Gramax Heliport Building, jutting up from Thirteenth Street. The fifteen-story brick building, built in 1964 as office space, has been unoccupied since the mid-1980s, so like most people, I had assumed it would be demolished. However, with public

concern growing over the limited amount of available affordable housing, the Gramax is being transformed into 180 rental units, with a designated number of units priced as “affordable housing” for qualified applicants. A major facelift has begun, the most noticeable changes being new windows and the painting of the brick. Because it is within the boundaries of the arts and entertainment district, the \$25 million renovated building will also feature street-level retail and art exhibition space.<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 45. Gramex Building

When the plans for this renovation were announced, some questioned why the county had placed this "affordable" project at the margins of Silver Spring, rather than nearer the core. Donell Peterman, an African American minister, charged that what was being developed was "a section for poor people, over by the Gramax next to

the District line."<sup>49</sup> Virginia Mahoney, long-time community activist and Senior Risk Manager for the Fannie Mae Foundation, who shared some Peterman's perceptions, now counters that a greater concern has to do with the formula the County uses to determine affordability and eligibility. Based on county wide income data, the rent for a studio apartment is nearly \$900 and requires a minimum income of almost \$21,000. "Market-rate" apartments begin at \$1,049 for a studio and require a minimum income of over \$25,000.<sup>50</sup> These rents, she points out, are prohibitive for many teachers, employees of area non-profits, and others of us.

### *Crossing Boundaries: South Silver Spring and the D.C. Line*

That Silver Spring, specifically what is now known as South Silver Spring, shares a boundary with the District of Columbia has long been an important part of what defines it. For much of its history Silver Spring has attracted white professionals who worked in D.C. but wished to reside in a more bucolic, less urban and diverse setting. Even though today there is little about the commercial landscape that visibly distinguishes the two jurisdictions, the boundary of Eastern Avenue is still a reference point for residents, who talk about whether this business or street address is on the D.C. or Maryland side of the line. And for those who have lived in the area longer, particularly African Americans, this line frequently has profound historical and personal significance.

Ruby and "Stan," both African Americans who lived in D.C. before Silver Spring desegregated, describe taking a trolley or bus across the line, comparing it to a trip to "a foreign country," and a hostile one at that. " Now in his early seventies, "Stan," a retired pharmacist and an artist, recalls visiting Silver Spring in his youth.

"It was like going to a foreign country. Let's go visit *them*," he laughs. And so he and his friends would hop the streetcar and discover that white people in Silver Spring were doing the same things they were. "They just wouldn't let us participate," he adds.<sup>51</sup> Ruby, also in her seventies, remembers that after moving from New York to attend Howard University in the 1950s, she and her classmates were warned about "Silver Spring and the hinterlands." "We were told, 'you're not welcome there, you don't go into the stores, and really be careful, just be careful, that sort of thing.... That was like a different world."<sup>52</sup>

The D.C./Maryland line also plays an important role in the lives of George Pelecanos's characters, who he often depicts crossing it. In *Hard Revolution*, the novelist captures the experience from the perspectives of an African American woman in 1957 and an Italian American man in 1968:

Althea Strange walked toward Georgia Avenue and stood at the bus stop with two other domestics who were waiting for a D.C. Transit bus to take them south over the District line, to the familiar faces, smells, and musical cadences of the voices that told them they were home.<sup>53</sup>

Dominic Martini came up off Longfellow and turned left, taking Georgia Avenue north toward Silver Spring.... When he'd gotten back from the service, the first thing he noticed about Georgia Avenue was that it had been re-paved.... The second thing he'd noticed was that there were many more blacks in the neighborhood, up on the commercial strip and in the residential areas as well. Soul music came from radios of cars cruising the Avenue and sometimes it came from the open doors of the bars.<sup>54</sup>

Architectural historian Richard Longstreth, who is white, observes that because D.C. has long been codified as black in white residents' minds, developers presenting proposals in public forums in the late 1980s and early 1990s never touted the potential of their plans to draw consumers from across the District line.<sup>55</sup> Ruby vividly recalls a conversation that she sat in on concerning redevelopment during the

period she worked for a former County Executive. "A guy sat in [my boss's] office and said, 'If we get certain kinds of stores in Silver Spring, we're going to attract people from across the border.'" Instead, the focus was always on attracting consumers from surrounding suburbs like Bethesda, Takoma Park, and Chevy Chase, all of which had predominantly white populations.

Over time, the diversity of the community's population and its urban character has become a major selling point for many liberal, middle-class whites. Richard Jaeggi, a local columnist and member of a citizen advisory committee for the new civic building, moved his family from a working-class black neighborhood of Northeast D.C. to Silver Spring when he learned that a friend was moving and selling his house at a low price. "In hindsight," says Richard, who is white, and married to a Japanese woman, "Silver Spring is a logical choice. It has some urban aspects and yet you still have a little green patch and you know you can't beat the Montgomery County schools. It's definitely not for people that, if you just hated cities, you'd move way up to Frederick or someplace far away."<sup>56</sup>

There is also Cynthia Rubenstein, who says that her desire in moving from Iowa to northern Virginia and then Silver Spring was to "live in more of an urban environment." Although Silver Spring "looked like a run-down suburban community" when she first saw it in 1983, "I started discovering that what makes Silver Spring most interesting is the diversity of its community."<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Silver Spring Historical Society President Jerry McCoy says that it was with great reluctance that he left D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood, complying with his wife Nan's interest in purchasing a home. But he was pleased to

discover that Silver Spring had many of the qualities that he liked about Adams Morgan. In his words, it was "sort of a semi-urban environment," where he could walk to a grocery store, the Metro, and restaurants.<sup>58</sup> Today, Silver Spring's proximity to D.C. is often promoted, with Georgia Avenue trumpeted as a "gateway" from the District to Montgomery County and Silver Spring's CBD.

### *Arts and Condos as Signs of Silver Spring's New Identity*

Continuing my walk down East-West Highway, I pass Izora, a fashionable, Afro-Caribbean restaurant and nightclub that opened in August 2003, but has since closed. With its sleek lines, rooftop patio and potted palm trees, Izora provided a striking contrast to the older, industrial buildings surrounding it. A *Washington Post* critic called it "a handsome, almost magical space for partying and networking."<sup>59</sup> Directly across from Izora, located in another of the newer structures in this section of the CBD, is the Discovery Creative and Technology Center. This light reddish brown brick building, which for a short period of time housed Caldor, a retail outlet, is where Discovery Communications, the international cable firm, does much of its production.

With its distinct, angular roof, I next spot A & A Auto Sales. Built in 1951 in what Thomas Hine has dubbed the "populuxe" style of that period, A & A long sat empty at the corner of East-West and Blair Mill Road, weeds sprouting up around it. While some people found this building, like the one that houses Tires of Silver Spring, to be an important artifact of the community's automobile history, worthy of preservation, others found both to be eyesores. Jim, a long-time resident of the area,

shook his head in disbelief and laughed when I told him that there had been an effort to save them. In the summer of 2004 A & A was leveled.



Fig. 46. A & A Auto Sales

Most noticeable at this intersection is the construction occurring directly across Blair Mill Road on East-West Highway. The rounded, two-story, pale yellow brick entryway of the 1946 Art-Deco Moderne Canada Dry bottling plant is all that remains on a large expanse of land. It will become part of "Silverton," a new condominium project with over 200 units. Of the former bottling plant, SSHS Vice President Judy Reardon told me that her sister Mary "would have put her body in front of that building. She was bound and determined. She would have killed herself to save that building."<sup>60</sup> Other historic preservationists fought hard, too, to minimally save this section of the building. In the end, they succeeded in having it placed on Montgomery County's *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*. While they view this as one of their major successes, there are other members of the community who have a difficult time grasping the value of this structure. Mary Ann Zimmerman tells

me: "Tear down a few things. Crap is crap." To her the building is yet another symbol of historic preservationists wanting to save everything. "It had been agreed to tear it down and then all of a sudden it popped up again. To save the outside and put something else inside it....I don't see it worth any of that....And my money, well my money is going into that because I pay taxes."<sup>61</sup>



Fig. 47. Canada Dry bottling plant entrance



Fig. 48. Canada Dry facade incorporated into Silverton condominium project

Watching a construction crew hard at work, I cannot help but wonder what workers at the old plant would think about this preservation effort, the end result of which will be to transform the site of their workplace into luxury housing units. Even though it lends this section of Silver Spring character and I would rather that it stay than go, I do share a curiosity about what exactly is being preserved in the process. What history will be remembered as the gutted lobby of this building is attached to something else entirely? Is this an example of why many people are critical of “facadism”?<sup>62</sup>

Pulled in the same direction, farther down East-West Highway, my gaze moves upward, spotting construction of the Bennington, a huge complex containing yet another 200-plus units of housing. Taking in the construction—recognizing that I am among the many who could never afford to live here—I almost fail to notice that across East-West Highway, butting up against the Discovery Creative and Technology Center, is the spring that led to Silver Spring’s founding and eventually gave the community its name. Because water no longer flows here, more noticeable are an acorn-shaped gazebo and huge panels depicting various scenes from Silver Spring's history on the side of what was the Caldor department store building, and now the auxiliary building for Discovery Communications.

While the original estates of two founding families, the Blairs and the Lees, have long disappeared, the presence of these families remains strong throughout the built environment. Stroll around Acorn Park and you will see the sole remnants of Blair’s Silver Spring mansion, a small nymph statue and the acorn-shaped gazebo that

Blair had constructed for his wife. You will also notice an historic marker that tells the tale of Silver Spring's "discovery."



Fig. 49. Acorn Park historic panel, depiction of original Armory



Fig. 50. Gazebo in Acorn Park

Leave the park and you will find streets, office buildings, apartments, other parks, and strip malls, all bearing the Blair and Lee names, a clear indication of the prominence of these families in political circles and as developers. One of the most conspicuous buildings in downtown Silver Spring is the Lee Building, housing the offices of the Lee Development Company. Walking down East-West Highway to Colesville Road you will pass The Blairs, a multi-building apartment complex and on Colesville the Blair Towns, a new townhouse development. Even Selim, the horse that is credited with leading Blair to the "silver spring" in 1840, has a street named after him, as does Gist Blair, and the Lee family. As for retail, if you continue down East-West you will come to the Blair Shops, near the spot where Montgomery Blair's mansion, Falkland, once stood atop a hill that was also leveled to make way for a supermarket. Giant Foods and a CVS Pharmacy have recently been joined by a number of eateries and a Caribou Coffee.



Fig. 51. Former site of Blair's Silver Spring estate

*From Something to Nothingness?: Stopping for Coffee at Caribou*

As different as they are, the presence of both the independently owned Mayorga Coffee Factory and Caribou Coffee chain signify downtown Silver Spring's renaissance as a commercial landscape and perhaps also its reinvention as an arts and entertainment community. Natalie Cantor, director of the Mid-County Services Center, tells the *Washington Post* that neighboring Wheaton, which is also trying to establish itself as an arts district, needs "a few coffeehouses and art galleries."<sup>63</sup> Coffeehouses, it seems, go hand-in-hand with galleries, as elements of what sociologist Sharon Zukin calls "the symbolic economy." An article in the *Silver Spring Gazette* quotes Mel Tull, Silver Spring's enterprise zone administrator, as saying that coffee shops are a measure of a town's "vitality." He and others interviewed note that the new professionals working and living in the area expect such amenities.<sup>64</sup> It is this influx that explains why Martin Mayorga opted to open up here, not elsewhere. New high-end housing construction, concentrated mainly in this part of downtown Silver Spring, is almost certainly why Caribou Coffee chose to do the same. While five years ago it is doubtful whether either would have risked opening up shops here, Mayorga's success proves that Silver Spring offers opportunities for savvy entrepreneurs, and Caribou's shows that this downtown has once again become a desirable location for corporate chains to do business. Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* suggests that these examples belong to broader national trends:

Creative Class people in my focus groups and interviews report that such third places play key roles in making a community attractive. This is because the two other sources of interaction and stability, the family and workplace, have become less secure and stable. People are more likely to live alone, and more

likely to change jobs frequently. Third places fill a void by providing a ready venue for acquaintance and human interaction.<sup>65</sup>

If Mayorga with its local ownership and management seems to have some claim on authenticity, then Caribou would at first glance seem to be its opposite, artificial and out of place, with little connection to its environment. When the first Caribou Coffee store in the nation opened within blocks of Lake Calhoun, near where I once lived in south Minneapolis, its Alaskan lodge or North Woods motif and folk and country music seemed to fit with its surroundings. But now, as the concept finds its way into this Mid-Atlantic urban environment of downtown D.C., its suburbs, and other urban areas across the U.S., it can seem oddly incongruous; in crucial ways, a perfect illustration of what sociologist Ritzer calls “the globalization of nothing.”



Fig. 52. Caribou Coffee at the Blair Shops

With Ritzer's observations in mind, I stand outside of Caribou and the Blair Shops, watching as traffic streams by on East-West Highway, some cars entering and exiting the parking lot, many of them on their way to Giant Foods or CVS. This is

hardly the natural environment of the Alaskan wilderness. And yet, while clearly lacking many of the traits that sociologists Ritzer and Oldenburg contend a setting must have to function as a third place, this Caribou appears to be serving as such, especially for those whose roots in the community are not yet very deep. Walk in most afternoons and you will discover that nearly every couch, table, and chair is occupied. Students, as at other area coffee houses—Savory in Takoma Park, Sparky’s, SoHo, and Tryst in D.C., and Kefa and Mayorga in Silver Spring—are using it as a library. With their laptop computers and piles of books and papers spread out before them, it is clear that they plan to stay awhile, and there are no cues (as at some Starbucks) that this is not acceptable to management. In addition to students, many of whom are here by themselves, you will observe a number of immigrant patrons, mostly from African countries, using this as a social setting. Somehow this faux lodge, complete with stone fireplace, has become a comfortable third place, an informal spot for them to meet and socialize in public. It could be, as Florida points out, that: “People have always...found social interaction in their communities. But a community’s ability to facilitate this interaction appears to be more important in a highly mobile, quasi-anonymous society.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, Caribou is clearly a manifestation of centralized, corporate planning, the key to “nothingness” that Ritzer writes about. Much as my encounters with Silver Spring and other area suburbs have led to a critical assessment of deeply held stereotypes of suburbia, so does time spent in Caribou Coffee result in complicating my views about chain businesses.

Leaving Caribou and the Blair Shops, I return to what planners call the “Ripley District” on my way to the Core. Waiting for the light to change, I look

directly across East-West Highway at the large complex of high rise office buildings. Totalling 1.3 million square feet, the \$130 million NOAA headquarters houses 4,700 employees. It, along with other high rise office buildings built in anticipation of the nearby Silver Spring Metro station are commonly criticized today, both for their generic quality and inwardness. Mary Ann Zimmerman cites them as the type of "cookie cutter" architecture that people in the community do not want.<sup>67</sup> And Geoff Durham, formerly with the Silver Spring Regional Center, says that from NOAA "a lesson was learned" by Discovery Communications, which decided not to house restaurants in its complex.<sup>68</sup> He and others note that NOAA's buildings are so self-contained that employees are rarely seen.

Geographer Edward Relph would undoubtedly point to these structures as emblematic of a decades-long trend toward "placelessness" plaguing urban landscapes. According to Relph, when abstractions like efficiency and profit take precedence over communally held values, then "sense of place" and "place attachment" become not merely unimportant, "...but their absence is an economic virtue and placelessness is sought after for it makes possible the attainment of greater levels of spatial efficiency."<sup>69</sup> At its most general level, writes Relph, this movement toward placelessness involves reaching back into the deepest levels of place, "cutting roots, eroding symbols, replacing diversity with uniformity and experiential order with conceptual order."<sup>70</sup> The result is that diverse and significant places—what Ritzer calls "places of substance"—are replaced with anonymous spaces and interchangeable environments.

As we have seen, the potential for "placelessness" and diminished character or sense of place has long been a central concern as Silver Spring residents, developers, planners, and elected officials have debated its downtown's future. Many in the community have worried that the solutions proposed to resuscitate a stagnant CBD would result in a depleted sense of place, trading buildings and businesses that have long been part of residents' lives, for more architecture like the NOAA buildings and a plethora of generic chain stores.



Fig. 53. NOAA building, site of IMPACT Silver Spring's office

### *Facing the Future, Walking through the Core*

Crossing the busy intersection of East-West Highway and Colesville Road, I continue down Colesville past the Metro Station and regional bus lot. This brings us finally to the intersection of Colesville and Georgia, the CBD Core. The Core is

bounded by Wayne Avenue to the south, Georgia Avenue to the west, Colesville Road to the north, and Spring Road to the east.



Fig. 54. Silver Spring Metro Station

Reminiscent of the Hollywood sign, a new sign placed at this prominent corner announces that this is Silver Spring. The long empty parking lot in front of the long boarded up Art Deco shopping mall is now teeming with traffic. Especially at lunchtime the sidewalks are busy with foot traffic as well. In the 1999 Sector Report it was reported that the CBD was to be "rejuvenated as Silver Spring's varied and active town center, with housing, office, and retail development in a pedestrian-friendly environment, enhanced with parks and open spaces."<sup>71</sup> Take the pass walk that cuts through the newly restored façade of the strip mall and you will come to such a space, "Silver Plaza," with benches and fountain. Although the cookie-cutter architecture of the light brick buildings in back of the Art Deco strip and on either side of the plaza bears no resemblance to the sleek, curved structure that stands in front of them on Georgia, that is not stopping people from coming. Red Lobster, Austin Grill,

Starbucks, Chipotle, and a number of other familiar corporate chain stores and restaurants open out onto the plaza, most offering outdoor seating. Staff members of the Silver Spring Regional Center and members of citizen advisory committees can hardly contain their enthusiasm for the numbers of people that are being drawn to the new Silver Spring.



Fig. 55. Downtown Silver Spring sign

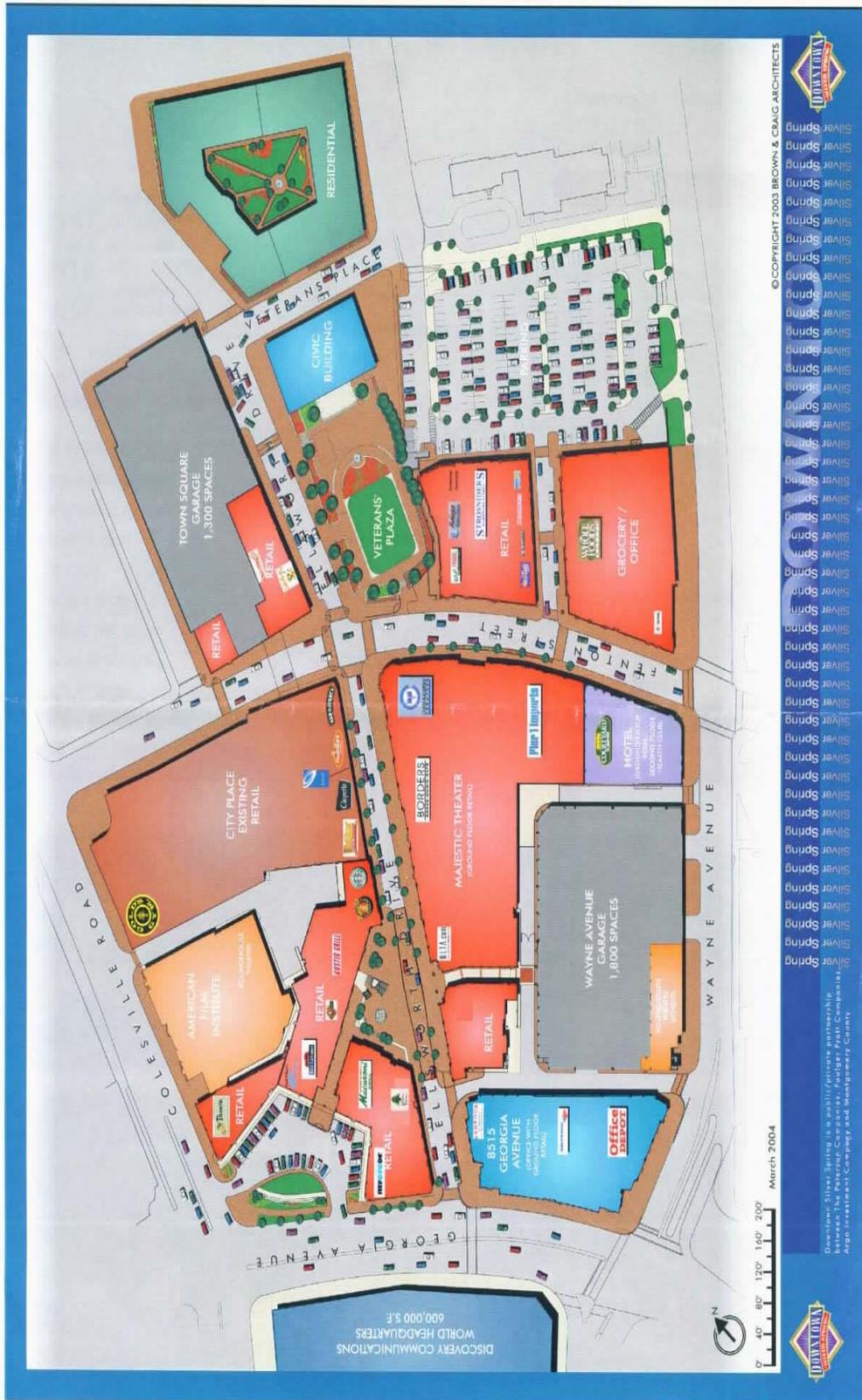
Credited with jump-starting this "renaissance" or "rebirth" were decisions by two firms, each identified with arts and entertainment. The American Film Institute (AFI) was first, announcing in 1998 that it planned to expand its East Coast operations by making a renovated Silver Theater its home base. After AFI's plans were finalized, Montgomery County officials decided to approach Discovery Communications again about relocating from Bethesda, the more upscale suburb where it had been leasing space in six buildings.



Fig. 56. Renovated Silver Spring Shopping Center



Fig. 57. Restored Silver Theater



map 6. Central Business District Core (Courtesy Brown Craig Turner Architects)

The play on the Hollywood sign is a nod to how key these two companies are to the new identity Silver Spring is attempting to fashion. "Silverdocs," an annual documentary film festival that in its first years has received significant regional and national recognition, is a joint effort of AFI and Discovery. The more public of the two operations, AFI has garnered the most attention—from its red carpet, star-studded opening, featuring an appearance by Clint Eastwood, to its role as the venue for the Silverdocs festival.

Circling the Discovery headquarters, let's walk to Georgia Avenue again and the building's main entrance. A small green space with public benches fills the spot where the Tastee Diner was formerly located. Whether I am standing on Georgia, Wayne, or Colesville, my gaze moves up and then outward, as I try to take in as much as possible of Discovery Communication's new, \$165-million, 550,000 square foot "campus." Ten stories tall, with a strikingly modern design of metal and glass, the building houses 1,600 workers and dwarfs most of the structures surrounding it. Among its most prominent features are its distinctive rooflines—what *Washington Post* architecture critic Benjamin Forgey calls its metal "hats"—a forty-foot-long tyrannosaurus skeleton in its exposed lobby on Georgia Avenue and, at street level on the Colesville side, a brightly colored, 170-foot baked-enamel-on-metal mural.<sup>72</sup> Billing itself as "the leading global real-world media and entertainment company," Discovery's web site boasts that its various television networks (including the Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, and TLC) broadcast into more than 354 million homes in 154 countries and territories, in thirty-three languages, outside the United

States.<sup>73</sup> The contrast between this global media firm and local Tastee could hardly be starker.



Fig. 58. Tastee Diner new location with Discovery headquarters in background

While local media and elected officials frequently point to the Discovery headquarters as a symbol of Silver Spring's rebirth, there are those, including many small business owners, who see it as symbolic of the preferential treatment given corporations with no roots in the community. Richard Jaeggi, in his monthly newspaper column, "The Big Acorn," is among those who note that huge tax subsidies and other incentives are what prompted national and international businesses to move to Silver Spring. Discovery received \$27 million in tax breaks and public subsidies both from Montgomery County and the state of Maryland. The County also spent \$25 million on the Silver Theatre, which it has agreed to lease to AFI for ten dollars a year, along with an \$800,000 grant for initial operating costs.<sup>74</sup> Jaeggi observes that these types of subsidies are "not the natural workings of the market" and that they "skew the balance in favor of big developers and large national

chains."<sup>75</sup> He and David Fogel of Gateway are among those who wonder what might be done to redress this imbalance, David suggesting that Silver Spring could make its mark by becoming the first community in the nation to offer small business subsidies.



Fig. 59. Construction of Discovery headquarters



Fig. 60. Completed Discovery Communications headquarters

Now let us cross the street again, returning to what is being touted as one of the jewels of revitalization, the renovated Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theater. Historic preservationists are somewhat taken aback by the attention being showered on these structures. After all, nearly twenty years ago many in the community began accusing the preservationists of "standing in the way of progress" because of their efforts to save these buildings. After sitting empty for many years the interior of the shopping center was entirely gutted, making it unclear to outside observers what would become of what seemed like sparse remnants of the structure, little more than a shell. However, on his July 2004 tour of downtown Silver Spring, Jerry McCoy confessed his surprise that so much care was given to restoring the building's exterior. The colors of the trim, most notably the distinct turquoise, were matched to what they had originally been, he noted, and old-fashioned cloth awnings, the kind that are manually raised and lowered, were installed, again to match the originals. Even the maroon panels that formerly were part of a Kresge's store were reproduced for the space that now occupies that corner of the shopping center. On his tour, as in all printed historical accounts of Silver Spring, Jerry emphasizes how important this strip was to the growth of the community.

The shopping center opened its doors to great fanfare in 1938. A full evening of entertainment, including swing and popular music performed by Sidney's Mayflower Hotel Orchestra marked the event. "Comprised of 19 stores, a Warner Brothers theater and a gasoline service station," the *Washington Post* reported, "the shopping center is one of the most complete ever built in America and is representative of the best ideas in modern business center development."<sup>76</sup> What

made it stand out, particularly striking in a suburb designed prior to World War II, was the provision for parking, a large lot in front and another in the rear, making all of its stores accessible in one stop. With its motto, “park and shop,” it offered a retail experience that recognized the increasingly auto-centered lives people were living, a sharp contrast to earlier planning that was based on on-street parking and individual shops that one entered from the sidewalk. “When it opened in 1938...this was the largest drive-in, integrated retail development in the region,” writes Longstreth, an authority on shifts in commercial architecture and planning.<sup>77</sup>



Fig. 61. Early stages of Silver Theater restoration



Fig. 62. Silver Spring Shopping Center before renovation

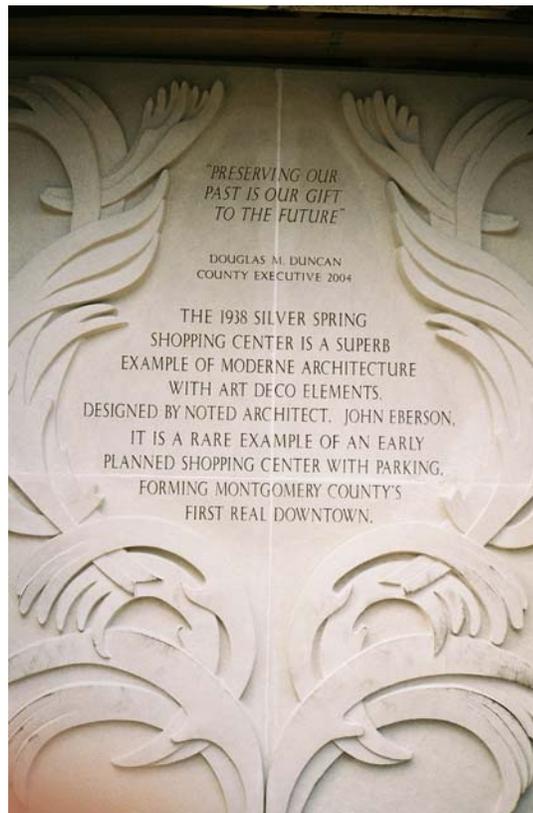


Fig. 63. Plaque celebrating Silver Spring Shopping Center

When Hecht's, a major D.C. department store, opened its first suburban store in Silver Spring in 1947, it blazed another trail. Longstreth notes that its was “the earliest very large...branch of a major department store to be realized outside a sizable, established retail district anywhere in the United States, outside of two prewar examples in Los Angeles.”<sup>78</sup> By 1950, Hecht’s was followed by J.C. Penney, Sears, Jelleff’s, Hahn Shoes, H.L. Green and Company, and a number of other shops.<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 64. Former Hecht Company department store, now part of City Place Mall

### *Visions Not Realized*

Jeremy Korr, in his cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model, discusses the significance of "absent components." "By absent components," he writes, "I mean

that every landscape reflects a set of decisions not only on how to construct it, but also how *not* to construct it."<sup>80</sup>

Had it gone forward, Lloyd Moore's Silver Triangle would have reinvented the CBD to conform to a much more typical suburban image. The nearly 400,000 square feet site, which was to have included retail (655,000 square feet), office, and hotel components, was divided into two large parcels: one bounded by Colesville Road, Georgia Avenue, and Wayne Avenue, the second by Colesville, Fenton, Georgia, and Ellsworth. Two major department stores, each with four floors, were to serve as anchor tenants in the retail portion of the complex, with a number of specialty stores and a food court occupying the remainder of the space.

While Moore's plans would never come to pass, historic preservationists observe with some satisfaction that elements of the CBD that they had campaigned to save and been derided for, eventually came to be viewed as indispensable. However, that was only after the Ghermezian's and Triple Five's "American Dream" plan failed to receive public support and most importantly, financial backing. In comparison with the Silver Triangle concept, Triple Five's proposal for an "Urban Entertainment Complex" (UEC), made public in 1995, was relatively short-lived, but even more controversial. Indications are that Montgomery County was aware of and concerned about potential risks from an early stage. A market verification study produced by MRA International and The Richardson Group in late 1995, during the American Dream's "formative stages of pre-development," described it as "highly distinctive and engaging." But the authors proceeded to state that the project's implementation was "risky," adding: "UECs are inherently risky because they remain a novel

development 'product' and because of the unique nature of the customized programs they require."<sup>81</sup>

The main story line in area media is that the proposal put forth by Bryant Foulger and the Peterson Companies was finally something that all segments of the community could live with. Still, many residents voice criticism and concern, whether it be over the bland architecture bearing no resemblance to the Art Deco heritage of the CBD, or because the concentration of chain stores is drawing customers from surrounding streets and threatening to increase small business owners' rents. While Nancy Urban of the SSSH and MPI notes that developer Bryant Foulger has made it clear that he is not a fan of Art Deco, others point out that the expense of designing something unique to a single location is generally not done for financial, rather than aesthetic, reasons. This has proven to be the case in neighboring Bethesda:

Since the first section of Bethesda Row opened in 1997, it has been a smashing success with shoppers, local residents and architecture critics. Yet for all its accolades, Bethesda Row has not been successful enough for its owners. Federal Realty Investment Trust, the company that built it, said last year that it would not build any more massive developments with the urban feel of Bethesda Row. Such places take so long to build, tie up so much money, and entail so much risk that the company decided they do not make economic sense.

The reporter goes on to explain:

Just as developers want cookie-cutter projects that can be completed quickly, those who finance them want to avoid complication and political risk, real estate industry executives said. A bank can finance a suburban shopping mall and have a good sense for the risks involved; with a development like Bethesda Row, not only is the expense higher, but there are innumerable risks that bankers generally do not know how to quantify.<sup>82</sup>

If the generic selection of stores and architecture in the core is not appealing to you, it can be jarring. Judy Reardon of the SSSH told me, "You go downtown

Silver Spring now and it could be Anywhereville. I hate it....Silver Spring had a sense of place. It's really a shame."<sup>83</sup> In one of his columns, Richard Jaeggi describes his and sidekick Jim Hinshelwood's reaction to the New Silver Spring:

It was only as we approached the outdoor eating plaza next to Baja Fresh that I began to comprehend the new downtown that had sprung from the old Silver Spring. The plaza was filled with people: sitting, eating, chatting....We headed in the direction where the crowd thickened, and approached the fountain at the Silver Plaza. Could this be the same Silver Spring that I had lived in for the last 12 years?<sup>84</sup>



Fig. 65. Example of cookie-cutter architecture on Fenton Street

Richard says that he still has to pinch himself and ask that question every time he visits the completed retail section of the CBD. He describes how awed he is by the number of people who are filling the chain restaurants and enjoying the newly created public space—the plaza—at the center. But he is somehow much less comfortable there than he is on the streets and restaurants outside of the core. "Strange that we should feel so comfortable in this exotic spot [the new Ethiopian restaurant on Fenton], and so out of place at the thoroughly sprung Austin Grill [in the core]."<sup>85</sup>

What troubles Richard and others most about what is happening in downtown Silver Spring is that market forces of economic development take precedence over everything else that is important to a community. He compares “community development” with gardening, explaining how the two are different from “economic development” which he sees guiding the changes in Silver Spring:

The danger in all this is the law of unintended consequences: sometimes by altering the terrain to favor the introduction of a new species, the balance is altered in such a way that the new species effectively overwhelms all other species and we end up with a mono culture of just one plant. (Think Kudzu.) The challenge that now faces Silver Spring is to make sure that our economic development does not strangle our community development.<sup>86</sup>

He goes on to note that once the market forces of economic development have been unleashed and taken root that they are almost always bound to do exactly that, to overwhelm or strangle what he calls community development. "Market forces have no emotion but only a cold and calculating impetus. Market forces favor the affluent over the modest, and they favor large national chains over independent retailers."

Without mechanisms put in place to tame these forces, he concludes, economic development becomes the master, not the servant of community development.<sup>87</sup> In the process, architectural, historic, and social elements that have long defined the community—have provided it with an identity—become vulnerable. And people like Eva fall to the wayside. These are among the key issues facing residents of Silver Spring today.

Walking around the landscape of downtown Silver Spring, there are other signs of change that reflect the emphasis placed on economic, as opposed to community development. But frequently the results are ambiguous. For example, the Tastee Diner was relocated from its prime piece of real estate to a far less visible

location a few blocks away to make way for the expansive Discovery Communications headquarters, a major piece of economic development. One result of citizen protest was that Gene Wilkes, the diner's owner, received generous financial support for its relocation and a major expansion. In the process it arguably lost some of its character; the original diner structure now serves primarily as an entryway to a much larger restaurant. And even though it no longer functions as the third place it did when the counter was the main seating area, it is attracting more customers.



Fig. 66. Cameron Hills townhouses across from new Tastee Diner

The diner remains one of the most diverse public settings in downtown Silver Spring, a place where people of various races, nationalities, and ethnicities mingle. It has become a much more popular place for families and for women than historically it has been, and is a place that members of each of the three sets of people in this study choose to meet. "Stan," who campaigned against saving the Little Tavern, has over the years come to enjoy the Tastee for its service, food, and atmosphere. Jerry of

the Silver Spring Historical Society was especially fond of the diner in its former life on Georgia Avenue because it captured a "picture-perfect nostalgia." And Mary Ann Zimmerman notes that it has long been the place where civic-minded people meet to do business. Similarly, no one can deny that people are flocking to the new plaza, restaurants, and shops in the core. Downtown Silver Spring's core, especially, has a vitality that it has lacked for decades.

More contentious as these changes have occurred in the core, is City Place, a discount mall that opened in 1994 after Hecht's closed and which incorporates that structure into a larger one that borders Colesville Road, Fenton Avenue, and Ellsworth Drive. Within the boundaries of what is now being called "Downtown Silver Spring," prominently located City Place has been, in the minds of many, a problem or nuisance, marring the newly polished image of the CBD. One person I interviewed told me confidentially that AFI patrons have complained to management about people loitering on the corner of Colesville and Fenton outside of the mall. He pointed out that what are seen by those patrons as loiterers tend to be people of color, many of them in their teens, waiting for buses. Cindy, a mother of biracial teens who socialize at City Place, often in her presence, is incensed by the stigma that has been attached to this setting, a third place for local youth. Now, as the commercial landscape surrounding it changes, City Place has begun attracting more recognizable and upscale chain businesses, including Chipotles, Ben & Jerry's, Oodles Noodles, and Philips Sea Food.

Directly across from City Place on Colesville Road, the shop owners who have been trying to succeed in a challenging climate are left fending for themselves.

Many of these businesses have struggled for the past two or three decades and now are threatened with the possibility of rent increases that they will not be able to afford.

The newly redeveloped core is still alien to me. Therefore I find myself walking quickly through it, observing the many people enjoying themselves, but never desiring to join them. Being in such an environment I develop an urge to return to old, familiar haunts. In other words, I seek to escape this branded environment for something less sterile and corporate.

### *Heading to the Quarry*

Continuing my walk, I recognize that over time I am creating my own narrative about Silver Spring. It is based on when I arrived on the scene, my family's past, my geographic roots, what I value, what I have read, who I have encountered, what I have experienced, and how I use this space. I am also coming to see that part of this narrative is shaped by my own ongoing quest for "authentic" places, people, and experiences. While I am not one of those who came to Silver Spring seeking a "Mayberry," a quaint, bedroom suburb with neat little houses and shop owners who know everybody's name, I do like that people at my favorite coffee shops and diner recognize me, even if not necessarily by name. I like it when Abeba and Lene at Kefa grab a coffee cup to hand me as soon as they see me walk in the door, or when Eunice at the Tastee drops by my table to whisper some gossip or show me photos of her dog.



Fig. 67. Quarry House Tavern beneath Bombay Gaylord

Like Pelecanos, I also appreciate Silver Spring's grittier side, the juxtapositions of old and new, and the mix of cultures reflected in the shops that dot the commercial landscape. Sociologist Kevin Hetherington remarks that, "The disenchantment of the world...leads to a search for new forms of experience and identification often located around issues of identity within everyday life."<sup>88</sup> He cites "authenticity" and a sense of "belonging" as fundamental parts of this quest.<sup>89</sup> Recalling anthropologist Michael Agar's observation that ethnography may attract people who grew up in communities where they felt no personal involvement I realize that I may be seeking what others seek.<sup>90</sup> Namely, a place to identify with and an antidote to "non-places" that are coming to dominate the world.<sup>91</sup> It is a recurring theme in conversations with residents who have migrated from somewhere else and become actively involved in community affairs.

While pondering all of this, I consider which of Pelecanos's character Quinn's favorite places to lunch. In the past I would have eaten at the Tastee, but the

relocated diner is too far off my path. I choose instead between the Quarry House Tavern, a gathering place with deep roots in this community, one that retains its working-class feel, and Kefa, the Ethiopian family-owned cafe with an equally strong following, a spot where residents come to meet and work. Having begun my day with coffee at Kefa, I opt to continue my musings on this gray day at the Quarry House. Descending the long flight of stairs to the wood-paneled basement bar at Georgia and Bonifant, I see that part of me, like Quinn, is resistant to changes occurring in this and other commercial landscapes. Still another part of me, like geographer J.B. Jackson, appreciates that, "The beauty of a landscape comes from its having been part of the world; not from having been isolated and protected, but from having known various fortunes."<sup>92</sup>



Fig. 68 Entrance to the Quarry House

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Silver Spring Central Business District Sector Plan, Approved and Adopted* (Silver Spring, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1999), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Copping, interview by author, tape recording, College Park, MD, 11 February 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Jordan, "Collective Memory and Locality in Global Cities," in *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, ed. Linda Krause and Patrice Petro, (Piscataway, NJ: 2003), 31-2.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, January 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Audrey Singer, Samantha Friedman, Ivan Cheung, and Marie Preece, "The World in a Zip Code: Greater Washington, D.C. as a New Region of Immigration" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001); and demographics fact sheet prepared by IMPACT Silver Spring, 9 March 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Weber, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 15 July 1998.

<sup>7</sup> M-NCPPC, *Silver Spring Central Business District* (1999), 9.

<sup>8</sup> See Stuart M. Butler, "The Conceptual Evolution of Enterprise Zones," chapter in *Enterprise Zones: New Directions in Economic Development*, ed. Roy E. Green, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991), 27-40; Patrick G. Grasso and Scott B. Crosse, "Enterprise Zones: Maryland Case Study," chapter in *Enterprise Zones: New Directions in Economic Development*, ed. Roy E. Green, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991), 122-35; and Earl R. Jones, "Enterprise Zones for the Black Community—Promise or Product: A Case Study," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 11, no. 1 (1987): 1-7.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Allen Whitt, "Mozart in the Metropolis: The Arts Coalition and the Urban Growth Machine," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (September 1987): 15-36; and J. Allen Whitt and John C. Lammers, "The Art of Growth: Ties Between Development Organizations and the Performing Arts," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (March 1991): 376-93.

<sup>10</sup> George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications, 2004), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Darragh Johnson, "A Moving Story in Silver Spring: Decades-Old House Will Be Demolished If It Isn't Relocated," *Washington Post*, 18 March 2004, sec. ME, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, "Minimizing Small Business Displacement."

<sup>13</sup> Joyce Nalewajk, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 8 October 2002.

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<sup>14</sup> Joyce Nalewajk, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 10 October 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, <[http://www.mc-mncppc.org/silverspring/private\\_projects/lofts24.shtm](http://www.mc-mncppc.org/silverspring/private_projects/lofts24.shtm)> (5 March 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Eva Jianos, interview by author, field notes, Silver Spring, MD, 11 October 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Bonifant Street, like many streets in downtown Silver Spring, is named after the member of a prominent family, in this case, Washington Bonifant, whose family has been in the area since the 1700s. According to *Colesville* author Ned Baley, Washington Bonifant was one of two members of that family who were on the Union side during the Civil War. Baley also reports that during the occupation of Silver Spring by General Jubal A. Early's Confederate troops, soldiers ransacked Bonifant's home, but were too drunk to burn it down. History of Colesville, Marland, <<http://www.colesville.org/book/ch12.html>> (4 December 2005).

<sup>18</sup> M-NCPPC, "Silver Spring Central Business District," (1999), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>22</sup> Ochoa, "Assessment Report," 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>26</sup> George P. Pelecanos, *Soul Circus* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003), 49.

<sup>27</sup> George P. Pelecanos, *Hell to Pay* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 61-2.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Jaeggi, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 11 February 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Frankie Blackburn, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 5 August 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Cynthia Rubenstein, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 28 February 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, "Minimizing Small Business Displacement," 6. The authors cite "poor exchange of information as one of the major problems confronting small business owners in downtown Silver Spring. Businesses, the study found, are often unaware of the existence of programs that might help them, have misconceptions about the nature of county programs, of negative perceptions.

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- <sup>32</sup> Pelecanos, *Hell to Pay*, 104.
- <sup>33</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 1961), 68.
- <sup>34</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, 53.
- <sup>35</sup> M-NCPPC (1999), 50.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>38</sup> The Peterson Companies, "Demographic Update: 1995/2000, Silver Spring 3 Mi Ring," Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.
- <sup>39</sup> Manny Hidalgo, interview by author, tape recording, Takoma Park, MD, 28 January 2003.
- <sup>40</sup> Pelecanos, *Soul Circus*, 202.
- <sup>41</sup> Geoff Durham, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 30 May 2003.
- <sup>42</sup> Meredith Hooker, "Redevelopment Frontier Moves South," *Gazette*, 11 February 2004, sec. A, p. 14.
- <sup>43</sup> Meredith Hooker, "South Silver Spring Poised to Benefit from Building Boom," *Gazette*, 2 July 2003, sec. A, p. 8.
- <sup>44</sup> Pelecanos, *Right as Rain*, 35.
- <sup>45</sup> Samuel R. Delaney, *Times Square Red Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 173.
- <sup>46</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *Proposed Sector Plan for the Silver Spring Central Business District and Vicinity* (Silver Spring, Maryland: 1974), 39.
- <sup>47</sup> Amy Marcus, "What is Gateway?," *Silver Spring Voice*, July 2003, 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Neil Irwin, "Little Things Important to Silver Spring Development," *Washington Post*, 3 July 2003, sec. E, p. 1.
- <sup>49</sup> Matthew Mosk and Michael Cottman, "A Look at the Past, Present and Future: New Issues Arise On the Long Road to Revitalization," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2003, sec. ME, p. 18.
- <sup>50</sup> "Gramax Heliport Building Gains New Life as Residential Highrise," *Silver Spring Voice*, July 2004, 13.

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<sup>51</sup> Stan Smith (pseud.), interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 16 September 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Ruby Rubens, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 9 September 2003.

<sup>53</sup> George P. Pelecanos, *Hard Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 38.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Longstreth, conversation with author, field notes, Washington, DC, 27 February 2002.

<sup>56</sup> Jaeggi, interview, 11 February 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Rubenstein, interview, 28 February 2003.

<sup>58</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy Lewis, "Posh Izora Restaurant and Club a Tropical Paradise in Silver Spring," *Washington Post*, 23 October 2003, sec. ME, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Judy Reardon, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 11 November 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 23 January 2003.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Heffern, "When History Is Only Skin Deep: Is the Preservation of a Historic Building's Façade Really Preservation?," *Preservation Online*, 26 April 2002, <[www.nationaltrust.org/magazine/archives/arch\\_story/042602p.htm](http://www.nationaltrust.org/magazine/archives/arch_story/042602p.htm)> 13 December 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Annys Shin, "Wheaton Weighs Creation of Arts District," *Washington Post*, 27 May 2004, sec ME, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Meredith Narcum, "Building Clean, Well-Lighted Places: Coffee Shops Percolating Downtown," *Gazette*, 11 December 2002, sec. A, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, Perseus Group, 2002), 226.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 16 January 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Geoff Durham, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 26 February 2003.

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- <sup>69</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 117.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.
- <sup>71</sup> Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (1999), 36.
- <sup>72</sup> Benjamin Forgey, "Polished Silver Spring: AFI's Theater, Discovery Headquarters Signal Revival of Suburban Downtown," *Washington Post*, 5 September 2003, sec. C, p. 1;
- <sup>73</sup> Steve Twomy and Scott Wilson, "New Headquarters to Stand Out," *Washington Post*, 15 February 2000, sec. B, p. 7.
- <sup>74</sup> Mark Jenkins, "Revival Houses: The New Silver and Avalon Theaters Demonstrate Different Approaches to Cinema Revitalization," *Washington City Paper*, 21 March 2003, p. 35.
- <sup>75</sup> Richard Jaeggi, "Silver Spring's Development Dream: Confidence or Complacency?," *Takoma Voice*, December 2002, p. 11.
- <sup>76</sup> "Silver Spring Shopping Center Opens Today," *Washington Post*, 27 October 1938, sec. A, p 1.
- <sup>77</sup> Longstreth, "Silver Spring, Georgia Avenue," 251.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.
- <sup>79</sup> Walston, "Commercial Rise and Fall of Silver Spring," 335.
- <sup>80</sup> Jeremy Louis Korr, "Washington's Main Street: Consensus and Conflict on the Capital Beltway, 1952-2001" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2002), 501.
- <sup>81</sup> MRA International and The Richardson Group, "American Dream Market Verification Study Final Report," 22 December 1995, p. xi, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.
- <sup>82</sup> Neil Irwin, "For Urban Developers, A Hard Row to Hoe — Bethesda Row is a Hit, but Many Builders Say That for the Effort Required, They'll Stick with Strip Malls," *Washington Post*, 13 January 2003, sec. E, p. 1.
- <sup>83</sup> Judy Reardon, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 4 November 2002.
- <sup>84</sup> Richard Jaeggi, "Remembering the 'Working Stiff Olympics,'" *Silver Spring Voice*, June 2004, p. 10.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>86</sup> Richard Jaeggi, "Tending the Community Garden: IMPACT Silver Spring Hosts Community Meeting to Take Stock," *Silver Spring Voice*, July 2004, p. 11.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Kevin Hetherington, *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998), 69.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>90</sup> Agar, *Professional Stranger*, 55.

<sup>91</sup> See Marc Auge, *Non-Places*, trans. John Howe (NY: Verso, New Left Books, 1995).

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, "The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Study: An Introduction," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after J.B. Jackson*, ed. Paul Groth and Chris Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14.

CHAPTER 4:  
SILVER SPRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS'  
REMEMBERED AND IMAGINED PASTS

*Transforming My Third Place into a Research Site*

By the summer of 1999 I had become something of a regular at the old Tastee Diner, familiar to wait staff and a handful of the regular customers there. Before divulging to anyone that I was a doctoral student, there in part to scope out the setting as a possible site for dissertation research, I enjoyed showing up at various times of day, taking a seat at the counter. If business was slow, I might opt for a booth. The diner reminded me of favorite third places I had left behind in Minneapolis, hangouts like the CC Club, the Bryant-Lake Bowl, Sunny Side Up, and Matt's Bar. As with those places, I liked that the diner showed signs of wear, such as the duct-taped ceiling in the annex to the right of the dining car and the scratches in the wooden booths. I also appreciated that patrons were never hurried and that the staff was not programmed to treat customers in any standard way. Martha could be her gruff self, Eunice was free to stop and chat, and Ruth could be, well, Ruth.

Some customers appeared multiple times each day, among them a pair of elderly, identical twin brothers who would show up together like clockwork for breakfast and dinner. Constant companions, they would sometimes fight and were a frequent source of amusement and conversation. One has since died, but the other

continues patronizing the diner, a small portable television serving as a substitute for his twin. Also intriguing was a group of middle-aged men, mostly white, in various lines of work (construction, sales, auto repair) dubbed by veteran waitress Martha "the old crows." The "old crows," Mike, Dave, Gene, and their cohorts, would claim one of the booths for several hours daily on weekdays, usually beginning between 3:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon, and stay well into the evening.



Fig. 69. Eunice Ramsey with remaining twin brother at the new Tastee Diner

Recognizing with some disappointment that my relationship with the Tastee would never be the same once I revealed my academic interests, it dawned on me over time that I not only needed, but that I wanted, to begin interviewing folks. I had read about the history of the place but wished to know firsthand what this diner meant to its users, why it was that patrons seemed so attached to it, and how they thought the local landmark might be affected by revitalization. Therefore, with some frequency, I began appearing with tape recorder and questions in hand, inviting

people to speak with me. Over the course of those exchanges, and having done some archival research, my interests broadened. From concern with the diner and its fate because of revitalization, I became curious about ways that the process was altering downtown Silver Spring's "sense of place," and in how active residents perceived it to be affecting the aging inner-ring suburb's identity. Following lengthy interviews with customers Mike and Dave and waitresses Eunice and Vickie, one of the first people I knew I had to talk with was Jerry McCoy, president of the Silver Spring Historical Society (SSHS).

In this chapter, I will begin by recounting a piece of the first exchange I had with Jerry as a way of introducing issues that are of concern to him and members of his organization. Those most involved with this local historical society have a particular way of looking at the built environment, and it is through that lens that they view their community and what they think should be its priorities. I hope to convey some of the passion that Jerry and others express for the work that they do, and to reveal sources of their commitment, establishing reasons why this group has often found itself embroiled in conflicts with others in the community.

*"Picture Perfect Nostalgia": Meeting Jerry McCoy at the Tastee Diner*

Prior to our meeting, Jerry's name had come up multiple times in articles in the local press. From those accounts it was clear that he had a passion for local history and a particular fondness for the Tastee Diner and other places being threatened by revitalization plans. Early one August evening in 1999 I walked my familiar path up the hill between Colesville and Georgia on Wayne Avenue, past the notorious, hole-filled parking lot, to the corner where the diner then sat. Opening the

door, I was not quite sure what to expect, other than that I had pictured someone older, with white hair, soft-spoken but with lots to say. To my surprise, I discovered that Jerry was roughly my age and that we shared several frames of reference. Most notably, both of us are Midwest transplants (he from Loraine, Ohio, I from Minnesota), and both had decided to work on graduate degrees (his in library science at Catholic U., mine in American studies at the University of Maryland), years after having been part of the workforce. Over time I have also learned that Jerry's parents, like mine, do not share his interests in local history, historic preservation, or popular culture artifacts. This is something that is a source of bemusement and frustration to him.



Fig. 70. Jerry McCoy leading monthly Silver Spring walking tour

In my field notes, I observed that Jerry stood out from others who were at the diner that evening. He was wearing a black polo shirt and khaki pants, had neatly groomed hair, and wore metal-framed glasses. By contrast, one of the regulars I had

interviewed, also there, was wearing his usual white t-shirt and old jeans. He had not shaved recently and his gray hair was mussed. I jotted down that some, including my students at the time, might peg the other man as homeless, although in fact he works diligently in construction. At that stage in Tastee's history it seemed to me that he and the other "old crows," as well as the veteran waitresses constituted the diner's "core culture." This was predominantly a white, working-class culture, it seemed, although that had begun shifting as the staff became more diverse, and would shift even more in the diner's final year at its original location.

As opposed to the regulars, Jerry described his patronage as weekly at best and called himself a "booth person," opting for the privacy which booths afforded over the counter. Those choices, plus the fact that he often came with his wife, put Jerry on the margins. While some of the "old crows" also had spouses, they were never part of the diner scene. It was as likely that Mike's wife would ever appear there as it was that Norm's Vera would materialize at the bar on the popular television series "Cheers."

The other thing that struck me about Jerry was how loquacious and enthusiastic he was. "He's a huge booster of Silver Spring," I wrote in my field notes, "to the point of having a personalized license plate that reflects his passion." The license plate on his minivan reads: "SLVRSPG," and in our first interview, he told me, "...It's my mission in life to, I think, create pride in the community through teaching of its history."<sup>1</sup> I added: "Beyond all else, this (local history and historic preservation) seems to be what gives most meaning to his life. It's where he sees himself being able to leave a mark, through preserving buildings, and capturing the

city's history through photos and words, something that's in danger of disappearing otherwise." Jerry further distinguished himself from regular customers I had spoken with, all of whom were observant of what was going on in the built environment, but who had been more passive than he, tending to critique but not be publicly involved in the dialogue about revitalization. They were far less likely than Jerry to testify at public hearings, circulate petitions, or write letters-to-the-editor.

In part because as I have come to understand, local historical society members perceive themselves to be misunderstood by most in the larger community, they are pleased to meet with anyone who they think may share their passions or belief system, and/or be a supporter of their positions. As a result, Jerry proved to be immensely helpful to my research from the outset. And once I gained his trust, others were generous with their time and assistance as well, although it was clear with some more than others that there was a hint of skepticism, a reluctance to see me as an insider, a part of the core group. This skepticism grew as I opted against becoming a visible member of the organization, something that would have happened had I accepted invitations to testify on the SSHS's behalf at public hearings.

Shortly after introducing ourselves, Jerry handed me three items. The first was a 1947 article about Tastee Diner founder Eddie Warner, published in the trade publication *Diner*.<sup>2</sup> The second was the Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form for the Tastee Diner, featuring documentation of the building's history, ownership, and architectural details.<sup>3</sup> Finally, and perhaps most fascinating of all, he presented me with a copy of a photograph of the installation of the Art Deco/Moderne Jerry O'Mahoney diner in August of 1946. From the photograph I was

able to gain a more vivid sense than I had of what the surrounding commercial landscape of downtown Silver Spring looked like at that time. Mike, a Silver Spring native in his fifties, and Eunice who has waitressed at the diner since her teens, had both painted verbal portraits of the landscape for me. But this was the first such visual image I had seen.



Fig. 71. 1946 installation of the Tastee Diner (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)

That night, I discovered that conversations with Jerry and other historic preservationists tend to consume entire evenings. This was true of sessions with other civic activists, as well as with third place customers. One of the fundamental things I learned in our first exchange is that Jerry views historic preservation as a "sidebar" to his interest in teaching community history, and this would be a recurring theme in future conversations. "I think it took me several years to realize that probably people would better appreciate history if it could be something that they could relate to on a

local level. You know, it's hard enough to get people interested in the Civil War, World Wars I and II. But when you start talking about the neighborhood they live in and what that building across the street used to occupy and when it was built and who built it. I think that's more meaningful to them and their lives, especially to younger people."<sup>4</sup>

During the course of the evening, we discussed Jerry's decision to move to Silver Spring, various preservation battles he has fought, the revitalization plans that had been proposed, and the impact the chosen plan might have on small businesses and historic structures. But my exchanges with Jerry that night frequently returned to the setting we were in, the Tastee Diner, a community icon with a rich history. While not all of Silver Spring's preservationists might see it as such, the diner provides a prism through which the chapters of Silver Spring's history may be told. Mostly focused on social aspects of the place myself, I appreciated that a good deal of Jerry's interest was in the physical or material elements of the structure, the exterior design, and condition of its interior. The copy of the Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form that he shared with me offered a detailed description of the diner as a "classic example of commercial Art Deco/Moderne machine age architecture." Reading this allowed me to more fully understand what value the Tastee held for local historic preservationists, including Jerry. In that document, attention is devoted to materials, including the flat porcelain enamel and wraparound bands of stainless steel of the exterior and concave salmon and marbled white Formica panels of the interior ceiling, the earth-toned terrazzo floors, and the burgundy naugahyde stools. It also emphasizes how these materials contribute to

"machine-age imagery of modernity and cleanliness."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the diner is considered as a material artifact with no attention devoted to its use.

## In Suburban Washington . . .

Perseverance and stick-to-it-iveness make Eddie Warner's rise from dishwasher to dining car owner read like a "rag to riches" dime novel—but it took a lot of courage, sound management and the willingness to learn.



From his desk in the Bethesda, Maryland, Tastee Diner, Eddie Warner transacts the paper work incidental to running his four diners. However, he takes an active part in the management of each diner with daily personal contact.

The latest addition to the Tastee Diners is the Silver Springs attractive new diner, well lighted at night. The old diner is now located in nearby Rockland, under Warner ownership.

You don't figure to listen to a guy talk about his business for any length of time without getting bored. Maybe if a guy talked about his business you would get bored anyway. But when Eddie Warner gets wound up on our industry, you lose track of time and regret only that the conversation was too short.

No "big mouth," Eddie is sincerely wrapped up in the dining car business. He runs it, eats it, sleeps it and talks it. His sincere love for, and enjoyment of, his life's work is such that he should be called Mr. Diner instead of Mr. Warner.

When you realize that the guy came up the hard way, from a \$12.00 a week dishwasher to owner of four well-to-do-diners, you've got to listen to him.

### LUCK AND THE DINERMAN

Anybody who has been in the dining car business any length of time has heard talk about "luck" operators, the guys who fell into a good location and succeeded despite bad management and general lack of ability. Much of this talk is spiteful, stimulated by guys who are just getting by but a lot of it has some truth in it. Eddie Warner gives full credit to luck for its part in his success.

"I was forced into so many things that turned out right that I really feel I'm about the luckiest man alive," Eddie says in his half-Southern, half-New England accent. "Man, so many different times, if any one thing had gone wrong, I'da been back to washing dishes for the rest of my life."



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Better Operators Are DINER Readers

THE DINER

Fig. 72. Original proprietor Eddie Warner, *Diner Magazine* (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)

This focus on material over social aspects of the diner is evident in Jerry's photographs too. Rather than making people his subjects, Jerry's lens is prone to capture the fine details of the countertop or even the salt shakers and ketchup bottles on top of it. This contrasts fellow Tastee fan Sujewa Ekanayake who snapped hundreds of shots inside the old diner, but remained focused on patrons and staff.

One thing that surprised me during our first conversation is that Jerry hates the color scheme of the original Jerry O'Mahoney dining car. "I just don't like the pink Formica," he laughed. "As much I love Tastee. I just don't like the color." He also voiced displeasure with the duct tape, something that other people referred to with amusement. "It's all this damn ductwork up on the top of the building that's just awful looking. As a photographer I've tried to photograph this building numerous times for that picture perfect nostalgia. But that ductwork, there's nothing you can do with it."<sup>6</sup> The phrase "picture perfect nostalgia" is significant, illustrating Jerry's desire to find and capture nostalgic elements of the built environment. As we will see, this leads him to focus on some aspects of the community's history in his monthly columns and tours while filtering out others. He handed me one more gift. "This is for you. This is my Christmas card from 1996, during the blizzard of '96. We had that ten feet of snow and I woke up and thought, 'I'm gonna trudge through the snow and get a picture of Tastee because I knew I wanted to have this as a Christmas card some day.'"<sup>7</sup>

This image, sans the snow, captures the diner as I first knew it and as it appeared until shortly before its moving day when it was stripped of its maroon-and-white striped awnings.



Fig. 73. Tastee Diner after the blizzard (Courtesy Jerry A. McCoy)

One factor which may set Jerry and fellow SSHS members apart from the wider community is that most people are not what Fritz Steele calls "place people," one of three broad types that he describes in *The Sense of Place*. Steele distinguishes "place people" first from "things people," people who are primarily interested in the things they do, their work and other activities. "What they ["things people"] are doing is the most important determinant of whether they are feeling all right," writes Steele. A second category, "people people," by contrast, are most influenced by *whom* they are doing things with; relationships are of prime importance, and "their activities can be almost anything as long as their satisfactory relationships are not restricted." Finally, there are "place people." This category of people, according to the author, "find their most consistent satisfactions from the ways in which they relate to their immediate surroundings, through exploring, traveling, reshaping their settings, and so

on. For them, the *where* of their action is generally more interesting than what it is or with whom it happens."<sup>8</sup> Preservationists, as a group, generally fall within the third category. This place orientation shapes much of the local (Silver Spring) preservationist community's shared worldview, and as we shall see, is one major source of tension with others around them. For example, IMPACT Silver Spring participants appear to be mainly "people" or "things" people.

*"Tropical Fish and Used Books": Talking Preservation with Judy*

After our first meeting at Tastee, Jerry and I maintained intermittent communication, mainly over email. When something significant happened, like the relocation of the diner in the summer of 2000, we saw more of each other and resumed our conversations. Also, after I became a known presence to Jerry, and my research piqued his interest, he would, from time to time, invite me to participate in a local event. One such occasion was a celebration of downtown Silver Spring's official designation as an "arts district." It was there, at the Hilton, that I met a number of people, including Joyce and her husband Steve, Judy and Mary Reardon, and Marcie Stickle and George French. As they would learn of my interests that evening it seemed as though each would excitedly tap the shoulder of the person next to them saying, "Listen to this, his dissertation is on the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring," or, "Let him tell you what he's researching."

With each of these introductions the person or small group would suggest a list of people that "you have to talk to." As they did this they would add commentary, such as, "I don't trust him, because he went to work for the developers [or she supported the American Dream project], but [so and so] would be worth talking to

about the Lloyd Moore project. They were key players in that [or the American Dream]." In a few cases they identified an individual, such as Richard Striner, as having been helpful to their cause. And in some instances they were able to introduce me to someone like Joyce, who was present.

Months passed before I took any of these people up on their offers of assistance. When I did it was to SSS Vice President Judy Reardon who I turned. We arranged to meet at the Tastee Diner for dinner early one evening.



Fig. 74. Judy Reardon (Courtesy *Silver Spring Voice*)

Based on my archival research I had learned that Judy's role in preservation battles was prominent and spanned at least fifteen years, much longer than Jerry's. Files from former Montgomery County Council President Rose Crenca's office show that Judy was prone to writing letters and delivering testimony at public hearings in support of buildings that she felt passionate about or projects she opposed. Also, from talking with her at the Hilton I had sensed that she relished the role of activist more than Jerry did. While he enjoys teaching about local history, she immersed herself in fights to save the artifacts that lent Silver Spring a history that could be shared with residents. In a column paying tribute to Judy after her death in December 2004, Jerry recounted learning of Judy's priorities at the first meeting of what was to become the

Silver Spring Historical Society. "Her reasoning was crystal clear. So much of Silver Spring's history had been destroyed that it was paramount for a historical organization to fight to preserve the best of what remained."<sup>9</sup>

By her suggestion, my first meeting with Judy took place at the new Tastee Diner on Cameron early one evening in November 2002. Between bites of her hamburger and sips of beer, she explained what motivated her to remain involved in preservation fights, the origins of her political beliefs, and the multiple challenges she and her cohorts face given the pro-development climate of Silver Spring.

Judy, who worked for the U.S. Department of Justice as a writer and editor, lived in downtown Silver Spring for over twenty years. A Baltimore native, with Pennsylvania mining ancestral roots, she moved to Silver Spring from D.C. because she was attracted to the slower pace and smaller-scale of the inner-ring suburb. "When I first moved to Silver Spring in 1982 I loved walking around seeing all these little secondhand stores. And I remember there was this one store, it might have been on Bonifant. They sold tropical fish and used books! I mean, where in the world are you going to find that?" Having businesses like that that were "little odd places that you couldn't find anywhere else," was important to Judy, who listed Vinyl Ink and Roadhouse Oldies as other examples of quirky one-of-a-kind Silver Spring places. Summarizing what she liked about the commercial landscape of downtown Silver Spring in the early 1980s she told me that "it was still kind of not chic, you know, it was still kind of not Bethesda."<sup>10</sup>

It was only four years after Judy moved to Silver Spring that developer Lloyd Moore put forth a redevelopment proposal that she and others feared would destroy

much of "the fabric" of downtown Silver Spring. "December 12, 1986," she said, "he [Moore] announced his plan. I'd never heard of him before. He was a developer of office buildings and he just announced his plan and everybody jumped on it. He was going to be the white knight." She recalled that the initial plan called for the construction of ten office towers. That these buildings, the shopping mall, and other pieces forming the "Silver Triangle" would result in the demolition of historic Art Deco structures was the rallying point for preservationists to come together. The formation of "Citizens to Preserve Old Silver Spring," which evolved into the Silver Spring Takoma Traffic Coalition, was what launched an "anti-big growth movement" in the community, Judy told me.<sup>11</sup>

While the likely loss of the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theater were the driving force of the burgeoning movement, participants quickly learned the importance of being strategic by appealing to residents on other grounds. "Well, the first opposition was obviously to the destruction of the shopping center and theater," Judy explained, but, she added, "nobody gave a damn about that." She continued: "It was outrageous what this man was proposing, but people wanted something." As a result of what seemed an overwhelming, growing public desire for change, appeals made by academics, allies of the preservationist cause, were not well received. Judy recounted a painful evening when Longstreth of George Washington University presented a slide show on the history of the shopping center. "This was before we'd brought the traffic issue in and people just about laughed us out of the room." At the same time, Richard Striner, a professor at Washington College and President of the Art Deco Society of Washington, was trying to appeal to residents by asking them to

join the campaign for a Silver Spring "where you'll be able to remember Fred and Ginger." Because "people weren't listening to that," Judy said it became clear that another approach was needed. "Somebody said 'traffic' and just like that, we realized that that was something that would resonate with people."<sup>12</sup>

Efforts that began in 1986 continued until Judy's death in 2004 and were driven by three main sources, one having to do with control, a second with history, and the third with aesthetics. On the issue of control, she explained:

I began to realize that preservation is not just about saving old buildings for the sake of saving old buildings. It's about who's going to have control over the community, who's going to say what shape the community takes. Should it be a developer, who's motivated by the bottom line? Or should it be the people who live in the community?<sup>13</sup>

She added, "I don't want a developer to dictate to me what my community should be like. I think the conflict comes in because one of the major values in this society is private property, so that if a building is owned by someone, is a private entity, they can do with it what they want." This fits with other observations Judy was to make about global capitalism and where power rests in the community. There is no mechanism in place, she said, to protect many of the buildings and businesses that contribute to the fabric of the community from the forces of global capitalism. "Silver Spring had its uniqueness. You're stripping that away because of global capitalism." And because those who are elected to political office are recipients of major support from developers it is difficult for those on the margins who do not subscribe to a "pro-growth" philosophy, to exert influence. However frustrating this situation may be, a handful of Silver Spring residents have continued making the effort to resist calls for growth<sup>14</sup>

A second reason that Judy and others have fought diligently to save portions of the built environment has to do with history. In their view, history is manifested in the buildings that surround people, in the places they live, work, and visit. These buildings do not have to be architectural masterpieces, nor do they have to commemorate momentous historic events. Instead, the structures that preservationists attempt to save in settings like downtown Silver Spring need to convey something of the everyday life of the community as it has unfolded over time. "When you take away the physical structures of a community," Judy told me, "you are taking away people's history. They will have nothing, or at least they will have less, to define themselves by."<sup>15</sup>

After a local business owner who closed a downtown bowling alley begged to differ with those who contended that his business had "historic" value, Jerry was prompted to post this statement from an article featured on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's web site:

#### Why Preserve? What Does "Historic" Mean, Anyway?

Let's face it: The label "historic" gets applied to so many different kinds of places — from ancient ruins and Gothic cathedrals to World War II battlefields and Art Deco skyscrapers — that it's sometimes hard to figure out exactly what it means.

What is it that makes a place "historic"? And who decides what's "historic" and what isn't?

After citing various reasons for preserving, including aesthetics and use, the writer concluded:

Finally, some places are worth saving because they link us with our past and help us understand who we are. Places like Gettysburg, the Alamo and Independence Hall tell America's story, and we'd never allow them to be destroyed. But places that tell your story are worth saving too: the house

where your grandparents lived, the school you attended, the movie theatre where you had your first date, the church where you were married.<sup>16</sup>

A third factor that motivated Judy to remain active in the movement, she said, was aesthetic, noting that aesthetics were linked to control over the environment, global capitalism, local history, and "sense of place" issues. Using the Tastee Diner as an example of something unique to Silver Spring, something that, "gives this community a sense of place, something to be proud of, and something for people to want to fight for," she proceeded to say:

You don't want every building to look like it was designed by Philip Johnson, or god help us, Frank Gehry, or who's the other one? Mies van der Rohe.... You don't want all your communities to look alike and there's a real danger of that. I think the danger of that is showing in the redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring now. You walk downtown and that could be Any Place, U.S.A. There's nothing that says, 'this is Silver Spring.' ... You lose that sense of identity.<sup>17</sup>

### *"You really have to pick your battles": Deciding on Standards*

In part because historic preservationists are known for fighting to preserve everyday structures, those in the community who do not share their values frequently view them as "zealots," intent on "saving everything." Judy countered that impression, first by acknowledging that fighting to save everything was not feasible. Nor, she said, would attempting to do so be a wise strategy on the part of preservationists, who are aware that theirs is a minority position. "You really have to pick your battles. You know you're spread so thinly. You can't save everything." Especially within a political environment that is not known for being preservation friendly, there are only so many "battles" that might be won. "If you antagonize the powers that be and say, 'I want that saved,' 'I want that saved,' 'I want that saved,' you're 'going to the well' too many times."<sup>18</sup> This is a source of internal tension

among the core group of local preservationists because at least one of the organization's most active and vocal members projects the message, in testimonies at public hearings and to the local press, that everything should be saved.

While it may seem otherwise to SSHS's detractors, Nancy Urban noted during a conversation at the train station, that: "Not everything old is important to us. Some [members] have a 'knee-jerk,' what I call a knee-jerk reaction to preservation. Anything old, they want to save. And they waste their energy and influence trying to save everything."<sup>19</sup> Nancy, who moved to Silver Spring in 1991, was active in the Woodside Civic Association, the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee, Friends of the Silver Spring Library, Montgomery Preservation, Inc., and the Silver Spring Historical Society. (Since this study was completed, she and her husband have moved to Florida.) She said that some friction persists between SSHS members like her—who recognize that unless a structure meets established criteria, the organization will not have a strong case to stand on—and those who wish to fight for everything.

To illustrate that preservationists as a whole do take a rational approach, Judy explained to me that the Silver Spring group is generally guided by criteria established in the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Ordinance. This means that historic preservationists must have solid ground on which to base a case to planners and the public if they want their efforts to succeed. Nancy points to similar criteria established by the National Historic Trust Fund as the foundational guideposts. In either case, there exists a rationale for what they do, which is something that outsiders to the preservationist cause might be surprised to learn.

Judy explained that from county and national preservation sources there are four main categories of criteria which SSHS members consider. "The prominence of the architect, that's one. And one of them has to do with whether or not the building is a familiar feature of the community; the cut-off point is usually fifty years. [Another is] the distinctiveness of the design. And [a fourth is] how it fits in with the economic or social or cultural history of the community."<sup>20</sup>

Within such broad parameters, it may seem that a case could be made for the preservation of nearly any structure, provided it has aged fifty years, although even that is not always held as a strict rule. However, what I discovered through interviews and attendance at public hearings is that there are hierarchies of value and that some elements of the built environment stand a better chance of being widely appreciated and receiving protection than others. The train station, for example, received nearly unanimous support from all quarters, according to Mary Reardon.

Given the breadth of criteria Judy had described, I wondered aloud whether the popular third place the Quarry House—which appeared on lists of several people I interviewed as a "sacred structure"—would qualify for designation as an "historic site." It may not be associated with a prominent architect or have a distinctive design, but it is a familiar feature of the community, over fifty-years-old, and has arguably played an important role in the social history of Silver Spring. A post-Prohibition working-class watering hole, its survival, like Tastee's, had been threatened once. As with the diner the community rallied successfully to save it. More recently its future has come into doubt because of a county-wide smoking ban that prohibits smoking in all public places, including restaurants and bars. (In November 2005 the owner of

Jackie's restaurant purchased it.)<sup>21</sup> However, Judy laughed when I asked the question about it meriting preservation. "There's no building," she exclaimed. "There's nothing!...It doesn't have an outside [it's below street level]. You have to have an outside. There's no bricks and mortar. What would be saved?"<sup>22</sup>

On another occasion, and in a similar vein, her sister Mary agreed with me that the Half Moon is a good place for food and music, but added: "it has no character." This comment surprised me, because from the vantage point of several people I had spoken with, the Half Moon is bursting with character, emanating mainly from the mix of people, the music, and regional food. From the perspective of local preservationists, however, it clearly does not have *architectural* character, as much as they enjoy it and see it contributing to local culture. A persistent challenge to SSHS members' work is that residents not sharing their worldview are prone to care most deeply about places like the Kefa Café and Negril Bakery because of how those settings fit into their daily lives, not as buildings, but as social gathering places. Both the Tastee and the Quarry House have survived in part because large numbers of citizens and patrons cared deeply enough about them to take up the fight when they were threatened.

*"People Come and Go...": Mary Reardon and Her Passion for Buildings*

Mary Reardon, who has also been an active SSHS member from its inception, was someone else I was to have multiple conversations with. Long after our initial meeting at the Hilton and some months after my exchanges began with Judy, we sat down to talk at several places that she suggested: the new Caribou Coffee, the Half Moon, and the Quarry House.

During our first conversation in June 2003, Mary, a public affairs specialist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, described what she tells skeptics or critics of historic preservation. It is a "quality of life issue," she says. "It's something you can't put a price on....If you're going to have pride in your community, you have to be able to recognize the community." Maintaining that pride becomes increasingly difficult the more the built environment is decimated. "If you destroy everything, then there's no uniqueness at all."<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 75. Mary Reardon with Wayne Goldstein

In a statement that echoes what others in the organization express, but is at odds with how many activists think, Mary adds: "People come and go. The community is the physical buildings, and if you lose them, then you're going to lose

the community's identity." Like Judy and most of the people I spoke with—members and non-members of the Silver Spring Historical Society alike—Mary points to the new buildings in the core as symptomatic of the problem. "They look like anything you would have in any suburb. There is nothing unique about them." By contrast, she describes Silver Spring as she first knew it, after moving there in 1987, this way: "You could walk around Silver Spring, you know, twenty years ago, and find really unique buildings."<sup>24</sup>

And yet, Mary is aware from years of experience, that not everyone will be persuaded by arguments about "sense of place," aesthetics, or scale, and that the forces she and the SSHS continue to fight against are powerful. "We're not going to be able to win against development pressures and money interests, now that we have 'the new Silver Spring.'" And rallying other citizens remains difficult. "I think preservation is one of the hardest things to do because it's not like, if you're fighting for affordable housing...or if you're fighting for civil rights...but preservation? It's not always easy to convince people that's going to help everybody."<sup>25</sup> This is especially true, as Judy Reardon pointed out, when there is so much suffering going on in the world. "We're fortunate that we don't have to deal with some of the issues that people in Bosnia and Chechnya have to deal with. I have to admit that hacking people's limbs off in Rwanda is a more pressing problem, but you know, I live right here."<sup>26</sup>

Mary also observes that larger social trends show that public space is becoming less and less a central part of North Americans' daily lives, meaning that when it is threatened there tends to be little response. "Americans are really homey

people. They want, well, the idea of having a bigger and bigger house so you have more and more private space. They care about that. They care about their own block, they care about the neighborhood, but beyond that, people just don't care." She notes that after a building is demolished the average U.S. citizen may say, "'that's a shame,' but they don't do anything to prevent it." This is different from what she has observed in European countries. "It's unthinkable to just tear a building down. Here, people just buy into the economic development argument. 'If we don't redevelop, you're just going to get a slum.'"<sup>27</sup>

Sharing her sister's background in European history, Mary proceeds to tell me about Harvey Goldberg, an influential professor of hers at the University of Wisconsin in the 1970s. At a time when downtown Madison was undergoing redevelopment, Goldberg drew comparisons between what was happening in Paris with the construction of Pompidou Center and the mall on Madison's State Street. "He said, 'When you destroy the buildings where people live and work, you rob them of their past.'"<sup>28</sup>

For the most part, Mary, like her late sister and Jerry, sees little to point to as positive in downtown Silver Spring today. "It's really depressing. You have to fight every step of the way so that the worst thing doesn't happen." And whereas others talk about Silver Spring "coming back," Mary counters, "It's not coming back. It's becoming something totally different, like a new suburb. I don't want to live in a new suburb." Instead she reflects back again on the downtown she once knew, back in the mid- to late-1980s. "It really was nice," she says, before a nondescript office tower replaced the townhouses on Wayne Avenue. "The Tastee Diner was there where it

belonged."<sup>29</sup> Based on these experiences, Mary has concluded that, "Not enough people care about their surroundings. As long as they're convenient, and neat, and clean," little else matters.

Rarely, according to Mary, does there exist consensus in Silver Spring that a building is so central to the community's history that it must be saved. More common are the divisions that formed over the shopping center, theater, Armory, and Canada Dry bottling plant. An exception was the train station's restoration, which in her eyes was a rare unifying event. Following the divisiveness wrought by Triple Five's ill-fated American Dream proposal, she says, "the train station came up, preservation of the train station, and then people came together." People who identified as "slow growth" proponents and/or as preservationists found that they were receiving support from others who were mainly part of the "pro-growth" camp.<sup>30</sup> Another key example of people coming together to preserve a local landmark occurred when the Tastee Diner was threatened.

### *Social vs. Historic Preservation, the Case of the Tastee Diner Battle*

Preservationists I spoke with still express astonishment over the energy that diner patrons, employees, and residents exerted to save the once endangered diner. The packed council meeting halls and public hearings, described in February 1987 editions of the *Montgomery Journal* and *Washington Post*, were nearly unprecedented. To accommodate all who wanted to testify, the *Journal* reported, the Planning Board expanded the hearing to two nights. The *Post's* reporter observed: "The most emotional point in the hearing came when Tastee Diner waitress Eva May Tomack spoke. Wearing her blue T-shirt, emblazoned with 'Save Our Diner,' Tomack

gave the board petitions bearing 9,000 signatures calling for the preservation of the diner, a long-time Silver Spring landmark eatery."<sup>31</sup> Never before or since have so many residents of the community come forward to speak in support of preserving a building.

This is an enviable position for a group whose members often voice frustration over having such a small pool of representatives to draw from when they need people to testify at public hearings or be quoted in the local press. Here are some samples of emails conveying that sense of frustration: "Judy is right...it is the SAME people always stepping into these forays and makes the SSHS look like it has no support outside of the people reading this email." And, "Bruce, Hi! We, Jerry, Mary, George & I, are hoping that you can read a one-page completely uncontroversial yet important statement before the HPC, Wed., at 7:30 p.m. on Heritage Tourism....It would be great to have a/your, fresh voice present our SSHS testimony, thanks!!!! the rest of us are just 'same old, same old'!"<sup>32</sup>

SSHS members admit that the impassioned citizen response to the diner's possible demise had less to do with its architectural or aesthetic qualities than it did with the *social* function it played in many people's everyday lives. The local media framed the story around quotes and passages like these:

Said [Bill] Morrison [identified as age 36, a resident of Silver Spring, who practiced criminal law in Washington, D.C.]: 'This is a piece of American popular culture....It's an artifact, but to look at it from that narrow perspective is to destroy its humanity. This shouldn't be perceived as a museum but as a social and communal gathering spot....There are street people, professional people, Redskins fans and Cowboy fans. If it closes, it will be like a close friend dies. I will suffer a loss.'<sup>33</sup>

While testimony on the theater centered around architecture and history, support for the Tastee Diner, which has served residents since 1946, was of a much more personal level.

Anita Morrison, representing the diner's owner, Gene Wilkes, said that the importance of the diner's architectural significance runs a distant second to its significance to the community.

'While office buildings provide important jobs and shopping centers may meet our retail needs, it's places like the Tastee Diner that give a community its soul,' Morrison told [the county's Historic Preservation Commission's] board members.<sup>34</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed in letters to the Montgomery County Planning Board. Nora Tocus, in December 1986 ended her letter with: "Nothing about the Tastee diner seems fancy, or franchised, or fake. It is wonderful because it is real. Please save it for us."<sup>35</sup>

Judy Reardon also communicated her concerns to the Montgomery County Planning Board on several occasions, although these excerpts from one missive display key differences in how historic preservationists perceived and described the Tastee's significance:

Diners are archetypically American institutions—they are found nowhere else in the world....The generation of the 'streamliners' started in the 1930s and continued for about 25 years. The term refers to the use of parallel horizontal lines or stripes, curves, and rounded corners—design elements that convey the feeling of forward motion....Built in 1946, Silver Spring's Tastee Diner has been called a 'splendid representation' of the streamline design by Art Deco historian Richard Striner. It features parallel lines, sweeping forms, and wrap-around corners both inside and out. The door handle, with its teardrop shape, is very typical of the streamline design....The Tastee Diner is part of the fabric of Montgomery County history. It dates back to the period when the county began to take the shape it has today.....<sup>36</sup>

Here, again, emphasis is placed on a structure's architectural qualities and its significance as an historic artifact, without mention of how it holds continuing value in people's everyday lives and the social life of the community.

For those historic preservationists who lived outside of Silver Spring and who had not integrated use of the diner into their everyday lives its value was less evident. In a conversation with Richard Longstreth, the prominent historian of commercial architecture and member of the Art Deco Society of Washington, it was obvious that he did not think that the diner merited placement in the same category as Silver Spring's other Art Deco buildings. Among other things, it was mass-produced by a company in another state. This put it in marked contrast to the theater and shopping center, which were designed specifically for the site by prominent architect John Ebersson. For another, diners, at least in some parts of the country are a dime a dozen and were produced for over seventy years before the Tastee was installed at the corner of Georgia and Wayne. By contrast, the 1938 Silver Spring Shopping Center was a first of its kind in the region, a revolutionary regional strip mall, designed for people shopping by car.

Joyce Nalewajk, once a very active SSHS member, also has a difficult time talking about the diner, knowing that other buildings, which in her view possessed greater historic and architectural value, were lost. "For me to see how that [the diner] got preserved and the Armory got demolished," her voice trails off. "What I don't understand is the County, Montgomery County, highly educated community and the people in government are highly educated. Why have they done things stupidly for so long in Silver Spring?" As Joyce points out, the diner could be and was easily moved. "The only reason that was saved was to placate the preservation cause," she tells me, "to say that you did something as a developer, as a county, for preservation." From Joyce's perspective, the social uses of buildings, including the businesses they house,

are of little importance in the big picture. Echoing Mary Reardon's statement she tells me, "Businesses come and go. The only thing that remains is the built environment."<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to Longstreth and Joyce, both of whom view buildings from the more detached perspective of formally trained architectural historians, those preservationists who patronize the diner, including Jerry, Mary, Judy, and Nancy are apt to honor its value in the everyday life of the community. "Everybody wanted to save the diner," remembered Judy. "And it wasn't because of preservation issues either. I don't think that was the paramount thing. Even for me it wasn't the paramount thing." Sitting at the Tastee at our first meeting, she explained: "You save your diner because it's the only diner we've got. It's such an institution in the community." Some of the letters that were written and testimonies delivered were incredibly "heart-wrenching" she recalled. "You just want to cry when you read them," she said.<sup>38</sup>

During our first meeting, Jerry, who has been quoted in local media many times over the years about his affection for the Tastee, eloquently displayed his appreciation for the role the diner has played in the community's history:

You know they have all these faux diners now that are popping up. Yeah, they look great, but they're not the real thing. They don't have fifty years of grime and grease.

I look at the steps when you come into the Tastee, how it's worn off, and that just amazes me. I mean that's half a century of people coming into this building, twenty-four hours a day. And, I kind of feel bad that there's no way to replicate that wear and tear when they move it over to Cameron and Ramsey. But it's better than the alternative, which is, you know, the Armory.<sup>39</sup>

Later, after the diner was moved in June 2000, Jerry was quoted in the *Silver Spring Gazette* saying that he hoped that residents and their children would remember the

diner's old location and appearance. "I'm glad that kids are here to witness this,' McCoy said Saturday. 'They'll remember this for the rest of their lives.'"<sup>40</sup>

While lacking the architectural or historic distinction of, for example, the shopping center, the Tastee serves as and possesses the traits of what Randy Hester calls a "sacred structure." Through his work in Manteo, North Carolina, a town undergoing redevelopment, the landscape architect discovered that the structures most important to residents are rarely the ones that experts, including historians, architects, and scholars in other fields identify as worthy of preservation. He came to define "sacred structures" as "places...that exemplify, typify, reinforce, and perhaps even extol the everyday life patterns and special rituals of community places, places that have become so essential to the lives of the residents through use or symbolism that the community collectively identifies with the places."<sup>41</sup>

These are the types of hole-in-the-wall places that appeal to Richard Jaeggi, who like Jerry, writes a monthly column for the *Silver Spring Voice*, and his friend Jim Hinshelwood. Assessing the appeal of the Half Moon Barbecue, one of his favorite third places, Jim told me, "It's not the space, because it's just a storefront, but it's partly what [owner] Mark did with it. It's partly the props. You can't downplay the props. That's part of what puts people in the mood. But then it brings in a certain crowd of people that know it's going to be comfortable, know it's going to be fun, and then it's a successful third place."

The Tastee, Quarry House, Half Moon, and many of the ethnic restaurants that dot downtown Silver Spring's commercial landscape, are, to quote Hester, the kind of "humble places, 'holes-in-the-wall,' that were the settings for the community's daily

routine" in Manteo. In Hester's words, they are, "familiar, homey, and homely." Vitally important to residents, Hester writes that Manteo's "sacred structures" "...were almost universally unappealing to the trained professional eyes of an architect, historian, real estate developer, or upper middle-class tourist."<sup>42</sup> If not for his role as community designer—through which he helped draft and facilitate a survey to identify residents' often unconscious attachments to place—most of these ordinary, everyday places in Manteo would have remained unprotected as redevelopment unfolded.

Differences in values and perspectives between those engaged in discussions and actions affecting the built environment and those who use it on a regular basis are something that Catherine Bishir, author of "Yuppies, Bubbas, and the Politics of Culture," recognizes as a real problem that preservationists must confront. "As participants in the politics of culture," she writes, "we as preservationists or scholars need to be aware of the impact of our own value systems on the decisions we make."<sup>43</sup> This is something that has shifted in the field in recent years, as Johnston, the Getty Report, the Burra Charter, and numerous other sources reveal.

If a survey similar to the one that Hester carried out were to be undertaken in downtown Silver Spring, it would show that structures deemed sacred by local preservationists are not always the same ones that other residents would name. In my interviews, preservationists typically named places that they had fought to save, including the demolished Armory, the train station, Canada Dry bottling plant, and Falklands garden apartment complex as "sacred" to them. By contrast, those outside the preservation community highlighted places where they met with others on a

regular basis and had formed relationships with owners and staff, including the Quarry House, Thai Derm, Kefa Café, Negril Bakery, and Half Moon Barbecue. Knowledge of values-based historic preservation work could assist Silver Spring's preservationists in advocating for third places and other sites that have meaning in people's everyday lives. From this foundation the numbers drawn to their cause might expand. This could result in diversifying the group and putting a different public face on it, beginning with who might testify at public hearings.

### *Newcomers and the Urge to Preserve*

The Silver Spring Historical Society members I interviewed, like most of the civic activists I spoke with, had moved to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area from someplace else. This may explain some gaps in their knowledge that will be explored in the next chapter, particularly of the racial history of the community. That so many are transplants is contrary to what I would have expected. After all, why would residents of a largely transient area, with fairly shallow roots themselves, choose to devote so much of their time and energy to local issues? Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, has found that this is a common phenomenon. He explains that those who belong to the class he researched—that estimated thirty percent of the workforce who use creativity as a major part of their profession—often become the most active members of the communities they move into. "Many Creative Class people I've studied...express a desire to be involved in their communities. This is not so much the result of a 'do-good' mentality, but reflects their desire to both actively establish their own identity in places, and also to contribute to actively building places that reflect and validate their identity."<sup>44</sup>

Those who comprise the active core of SSHS, mainly baby boomers, fall squarely within the category of the "Creative Class," professionally and in terms of core values. Jerry's background, as noted, is as a photographer, librarian, and archivist. Judy Reardon held a doctorate in history and worked for the Department of Justice as a writer and editor. Her sister, Mary, is a Public Affairs Specialist for the Department of Agriculture with a background in history. Joyce's training is as an art historian with a Master's of Arts Degree from Brown. Prior to joining her husband Steve at Cunieform and Wayside Records, she worked for the Library of Congress in Prints and Photographs and as a liaison to the National Park Service working with their collection. Nancy Urban has a degree in music. Marcie Stickel, another key preservationist, is an editorial assistant at the Bureau of National Affairs. Of the most active members, all but Marcie and her husband George French have moved to Silver Spring from other cities and states. As a graduate student, living in Takoma Park, surrounded by writers and artists, I myself share many of the traits identified by Florida.

During our first meeting, one of the subjects I pursued with Loraine, Ohio native Jerry was what led to his decision to move to Silver Spring. Jerry described for me how he had begrudgingly complied with his wife's wishes to leave their Adams Morgan apartment behind and search for an area where they could afford to purchase a home. "I loved that address," he said. "You know, Washington, D.C." With the goal of duplicating what he had in Adams Morgan—to be able to walk to the Metro, a grocery store, and restaurants, and to have "a sort of semi-urban environment"—Jerry did his research and found that downtown Silver Spring "fit the bill." In our initial

conversation, he recounted telling the realtor that Silver Spring was where he and Nan wanted to look. "She was like, 'you're kidding!' I mean, then as now, Silver Spring was sort of a stepchild in Montgomery County."<sup>45</sup>

While many residents in 1993 perceived the central business district to be in an extended state of decline, desperately in need of repair, Jerry was charmed. On a monthly walking tour in June 2004—this one in conjunction with Montgomery County History Days—Jerry reminisced to about ten participants that there were three things he had always hoped to find in a community: a working train station, a post office mural, and a 24-hour diner. And Silver Spring had them all. Even in 2004, after all that he has endured as president of the SSHS, he says that he cannot imagine living anywhere else. From his perspective, Silver Spring has something of the character of a small town, but is still near Washington, D.C. "It's like the best of both worlds. I like the analogy that I've used of downtown Silver Spring as Mayberry. And I hope it doesn't lose that, that it's not just going to become homogeneous and lose all of its character and everyone's going to be a total stranger to everyone else."<sup>46</sup> In our earlier taped exchange, Jerry had told me that this mix of urban and small town was something that always struck him as appealing. "That always amazed me, right when I first moved here, because even though it feels very urban...you know the shopkeepers and they know you when you come in."<sup>47</sup>

Jerry makes a distinction between his self-identification as a Silver Spring resident and his lack of connection to Maryland. The owner of the minivan with personalized license plates reading "SLVRSPG" confesses: "I don't think of myself as a Marylander yet, which kind of amuses me. Silver Springer, yes, but like to me

nothing really exists beyond—I mean to me, Rockville is the end of the Earth." And in his mind, only a limited portion of the sprawling suburb is truly Silver Spring. "To me, Silver Spring ends at Cedar, right where the Park & Planning building is, there's that little park. That to me is the end of Silver Spring." He also admits to having initially been drawn more to neighboring Takoma Park than he was to Silver Spring. "We wanted to live in Takoma Park, but we couldn't afford Takoma Park," he laughs. "I mean, when I was dragged, kicking and screaming from Washington, I said, 'well, fine, so we're going to live in a bungalow.' Because I love bungalow architecture, arts-and-crafts...." As for his attraction to neighboring first-ring suburb Takoma Park, he says: "They have everything that I think we here in Silver Spring wish we had in terms of little cutesy stores, no chains...."<sup>48</sup>

Florida has found that historic preservation is one of the aspects of communities most highly valued by the Creative Class, and that it goes hand in hand with a more general distaste for homogeneous environments. Places that this class seeks when moving, he says, are valued for their "authenticity" and "uniqueness":

Authenticity comes from several aspects of a community—historic buildings, established neighborhoods, a unique music scene or specific cultural attributes. It comes from the mix—from urban grit alongside renovated buildings, from the commingling of young and old, long-time neighborhood characters and yuppies, fashion models and 'bag ladies.'

People in my interviews and focus groups often define 'authenticity' as the opposite of generic. They equate authentic with being 'real,' as in a place that has real buildings, real people, real history. An authentic place also offers unique and original experiences. Thus a place full of chain stores, chain restaurants and nightclubs is not authentic: Not only do these venues look pretty much the same everywhere, they offer the same experience you could have anywhere.<sup>49</sup>

Local preservationists, like nearly everyone I spoke with, said that they had chosen Silver Spring over newer outlying suburbs because of some combination of those qualities.

Over the course of Jerry's first ten years as a resident, the train station would be smashed into by a car—at which point it would be slated for demolition, a decision that was reversed—and the diner would be moved and morphed into something else. A number of other events have occurred, including the demolition of the Armory and more recently the removal of a Little Tavern hamburger stand. All of these actions, in Jerry's view, have chipped away at the fabric of the built environment and been sources of heartache.



Fig. 76. Wayne Avenue parking garage, former Armory site

In our first interview, Jerry told me that it was not too long after moving to Thayer Avenue that he found himself testifying before the County Council in support of the Tastee Diner. "Within three months, in the March of '93, I was testifying before the Montgomery County Council to save this [the diner] because they'd been trying to

tear it down since '87." He describes being able to "breathe a sigh of relief after '94 because I knew it [the diner] couldn't be torn down after being listed on the [Locational] Atlas" as a Montgomery County Historic Landmark. But then, four years later, the fate of the Armory, which had also been listed, taught him that no building was safe in the face of massive redevelopment. It was around that same time (1997) that a car careened across Georgia Avenue, crashing into the waiting room of the train station, which at the time served as the MARC commuter train depot. Because of the extensive damage, the station closed and owner CSX Railroad talked about tearing it down. Jerry remains suspicious about that occurrence, wondering whether it truly was an accident. And for this, he claims, he had good reason.<sup>50</sup>

In 1984, the owner of the Silver Theater began destroying its Art Deco façade, after learning that the County's Historic Preservation Commission would be meeting the following week to consider whether the theater, adjacent shopping center, and other shops on Colesville Road merited special historic designation. This designation would protect the structures from destruction, something that was being sought to pave the way for high-rise buildings being proposed by developer Lloyd Moore. When workers were discovered dismantling the Silver Theater's large tower, a chimney, and decorative glass trim, Richard Striner, president of the Art Deco Society of Washington and ADSW members, took action, after severe damage to the building had already been done. According to an article in *The Prince George's Journal*:

[ADSW president Richard] Striner said the theater owners, the K-B chain, are attempting to 'leave the theater as bland and undistinguished a remnant as they possibly can by the time of the [Sept. 6 preservation] hearing.'

'This is one of the most disgraceful, apparently deliberate acts of cultural vandalism that I've seen in Washington in 10 years,' he said.<sup>51</sup>

Striner's organization and other interested parties succeeded in getting Montgomery County to revoke the theater's renovation permit. Finding the train station similarly threatened, Jerry says, "I would have chained myself in front of a bulldozer for that [building] because I love train stations."<sup>52</sup>

Like most of his cohorts in SSSH, Jerry is able to see that things could be worse. When he and Nan moved into their bungalow, people were still arguing over the Silver Triangle project, which had recently been "kiboshed," but it wasn't too long before another proposal came along. As Jerry recalls:

...It wasn't until a couple years later that the Ghermezian brothers from Canada ('O Canada! O Canada!') came up with their American Dream and that really scared us because we would have been three blocks from the wave pool and the roller coasters. And I thought, 'well, there goes our property value.' I remember the first time I saw the architectural model they had in the former Armory over here and I just got sick to my stomach.

I looked at that gargantuan development and I thought, 'this isn't good.' So I was very grateful when that thing failed.<sup>53</sup>

While other SSSH members are so bitter about losses that they refuse to step foot in the CBD's core or to patronize any of the new businesses, Jerry was initially quite pleased with the plan. He told me he liked the idea of having a hardware store that he could walk to and was involved with the new civic building as a member of the Veterans Memorial Design Committee. "Just the idea of being able to walk to a hardware store, a bookstore, really seems a fabulous idea...."

Yet, over time, as things have proceeded, Jerry has become less sanguine about the rapidly redeveloping CBD, and is coming to be more aware of its costs to the built and social environment. The removal of the Little Tavern hamburger stand

from its site on Georgia Avenue was a particularly crushing blow, he says, adding:  
"I'm tired of this. I can't go through another one of these battles, because I took Little Tavern's loss far worse than I did the Armory. And I thought I would never have anything affect me as emotionally as the Armory, but the Little Tavern did."<sup>54</sup> The removal of the Little Tavern from downtown Silver Spring's Georgia Avenue will be a major topic of the next chapter.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 27 July 1999.

<sup>2</sup> "In Suburban Washington...The Spotlight's on Warner's Tastee Diner," *The Diner*, May 1947, 8-11.

<sup>3</sup> William Bushong, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Maryland Historic Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form, survey number 36-13, 31 August 1994.

<sup>4</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Bushong, "Historic Sites Inventory Form."

<sup>6</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Steele, *The Sense of Place* (Boston: CBI Publishing Company, 1981), 43-4.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "In Memoriam: Judy Reardon," *Silver Spring Voice*, January 2005, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Judy Reardon, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 4 November 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to SSHS members, 30 April 2003, citing statement on National Trust for Historic Preservation's web site <http://www.nthp.org>.

<sup>17</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 4 November 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Judy Reardon, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 11 November 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Urban, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 8 November 2002.

<sup>20</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 11 November 2002.

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<sup>21</sup> Meredith Hooker, "Regulars Savor Tavern's Last Days: A Neighborhood Gathering Place, Quarry House to Change Ownership," *Silver Spring Gazette*, 9 November 2005, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Reardon, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 5 June 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 4 November 2002.

<sup>27</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 5 June 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> M. Reardon, interview by author, 31 July 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Matt Hamblen, "Save Silver Spring, Scores Urge," *Montgomery Journal*, 4 February 1987, sec. A, p. 1; and Molly Sinclair, "Silver Spring Renewal Debated: Planning Board Asked to Save Art Deco," *Washington Post*, 3 February 1987, sec. B, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 19 August 2003; and Marcie Stickle, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 9 February 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Eugene L. Meyer, "Plan to Shut Landmark Diner Leaves Bitter Taste with Fans," *Washington Post*, 11 December 1986, sec. ME, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Grant, "Holding on to History: Residents Urge Planners to Save Theater, Diner," *Silver Spring Gazette*, 24 March 1993, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Nora Tocus, Silver Spring, to Marty Reinhart, Montgomery Planning Board, 9 December 1986, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>36</sup> Judy Reardon, Silver Spring, enclosure to letter to Gus Bauman, Chairman, Montgomery County Planning Board, 24 March 1993, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG2.

<sup>37</sup> Joyce Nalewajk, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 8 March 2003.

<sup>38</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 4 November 2002.

<sup>39</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

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<sup>40</sup> Theodore Kim, "Silver Spring's History on the Move: Tastee Diner Relocation Draws Tears, Optimism," *Silver Spring Gazette*, 21 June 2000, <[wysiwyg://3/http://www.gazette.net/200025/silverspring/news/15866-1.html](http://www.gazette.net/200025/silverspring/news/15866-1.html)> (22 June 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Hester, "Subconscious Landscapes":15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Catherine W. Bishir, "Yuppies, Bubbas, and the Politics of Culture," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 8-15.

<sup>44</sup> Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class*, 230.

<sup>45</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Jerry McCoy, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD, 13 August 2003.

<sup>47</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>50</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Wayne Goldstein, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 20 June 2003. Includes excerpts of article cited.

<sup>52</sup> McCoy, interview, 27 July 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> McCoy, interview, 13 August 2003.

## CHAPTER 5:

### WHEN VALUES AND EXPERIENCES CLASH: LOCAL HISTORY NARRATIVES AND PRESERVATION IN A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

Just as it is nearly impossible for preservationists to understand others' willingness to see older buildings either demolished or altered, it tends to be difficult for those outside Silver Spring's historic preservation community to appreciate SSHS members' interest in origins and heritage, and their at times missionary zeal for preservation. David Lowenthal, who has written extensively on their intersections, sees heritage, historic preservation, and nostalgia as understandable, though problematic responses to drastic social changes that have occurred during the past half-century. He contends that because of the rapidity and massive scale of changes, large numbers of people seek comfort in the past to allay grief that they have over the present. This, he claims, happens most often when the pace of change exceeds people's capacity to absorb it. "Amidst bewildering novelty, historic sites and antique objects spell security, ancient bricks and mortar offer tangible assurances of stability." Lowenthal also observes that the more the past is destroyed—and here he pinpoints "redevelopment as the past's main rival"—the stronger the urge to preserve becomes.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will consider ways in which the historical society is unrepresentative of the larger, multicultural community and how this has become a

source of tension in Silver Spring. Like many volunteer-based historical societies and preservation groups, SSHS's membership consists of people who remain passionate about preservation and/or local history but are not always as well versed in current trends in these fields as they might be.<sup>2</sup> This, at times, has been revealed through lack of sensitivity to the multiple histories and concerns of residents of increasingly diverse Silver Spring. To illustrate, several examples are provided of Silver Spring Historical Society members in action. One case contrasts SSHS members' perceptions of a Little Tavern hamburger stand with those of African Americans who spoke out against its preservation. Another example comes from preservationists' response to decisions made about an historic bank building now owned by a church with a large African congregation. And a third describes the rededication ceremony at the refurbished train station. These are followed by descriptions of an annual membership meeting in which actions taken show problems in how the group approaches diversity. This meeting demonstrates too some of the internal issues that plague the group, which arise from keeping it small and insular and its core membership especially homogeneous and uniform in its thinking.

### *Gone with the Wind: Nostalgia and the Problem of Connection*

After explaining the origins of such impulses, Lowenthal notes that interests in heritage and preservation, and the nostalgia that surrounds them, have several downsides. One of the most potentially troubling is that in seeking a lost golden age, much is filtered out, in turn suppressing history's complexity. "Above all, memory transforms the past we have known into what we think it should have been. Selective recall eliminates undesired scenes, highlights favorable ones, and makes them tidy

and suitable."<sup>3</sup> It is this filtering process that can trouble or offend other civic activists, particularly those who celebrate many of the social changes that in their view have made the current chapter of Silver Spring's history culturally richer and more socially just.

The creation of an idealized past among individuals immersed in heritage and historic preservation projects is evident in Jerry's columns, his tours, and in other members' admitted nostalgia for eras other than the present one. Here are two examples of passages from "Silver Spring Then & Again" that serve as illustrations:

Mr. O'Donnell was a contractor and built the two-story wood frame house with a wrap-around front porch. He probably enjoyed sitting out on it in the evening, talking to passing neighbors, watching the occasional 'gasoline buggy' putter by...and waving to the conductor operating the passing Washington, Woodside & Forest Glenn Railway streetcar."<sup>4</sup>

In my mind's eye, I can see the residents relaxing on their porches on a warm summer night in 1936, their radios tuned to the Lombardo Trio performing "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket." Or they may have been reading the book that everyone was reading that year: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.<sup>5</sup>

While Jerry admits a particular fondness for the 1930s—the 1939 Worlds Fair and Art Deco architecture are sources of fascination and appeal—often times it is the post-World War II decades of the 1940s and 1950s that are mentioned, as in this exchange with Judy.<sup>6</sup> "I'd like to roll the calendar back to 1950-something," she told me. "I have a friend who says he'd like everything to look like it did in 1958. Me too. I think it was nice then. Everything was made out of wood."<sup>7</sup> In a later conversation Judy acknowledged that, "I'm not ready for this century." When pressed, she admitted to knowing that blacks couldn't vote, "women didn't have a prayer," and "there was the Bomb." Yet, given all of that, she still said that she finds comfort in the 1950s,

especially in comparison to the new century, with its threats of terrorism and the plague of AIDS. Comparing the two, Judy concluded that she preferred "the boringness of 'the man in the gray flannel suit.'"<sup>8</sup>

Such images—the man in the gray flannel suit, fictional Mayberry, people sitting on their porches listening to Guy Lombardo or reading *Gone With the Wind*—all belong to a nostalgia that appears to be exclusively white. In turn, this way of thinking has a way of impinging on preservation decisions. For example, the Little Tavern on Georgia Avenue that recently disappeared was not the only structure of its type in downtown Silver Spring. Another, situated on the edge of the rapidly redeveloping core, this one on Wayne Avenue, is also slated for demolition or removal, but SSHS has demonstrated no interest in it. The primary reason, as is made clear in a "Silver Spring Then & Again" column is that it has been too drastically altered by its current owner:

...Sadly, the current owner [of a former Little Tavern in Bethesda] converted it to Golden House Chinese Carry-Out and has eradicated all of the restored Little Tavern signage. The same owner has made even more alterations to Silver Spring's other Little Tavern, a circa-1950s model located at 900 Wayne Avenue. It too has been turned into a Golden House and painted yellow!<sup>9</sup>

The types of changes exhibited by this Little Tavern are characteristic of a multi-ethnic community which does not fit into the existing narrative created and reproduced with some consistency by SSHS. The "picture perfect nostalgia" that the lost hamburger stand on Georgia was able to project has been compromised by the current users and use of this LT.



Fig. 77. Golden House Chinese Food

From the vantage point of scholar Tim Davis, this stance, while historically common among local preservationists, is unfortunate, because the recycling of commercial structures is a crucial element of a vital, changing community, an important reality of the historical era we are living in. As a result, when Davis wrote his piece, he was highly critical of the priorities of preservationists such as those in Silver Spring. He charged that nostalgia is not a terribly important reason to value a landscape and that selective preservation is usually an elitist activity rooted in a middle-class penchant for sanitizing the past rather than accepting a messy and complicated present. Davis then pointed to choices made in redeveloping Silver Spring's CBD to illustrate how such nostalgia leads to problematic choices:

The charming Art Deco facades [of the Silver Spring Shopping Center and Silver Theater] will provide megamall shoppers [his article was written during the American Dream phase] with a comforting reminder of a bygone era, when Silver Spring and other American suburbs exuded confidence in the promise of the motor age but retained—at least in retrospect—much of the scale, pace, and cultural homogeneity of traditional small-town life.<sup>10</sup>

Like many Silver Spring civic activists, Davis called for a return to the ethos of urbanist Jane Jacobs. Jacobs, he reminded readers:

...pleaded the case for old, ugly, and ordinary buildings and chaotic mixes of uses and spaces; not for their own sake, but because they added opportunity, variety, and vitality to the urban landscape—even though these buildings were put to uses that might not always conform to middle-class ideas of beauty, morality, and good taste.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Wood's case study, "Vietnamese Place Making in Northern Virginia," also shows how commercial structures are appropriated by new populations. He sees this as central to how people become American, by reinventing themselves, their spaces and places.<sup>12</sup>

Richard Jaeggi wonders sometimes if Silver Spring's historic preservationists do not share with developers too much interest in the shell and not enough in the people that give life to the present day community. "...Historic preservationists... always want to preserve buildings and not people and to me a building is just a place for people to do stuff. And if people can't, to keep a place as a museum piece that nobody goes into, I don't care about that." He recalls how a discussion of Walter Gottlieb's *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb* (following a screening I had organized) prompted him to think about this:

[One of the other participants who doesn't like the preservationists] was saying that the film was from a historic preservationist's point of view. And that's when kind of a weird thing hit me. Historic preservationists and developers are all about buildings. Historic preservationists will fight the developers about what they're going to do with this building, but down the

road they'll protect that building that the developers wanted....But neither one of them cares all that much about people.<sup>13</sup>

Maintaining one's nostalgic relationship with what is often an imagined past also has the potential to skew a person's vision in ways that they see what they want to see even in the midst of change that is obvious to others. When the Tastee Diner was picked up and moved from its Georgia Avenue location to nearby Cameron Street, outside of the core, Jerry was quoted in an article in the *Washington Post*. "'It's truly one of the last of a dying breed,' McCoy said. 'But more importantly, the waitresses always call you 'honey' and 'dear.'"<sup>14</sup> Having been at the diner for lunch on its last full weekend in its original location, I was surprised by this observation because it was so clearly at odds with what I had written in my field notes and what I vividly recall. As both clientele and staff of this once segregated diner came to reflect the diversity of the community, it had become a rare occurrence to be called "hon" or "dear," and sometimes when it happened, it was not taken kindly. One day while seated at the original diner, I witnessed a young white waitress address a considerably older African American male customer with such phrases and she was told in no uncertain terms to stop.

Yet, Jerry's desire to hold the diner in a certain image is not uncommon in mainstream American culture. A myth has been perpetuated about diners and other third places that they are friendly, inclusive places, welcoming to all. This myth plays out in nearly all published materials on diners, with the exception of historian Andrew Hurley's work which demonstrates how various features historically kept diners the province of male-oriented, working-class culture. Features such as the counter deterred women from patronizing them, and there were more overt policies that

excluded people of color, primarily African Americans. As an example of racial segregation well into the 1960s, he cites Silver Spring's Tastee Diner:

While segregation was more pervasive in southern states where both law and custom underpinned Jim Crow practices, it held in many mid-Atlantic and Midwestern states as well. Eddie Warner, who ran a chain of diners in suburban Washington D.C., explicitly instructed his employees to tell black would-be patrons that they could not be served inside the diner. As in most other diners, only take-out service was available.<sup>15</sup>

Eunice Ramsey recalls that black customers could pick up orders, but only from the back door, off of the parking lot. Hurley adds that Eunice's boss Warner made no exception for the African American cooks and dishwashers he periodically hired. He concludes that, "...African American families who wanted to partake in the adventure of commercial dining had little choice but to patronize local restaurants that bore little resemblance to the domesticated diner. People in the diner business wanted no part of the inner-city African American market."<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 78. Serving customers at the new Tastee diner



Fig. 79. New generation of Tastee wait staff

Stemming from their awareness of such legacies, many people because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation continue to approach these places with a great deal of caution. Meanwhile, those who do not share this knowledge or experience are more able and likely overlook the unpleasant historical truths of third places. For example, in a letter-to-the-editor, Jerry mourned the closing of Bowl America, a fixture in downtown Silver Spring since the late 1950s. Arguing with its owner that the bowling alley did have "historic value," and belying the fact that bowling alleys, like movie theaters, train stations, and diners were segregated, Jerry wrote:

It is worth saving because the building and the wholesome sport of bowling are important to the community and worth preserving.

Bowling alleys are representative of what I like to call 'democratic buildings,' places like movie theaters, train stations and diners...where all people can congregate for a common purpose.<sup>17</sup>

While this characterization may be truer now than in the past, documentation of the need for a county-wide anti-discrimination public accommodations ordinance frequently refers to race-based exclusions in bowling alleys, alongside diners and movie theaters. Hurley's work shows that sit-ins in many cities in the early 1960s spread from lunch counters to bowling alleys, and that the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) both became involved in efforts to desegregate bowling alleys through such sit-ins.<sup>18</sup>

The comic strip "Non Sequitur" has commented on how widely believed, but grossly inaccurate, myths about third places such as diners are. In the first panel of a 2002 strip, a middle-aged white male customer says to the red-haired waitress who is pouring his coffee, "Nostalgia is big business Flo. With a few vintage signs and decorations, you could make this into a replica diner of the '40s and '50s." To which "Flo" replies, "Why would I want to replicate that era?" The man tells her, "Are you kidding? EVERYONE wants to go back to when America was at its best....A time when our values were simple, solid and intact...." She says, "EVERYONE wants to relive that era?" "You bet," he says. To which "Flo" responds, "Well then let's staht with this vintage sign to hand in the windah...." The customer's hair stands on end and his coffee splashes when she shows him the sign: "WHITES ONLY." He concedes, "OK...Maybe not EVERYONE."<sup>19</sup>

Distancing themselves from such historical knowledge, historic preservationists in Silver Spring sometimes project themselves in ways that can seem disrespectful of histories and cultures different than their own, or at least unwelcoming and non-inclusive.

*"What are You Trying to Preserve?": Contested Memories of the "L.T."*

Each month since February 2003, Jerry has contributed a column, "Silver Spring: Then & Again" to the *Silver Spring Voice*. The idea behind the column is to pair vintage images of Silver Spring with their "contemporary twins," accompanied by a history lesson about events that led to the changes. May 2003's "Then & Again" was devoted to the history of the 1935 hamburger shop on Georgia Avenue and the events that led to its disappearance from the landscape that spring. It began:

On March 11, 2003, I had a rude awakening, courtesy of the Internet. Trolling the waters of e-bay, I came across the following offering:

CAFÉ/TAVERN, Item #-2312358066, Price \$89,000. Charming café, originally built for the sale of little hamburgers, now available. Over the years the building has been used for many things—most recently a summer art gallery. Nostalgic little structure, but not historic. Buyer must move to their own lands; nice size for coffee-house, art studio or guest cottage....All reasonable offers considered.

From Jerry's point of view, the owner of the property, Pyramid Atlantic, a non profit arts organization devoted to handmade paper, printmaking, digital media, and the book arts, was acting in selfish disregard of the public interest. He commented: "What is being marketed as a cash and, literally, carry commodity, is a piece of downtown Silver Spring's cultural history...."<sup>20</sup>

The bitterness that the SSHS president and other members felt toward the seller was expressed on the organization's web site and in a flurry of email exchanges. These came to a climax in June, when Jerry discovered that the arts organization had begun dismantling the building, leading him to fire off this email to select SSHS members:

All,

Something is happening at Silver Spring's circa 1935 Little Tavern and it doesn't look good.

I just walked past LT and saw that someone has completely removed the curved, enameled corner...about a 10 ft. vertical section from sidewalk to roof line. This is the front right side of the building as you are looking at it. The cinder block upon which the panels were attached is fully exposed. I don't know why these pieces would have been removed unless the dismantling has begun or they were stolen. I also noticed that the awning over the front door (added during the early 80s renovation) has been removed.

It doesn't look good for the preservation of this building.<sup>21</sup>

The following day, Wayne Goldstein, president of Montgomery Preservation, Inc. (MPI) emailed the same select group of people, reporting what he had learned. A demolition permit for the Little Tavern had been applied for, he wrote, "even though the preservation planner has written in her staff memo that it should be reviewed for possible placement on the Locational Atlas for historic properties in the fall." He urged that immediate action be taken, specifically that people demand that a "stop work order" be issued by the HPC. "We need to monitor the site until Monday morning. If there is further demolition activity this weekend, we will have to contact TV and newspapers and hold a demonstration." He added: "This is very similar to what happened to the Silver Theater in 1984."<sup>22</sup>

The next email, from Jerry, was sent out to the full membership of SSHS advising them on what actions needed to be taken immediately. The barrage of phone calls to the M-NPPC staff and others resulted in a "stop work order" that would remain in effect until a decision could be made about the Little Tavern's historic value at a public "work session." Those receiving the mass email message were urged to attend a special public hearing, invited to testify or submit written comments to the

HPC, and to contact Pyramid Atlantic's Executive Artist Director, Helen Frederick, to express their desire to see the organization reverse its decision.<sup>23</sup>

The July ninth work session was similar to most hearings I had attended at the M-NPPC building. In other words, it was fairly sparsely attended; there was no outpouring of public interest in saving this structure, which had long been dormant. In contrast to meetings in the 1980s concerning Tastee's future, about forty people were present that night. The first order of business was for HPC's Gwen Wright to explain the purpose of the hearing. The HPC, she said, was seeking any material that was not available when that body had made a prior decision to deny historic designation to the property. She went on to explain that the earlier decision had been made on two main counts. The first had to do with the diminished integrity of the structure. Various materials had been replaced, including the roof, which was no longer the original tiled one. The second concerned the presence in the county of another Little Tavern that had already been designated and placed on the Locational Atlas due to its higher level of integrity. After hearing testimony from what turned out to be close to a dozen speakers, the commissioners would then discuss the matter in front of those present and formulate a recommendation that would be delivered to the Montgomery County Planning Board.

From talking with others and reading the local press, I had sensed prior to walking into the hearing room that Pyramid Atlantic had garnered a good deal of public support and that this was likely a losing battle for preservationists. It appeared to me that this was exactly the type of organization that Montgomery County's elected officials had been seeking to establish Silver Spring's new identity as an arts and

entertainment district. Not only was Pyramid Atlantic a good fit with that designation, but it was playing well among activists like IMPACT Silver Spring's Frankie Blackburn, who appreciated its outreach efforts to the wider community. Consequently, as it turned out, the preservationists who offered testimony found themselves in the familiar position of being in the minority.

An architect with a firm that has a long history of preserving older buildings paved the way that evening. He derided what he identified as a growing tendency to "save everything." The Little Tavern might be "cute," he said—he later called it "a broken oddity"—"but is deficient in meeting the owners' goals and needs, isn't up to code, and isn't [handicapped] accessible." He concluded that the owners were civic-minded and "should not be forced to keep something, because others find it quaint." The architect's testimony was followed by Delegate Sheila Hixson's. Focused on how important the vision of the arts center was to a "revitalized Silver Spring," she said that Pyramid Atlantic would be "a crowning jewel for the community."

A representative from County Executive Doug Duncan's office submitted a letter in which Duncan voiced concern over what reconsideration of the Little Tavern's status would do to plans for an arts and entertainment district. A staff person present noted that she was aware of "nostalgia and the strong sentiment for preserving elements of old Silver Spring," including from her husband. But she, like various civic activists, including Blackburn, claimed that oral histories and exhibits, among other things, were sufficient substitutes for saved buildings.

Fairness became another key element of testimony on Pyramid Atlantic's behalf, beginning with the its lawyer. The organization he represents, he said, had

been invited by the county to be a "keystone in revitalization" and was led to believe that it had the freedom to make decisions about the building. This is a common argument made by property owners, who are aware that historic designation of their building will place many restrictions on them. The lawyer was followed by Cheryl Derricotte, the organization's financial and facility project manager, whose testimony particularly irked SSSH members. Derricotte, who is African American, said that she chuckled when she read a statement Jerry made to a *Washington Post* reporter. Jerry had said that he would "like to chain myself to that building until the bulldozers came."<sup>24</sup> Derricotte, having worked as an advocate for affordable and accessible housing and against displacement, stated that she found the remark to be absurd and somewhat offensive.

The next two pieces of testimony were from a corporate psychologist and a 20-year-resident of Silver Spring who remembered well her experiences eating at the Little Tavern. Both saw more value in Pyramid Atlantic's plans for a community arts center than they did in saving the old hamburger shop. The psychologist saw LT as a "curiosity" for people, incapable of fulfilling "deeper needs." The long-time resident called it a "nostalgic remembrance" with "no historic value to the community." "It isn't the Armory," she added.

Preservationists were called to testify last. Eileen McGuckian of Peerless Rockville testified on behalf of the preservation committee of SSSH, saying that she was convinced that most of the criteria for historic significance were met by LT. She called the structure an "icon of twentieth-century architecture" and went down the line explaining how it qualified for listing in terms of historic importance,

architectural significance, familiarity, and so on. Jerry followed, citing the structure as an important part of "Silver Spring's cultural heritage." He noted that it was one of few remaining LT buildings in the metropolitan area, and that even though modified it was a more pristine example of the prototype than most of the others. Jerry then brought up what he continues to see as Pyramid Atlantic's pattern of "deceptiveness." He reviewed how original plans had incorporated the tiny structure into the design of the center. But then, he said, having accepted large amounts of financial support from the county and state, and after having made the move to Silver Spring, Pyramid began featuring a new design, a glass cube, and no Little Tavern. It was, he said, "disingenuous" of them, a breach of trust with the community. Joyce and Wayne concluded the testimony portion of the hearing, Joyce arguing broadly for consideration of the LT as an architectural artifact and piece of popular culture, while Wayne delved into some of the more technical rationale for reassessing its merits for designation as historic.

Jerry has told me more than once how pained he was when Pyramid Atlantic opted to remove the hamburger shop from its plans, keeping only the company's corporate headquarters building which was set far back from Georgia Avenue. He says that he has always had an interest in the book arts and was excited when he heard the news that the organization had decided to relocate from Riverdale in neighboring Prince George's County. In his May 2003 "Silver Spring Then & Again" column, he told readers: "I have long loved art and hold great admiration for those who create it. Jubilant over the news of Pyramid Atlantic's pending arrival, I had envisioned being one of the first to sign up for one of their papermaking classes."<sup>25</sup>

But following the organization's reversal of its decision, he says forlornly that he will never step foot in the building, which at this point consists solely of the brightly repainted and renovated Little Tavern corporate headquarters.

Mary describes how bitterness between SSHS members and Pyramid Atlantic's director escalated. At one point, she says, a group consisting of SSHS and MPI members was scheduled to meet with director Frederick, Derricotte, the organization's financial and facility project manager, and their lawyer. The preservationists waited and waited and finally the attorney received a call saying that Frederick had had a family emergency and therefore there would be no meeting. When later pressed by Judy and Jerry about rescheduling the meeting, Mary reports that Frederick told them, "I'm not going to meet with you," and that she had never intended to meet with them. Following a great deal of media publicity and SSHS's testimony at the special public hearing, Mary said that Derricotte told Jerry, "Don't you dare come on our property, don't you dare come on our property and have your picture taken with a tape measure, because that's trespassing and that's hostile."<sup>26</sup>

In one of the *Washington Post* articles about the controversy, the one in which Jerry had been quoted about his willingness to chain himself to the Little Tavern, he had been photographed measuring panels of the building.<sup>27</sup> For Jerry, like other local historians and historic preservationists, the Little Tavern was "a wonderful example of the 'art' of mid-twentieth century commercial 'roadside' vernacular architecture." It was something that belonged to the community. Meanwhile, Pyramid Atlantic, its owner, thought that it had the authority to remove the structure from its property without notifying the county or the historical society.

At the July ninth session, commissioners spoke briefly about the various arguments that they had heard. The first commissioner noted that the HPC had already recognized that the building *type* merited designation, that the form was intact, and that materials that were missing were replaceable. This, I thought, sounded promising for the preservationists. Other questions that arose had to do with whether all LTs in the county should receive designation, but that issue was dismissed as being beyond the realm of what was to be decided that evening. Sidestepping that issue also seemed like it could bode well for the case of this specific structure.

Next, something occurred that I was not prepared for. Nor were the preservationists. During the course of my archival research I was surprised to find an extensive amount of material tucked away in the grossly underused Montgomery County Archives in Rockville that dealt with segregation of housing, schools, and public accommodations. This history tends not to come up in conversations with white residents or relative newcomers to the community, receives scant mention in local newspapers or in most published histories, and is not a part of county publications or web sites. Nor does the historical society have anything on its web site devoted to Silver Spring's racial history, and it is absent from Jerry's narrative on his monthly downtown walking tours. I had become convinced by this point that segregation was the white community's dirty little secret, something that older black residents remembered well and communicated orally, but that it was not about to become a part of the official story of Silver Spring. So I was surprised when, during this meeting among the commissioners, a letter was read that added a new element to the discussion.

Written by a seventy-year-old African American resident of the area—who was born in Washington, D.C. and had lived in Silver Spring since the early 1970s—it recounted that Little Taverns meant different things to different people. "As you may know, the Little Tavern was a place that was 'very unfriendly' to people of 'color,' as were many other places in Silver Spring," he recalled. The letter writer concluded, "Happily, those days are gone. I understand that a sculpture garden is planned for the site of the edifice. That will be nice. Please allow the Pyramid Atlantic Project to proceed without delay."<sup>28</sup>

As in Walter Gottlieb's documentary, the African American perspective of local history was not dwelled upon that evening. In Gottlieb's film more is made of Silver Spring natives (including actor Ben Stein's) fond recollections of Mighty Moe burgers at the also segregated Hot Shoppes, than it is of a large class of people being banned from such places. In fact the subject of segregation, which occurs at two points in the documentary, receives less than four minutes of coverage.<sup>29</sup> That evening, the African American man's testimony was included in the public record, but the commissioners quickly moved on.

In the end, while the LT's racial history had little bearing, the votes were not what SSSH members had hoped for, the body reaffirming a prior decision that the LT not be included in the Atlas. In his closing statement, the chair repeated that the building had suffered structural losses and that the "higher value" was to proceed with "revitalization" of downtown Silver Spring. Therefore, no nomination was being recommended or forwarded to the Planning Commission.

The story of the Little Tavern, especially the initial and closing chapters, garnered a good deal of media attention, primarily because of the novelty of a commercial building being auctioned off on the popular e-bay web site. Not only did local publications feature multiple articles, so did *USA Today*, a publication with a vast national audience. In most cases, "local history and nostalgia buffs" were depicted as fighting a valiant, but in the end un-winnable cause. Meredith Hooker from the *Silver Spring Gazette* noted: "Many residents, particularly baby boomers, associate the small, white building with their youth, when 5-cent mini-hamburgers were popular at the restaurant chain, considered one of the first fast-food outlets."<sup>30</sup> But, she reported, because the site had not been listed in Montgomery County's inventory of historic places and because Pyramid Atlantic had come to realize the challenges and expenses of meeting building codes, it appeared that such sentiments would be overruled by the politics of redevelopment.

A minor thread, appearing in only one of the last articles published, picked up on the point that people in the community had a range of perspectives on what Jerry and others saw as a "a little, cute building" and "American icon." While SSHS member George French, who is white and in his mid-50s, recounted to the *Washington Post* reporter his fond memories of taking dates to the "Club L.T." in high school, African American residents offered competing reflections. To George, it was "almost an insult to the workmen and architects who came before us to take it down." The reporter recounted that George and a small group of others had spent several days methodically stenciling labels on each of the 200 panels, which would later be reassembled at the National Capital Trolley Museum in nearby Colesville.

However, the reporter said, "not everyone appeared so sure that the Little Tavern should be held up to be admired." The story's concluding paragraph featured a lengthy quote by Curtis White, the African American project manager of the LT's dismantling.

White, age 48, observed: "If I walked into that Little Tavern when it first started up, I don't know if I would have been served—and it wouldn't have been because I didn't have enough money." He went on to say that he had attended the public hearing on the matter. "I sat in the public hearing and I did wonder, What are you trying to preserve?"<sup>31</sup> Such statements, the letter read at the hearing, and two brief segments of Walter Gottlieb's documentary, all reveal a rare glimpse of what is generally kept secret—that until fairly recently Silver Spring was a segregated suburb. Furthermore, officers and the most active members of the Silver Spring Historical Society are only beginning to recognize that it has work to do in these areas.

### *Confronting Racism in Silver Spring's Built Environment*

When I met with Jerry about a month after the hearing, he volunteered that the accounts of the letter writer and Curtis White contained information that he had not known. He found the revelations "disturbing" and said that his curiosity had been piqued, making him interested in learning more about Silver Spring's history of segregation. At one point that evening he told me, "The segregation story; that's something that really needs to be told. And I have to educate myself about that because if those things really happened, I need to say those things on the tour." The

series of events also led to one especially interesting response by Jerry in the form of a letter-to-the editor of the *Washington Post*:

Garance Burke's decision to end her article [which had quoted White] on such an incendiary note was both unfair to the Silver Spring Historical Society's effort to save our community's 1940 Little Tavern Hamburger Shop as well as an insult to historic preservationists everywhere. Yes, Pyramid Atlantic's project manager, Curtis White, may, as an African American, have experienced racism had he patronized Little Tavern in its early years. Should the past inequities that may or may not have been embodied in this structure, or in any structure of historic merit, serve as a litmus test for its preservation?

By that reasoning the magnificent Spanish Ballroom at the National Park Service's Glen Echo Park should never have been restored because of its history of segregation. The adaptive reuse in progress of downtown Washington's original Hecht's department store—site of numerous protests led by activist Mary Church Terrell because of the store's policy of segregated lunch counters—should be immediately halted.

The list, unfortunately, could go on and on. To equate the worthiness of historic preservation with racism is simply shortsighted and wrong.<sup>32</sup>

This letter, while demonstrating less sensitivity than it might to the perspectives of African American residents, raises an important point. Rather than erasing from the landscape sites that represent disturbing facts about U.S. and local history, some African American residents I spoke with, as well as whites adept at thinking about issues of race, agreed that it is in the best interest of the community to preserve such artifacts. Virginia Mahoney, who is black, and Frankie Blackburn, who is white, emphasized however that it is not enough simply to save such buildings. Another step must be taken, which is to interpret and highlight the harsh historical truths of racism. If this step were taken in the case of the LT, it could become part of a larger effort to recover lost histories and missing perspectives from the master

narrative that has been spun, not just about Silver Spring, but about most communities in the United States.<sup>33</sup>

If Jerry and/or other members of the Silver Spring Historical Society at his urging move forward and document the complicated, and decidedly non-nostalgic aspects of social histories of places like the Little Tavern, its mission might be altered in ways that could better resonate with a broader segment of the population. Had these efforts begun prior to the July ninth 2003 meeting, a very different case might have been advanced concerning why it was important to preserve an LT in Silver Spring. The SSSHS could have prevailed in some form had it proposed that the preserved structure feature an exhibit on discrimination in places of public accommodation in downtown Silver Spring. New allies, including members of the community who were glad to see the building removed, might have joined forces to work out a solution between the SSSHS and Pyramid Atlantic. Roscoe Nix, the local civil rights leader who had filed a complaint against the county when he was refused service at another downtown restaurant, might have been invited to give presentations at a preserved LT. At the LT work session, a broader range of testimonies could certainly have been presented, and more public participation might have ensued. Rather than finding themselves placed in the customary minority position of impeters of progress, the SSSHS, playing up and expanding its role as an educational group, might have rallied support by conveying an expanded notion of what historical education of the public means.

It will be interesting to see if in future months Jerry adds material on racial segregation to his monthly walking tour of downtown Silver Spring. So far, when he

stops in front of the site where the LT once stood he talks about the founder, rehashes the company's history, and describes the events that led to the structure's removal. A corner will be turned when he is able to pursue his interest in learning more about what that building and others like it symbolize to a sizable segment of the community, and then conveys that new historical knowledge to tour participants. This will not be easy and will take time, something illustrated by exchanges with other SSHS members who were upset that the historical perspectives of African American residents were introduced into the discussion of historic preservation. Regarding the letter read by the commissioner at the work session, one member said: "That letter shouldn't have even been mentioned. You know, put it in a file and forget it. It's ridiculous. To say that in a hearing as if it has weight." That person also dismissed the *Washington Post* article's quote by Curtis White, agreeing with Jerry's response. "By that logic, tear down Glen Echo. Look at Glen Echo's history and Glen Echo's getting all this money for restoration. Or Mount Vernon. Slaves lived there. I mean you could go on and on." Although not intended, the Mount Vernon reference is instructive. While not everyone who visits George and Martha Washington's estate will opt to do so, visitors do have the opportunity to take a highly informative tour of the slave quarters. Nothing comparable to the slave tour is being offered in downtown Silver Spring. To my knowledge, only recently are discriminatory practices at Glen Echo highlighted at the once segregated amusement park.<sup>34</sup>

*"It Seems to Me It's White....": Historical Society Membership*

One reason that SSHS to date has had limited appeal is because it holds a relatively narrow perspective on the social history of the community, and is

essentially a middle-class, mostly-white organization. Of its approximately eighty members, only three people of color have joined, and that is a very recent development. (One of those individuals became a member at my urging, but other than taking one of the monthly tours has not been active in the organization.) What this means is that all of the core members, the six or eight who are especially active, are white, and it is those few people who shape much of what is remembered about the community's past. An encouraging development is that a new member of color, Karen Kali, has taken a more active role, leading monthly South Silver Spring tours. This has permitted Jerry to develop a new tour of the CBD core.

Karen recognizes some of the areas in which the historical society is deficient and has met with me to discuss ways of reaching out to communities of color through other area organizations, such as the Lincoln Park Historical Foundation/Society and IMPACT Silver Spring. One mission of the Lincoln Park Historical Foundation/Society is to "raise an overall awareness of Montgomery County's unique and diverse history." Another is "to heighten African American consciousness" and enhance "community pride though highlighting contributions made by African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups working and/or living in Montgomery County."<sup>35</sup> Karen has also joined Jan Goldstein, Director of Arts on the Block, a Montgomery Youth Works program, in planning a mural depicting Silver Spring's multicultural character and history. The mural project is slated to begin in January 2006 and will be executed by local high school students.

When asked what type of person is drawn to local history and preservation work, at first Jerry says, "Boy, it really runs the gamut." But he quickly adds: "It

seems to me it's white. I mean, I don't know why that is. Every time I have a person of color on my tour, I'm just amazed."<sup>36</sup> SSHS vice president Judy Reardon also acknowledged that, "The preservation community is largely white, middle-class. That's for sure." She and others, including Nancy and Mary, speculate that issues of concern to SSHS's membership have weak resonance with those who are more concerned with basic matters of day-to-day survival. Said Judy, "They [meaning people of color] have other matters at the top of their agendas, and this isn't one of them." She cited jobs and transportation. "The burden is on us," she added, "to raise these [preservation] issues in a way that will engage them."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately this line of thinking equates class status with race, something that is not necessarily the case in suburbs like Silver Spring that have large populations of solidly middle and upper-class residents of color.

Mary Reardon, who has been active in local historic preservation struggles since 1986, chooses to focus on class in explaining SSHS's limited diversity. She observes that, "A lot of times it's the more upscale, people from the more upscale neighborhoods" who become involved. Active in other civic organizations, including the Allied Civic Association, Neighbors for a Better Montgomery, and the Montgomery County Civic Federation, she contrasts wealthier Woodside Park meetings and meeting participants, with those in historically more working-class East Silver Spring:

They [Woodside residents] really appreciate the value of the built environment there...[whereas] one of our biggest enemies during the Silver Triangle thing was East Silver Spring. They were, if you look at them, largely more downscale. I can say this because I come from a working-class background....They were just not the big bucks people in Silver Spring and they were very, very threatened by anything that might possibly make the

community go down in value [including, they thought, historic preservation]. They were much more worried about it than anyone in Woodside Park would be, or in Takoma Park. So that's part of it. I hate to say it, but it's a class thing.<sup>38</sup>

When pressed, Mary observes that a good share of SSHS's membership resides in Woodside Park and that by and large those members most involved in historic preservation aspects come from that community. Jerry, as a downtown resident, she points out, is atypical. So are Marcie and George who live in an East Silver Spring neighborhood bordering Takoma Park, although she adds that Marcie "is from a privileged family."

Meanwhile, Judy, who acknowledged her disdain for the stereotype of preservationists as "little old ladies running around in tennis shoes," contended that from her experience—including with SSHS—the stereotypes simply do not fit. Yes, preservationists are mostly white and middle-class, and yes, they tend to be middle-aged or older and therefore more settled, but in her view, it is not an easy group to categorize. She pointed to the range of political backgrounds of members, but then commented that this is Montgomery County, which is so overwhelmingly liberal.<sup>39</sup> Such comments suggest that SSHS members may be invested in believing that the group is more diverse than it actually is.

All of the active members and officers of SSHS would agree that the organization does not reflect the demographics of what has become a majority non-white community, and over time it has become clearer that this is proving to be a source of conflict. Some of the discourse surrounding Little Tavern may foreshadow what is yet to come. Based on the LT experience, Jerry worries about what may happen if others in SSHS push forward with plans to take action on the Silver Spring

National Bank building. The former bank, along with the former Seco theater building, is part of property on Georgia Avenue owned by Bethel World Outreach Church, a church with a large, predominantly African membership. Bethel Outreach's leadership has demonstrated no interest in preserving the two buildings that it owns, and there are signs that the church is considering constructing new facilities on the property. From testimony offered by the associate pastor at one of the public hearings devoted to discussion of the historic sites survey, it is clear that the church would at least like to have that option. Individual SSHS members and MPI's Wayne Goldstein have begun taking steps to see that that will not happen. But because of race issues, Jerry says, "that's a fight I don't want to get into."

*"Why Do You Care about the Past?": Old Silver Spring Meets New*

On a warm weekday evening in late July 2003, I was stunned to arrive at a public hearing of the Montgomery County Planning Commission and to find the room filled to capacity. Over time, I had learned that it was fine to arrive at or around the exact time hearings were scheduled to begin. Generally, whatever hearing was taking place prior to the one I was interested in was running long, which meant lengthy waits in the hallway outside the room. So that night, like others, I had arrived promptly at 7:30 p.m., only to discover that all of the chairs were filled. Not only that, but there was barely any space to lean up against the wall. People were standing in the hallway because the large room was not sufficient in size to accommodate all of them. It was reminiscent of the town forum on the American Dream I had attended shortly after moving to the area. Instead of the usual ten or twenty that attend such forums, there appeared to be around 150. Also in sharp contrast, most in attendance were not white

property owners, developers, attorneys, or representatives of the county; nor were they preservationists. Instead, this group was comprised mostly of black African immigrants. I counted ten or twelve whites, at least half of whom I knew to be SSHS members.

The purpose of this meeting was for commissioners to consider the historic merits of a number of buildings and groups of buildings. They were to vote on those structures based on recommendations of the HPC staff, which had taken under advisement the conclusions of a report drafted by a consultant hired to survey all downtown structures that were fifty years old or older. Following closely on the heels of the Little Tavern controversy, Jerry was not present that evening, but the Reardons, Marcie, Nancy, and a few other SSHS members were there, and they stood out. They had arrived early enough that they were able to get seats. I watched from my spot against the wall at the left side of the room, as they stood from time to time to scan the numbers that continued to increase. From the looks on their faces and their body language I could tell that there was tension.

Prior to that hearing, there was little in the way of email discussion about it, perhaps because it came so soon after the Little Tavern work session, or maybe because the hearings leading up to this one had been so sparsely attended. There had been nothing to indicate that this one, even though it was to be the last concerning the historic sites survey, had stirred up any special community interest. Other than Mary Reardon's email plea, urging people to attend, three days in advance, there was nothing alerting SSHS members to it. Nor were there exchanges between smaller groups. This is how Mary phrased things:

On Monday night, July 28, The Planning Board will hold a work session and vote on the Silver Spring CBD Historic Resources Inventory. The meeting is at 7:30 to 9:30, and this is the only item on the agenda. There will be no public testimony (hearing was June 19), but it's VERY important that preservationists and supporters attend this session to indicate support. Board members have to know this is important to the community—attendance could affect the outcome. We have not yet seen the Planning Commission staff report which will indicate their recommendations. It was not ready until late this afternoon. We are particularly concerned about the 1936 Falkland Apartments, which we are afraid may be rejected either partially or completely.

The Board will vote on whether to add the following properties to the Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites, as recommended by the HPC:

National Dry Cleaning Institute  
North Washington Shopping Center (Georgia at Eastern)  
Silver Spring National Bank (Copy Connection)  
Silver Spring Volunteer Fire Department (Old Armory)  
Falkland Apartments  
St. Charles Apartments  
U.S. Industries Building (Bonifant)  
Tires of Silver Spring (Georgia and East-West Highway)—not recommended by STAFF of HPC  
A&A Auto Sales (East-West Highway)—not recommended by STAFF of HPC

The Board will also vote on RETAINING the following properties on the Atlas:

Spring Garden Apartments  
Hecht's  
SS Historic District, which includes Penney's and the buildings on the north side of Colesville, the Fenton Building, Hecht's, and Master Plan properties the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center and Montgomery Arms (Master Plan properties are already fully protected by law)

The Inventory is an opportunity to have significant buildings placed on the Atlas and receive interim protection until they can be thoroughly reviewed for Master Plan historic designation. But any buildings the Planning Board rejects on Monday will have a stigma that will be difficult to overcome.<sup>40</sup>

Gwen Wright, Historic Preservation Coordinator for the Montgomery County

Department of Parks and Planning, opened that evening's session with a review of the

history of the historic sites survey. She noted that this was part of the mitigation the county had agreed to after demolishing the Armory. She then explained that an outside consultant had been hired to do the survey, that he had recommended eleven sites and three districts be considered for inclusion on the Locational Atlas, and that the HPC staff, from those, was recommending seven to the Planning Commission. Being added to the Atlas, she stressed, would not preclude development, nor did it signify historic designation. It simply meant, as Mary had pointed out in her e-mail message, that these properties would receive interim protection until they could be more thoroughly reviewed.

The buildings being recommended by the HPC staff (listed above) consisted of a mix of garden apartments and retail and office spaces. Slides of each site were shown, along with backgrounds of each and a summary of issues. During the opening presentation it was stated that the powerful County Executive, Doug Duncan, had recommended, through a letter, that only three of the buildings under consideration be added to the Atlas. These were: the National Association of Dyers and Cleaners Building, the North Washington Shopping Center, and the Silver Spring Volunteer Fire Department, all on Georgia Avenue, south of the core. Signaling what was to become the most contentious site of the work session, he voiced concern for one property: the 1925 Silver Spring National Bank building, located on the core's edge.

The commissioners then considered each of the properties, individually, making comments and then entertaining motions on whether to add or not add the building in question to the Atlas. The first two, the Dyers & Cleaners building and the North Washington Shopping Center were unanimously approved; both had been cited

positively by Duncan. The third building up for discussion, the National Bank, was the source of much lengthier comment. Bethel World Outreach Ministries, which has been using the bank building as office space (except for the portion it had rented out as retail to Copy Connection) wanted the freedom to make alterations or to demolish the building as it considered its long-term future. The commissioners reviewed the list of parties who were seeking listing of this property (the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board and HPC staff) and which were not (County Executive Duncan). Wright explained that few buildings from that era remain in downtown Silver Spring and that many that have survived have been extensively altered. Placement on the Atlas, she contended, would permit dialogue to occur on the classical revival building. In addition, she argued that the building had deep historical and cultural significance, providing early residents with a sense of permanence. But when Dereck Berlage, the chair of the commission opened with his remarks, he received laughs from the audience when he described the building as "pedestrian architecture." None of the other commissioners seemed swayed one way or another. Of the buildings being voted on, the bank and the two garden apartment complexes were the only ones deferred by the commissioners.



Fig. 80. Former Silver Spring National Bank building

Several up and mostly down votes followed. The Fire Department, another of the structures recommended for inclusion by Duncan, received a unanimous yes vote. The U.S. Industries Building on Bonifant, a site being sought by a developer, was voted down. All seemed to agree that it was an unattractive building that was being recommended only because of its historic significance as a site where robotics advancements had occurred. Preserving it would impede plans for development. More confusing was The Falkland Chase Apartments complex, located on valuable property near the Metro Station. Contentious in the past, there was some division among commissioners, who opted to delay voting on it, along with the bank building, until the end. A decision was also made to defer a vote on another garden apartment complex. Unanimous “no” votes were then voiced for the Tires of Silver Spring and A & A Auto Sales buildings, neither of which had been recommended by the HPC staff.

Suspense was heightened by the deferral of the three votes. More discussion of the garden apartments sites led to a vote to include one of the complexes (the Falklands) on the Atlas, but not the other (the St. Charles). Then it was back to the bank building, the decision that most in the room had been waiting for. Berlage voiced his opposition to designation of any kind, arguing that "over-designation" of Silver Spring was harmful to revitalization. Others, including Valerie Wellington, were interested in the possibility of preserving the front façade. But her colleagues rallied around the Chair, one of them saying that this building was not "the best of the best." When the voice vote was taken on the Silver Spring National Bank Building, the commissioners sided with the County Executive and Bethel Outreach against

adding it to the Locational Atlas. The room, which I had experienced in the past only as quiet and orderly, was filled with thunderous applause from church parishioners. I noted that MPI president Wayne Goldstein was holding his fingers in his ears and that the Reardon sisters and Marcie looked shell-shocked.

It was the first time that I had witnessed what IMPACT director Blackburn and others label "new Silver Spring" (the influx of immigrants and people of color) rubbing up against "old Silver Spring" (longtime white residents who are often nostalgic for the past and more resistant to change). In my field notes I wrote that there was something exciting about seeing new people being brought into the public sphere, and to witness the room filled, regardless of whether the presence of the church parishioners affected the outcome.

An exchange with Mary Reardon the following day confirmed that her perspective was devoid of anything resembling excitement around what had occurred. "Instructive and depressing," was the phrase she used.<sup>41</sup> Three days later during a conversation that began at the Half Moon and ended at the Quarry House, Mary and I talked at length about the work session. "We got there at about twenty after and saw all these people coming in and I just knew that that wasn't going to be good. And first, I thought, is that for another meeting?" Gwen Wright informed the SSHS members that, no, this was the work session and that what they were seeing were "the church people." "And I knew that was bad," she recalled. From encounters with the pastor that evening and from listening to him testify at previous hearings, she said, "he seems like a pretty cold character." It was clear that he, the white associate pastor, had been the one who orchestrated the large turnout.<sup>42</sup>

As Jerry observed a couple of weeks later, the frames of reference of Bethel parishioners are largely transnational and spiritual, giving them a worldview very much at odds with SSHS members. Some SSHS members I spoke with made it clear that religion is not a part of their lives. No one I interviewed from SSHS volunteered that church was important to them. And while national affairs and the Iraq war came up in conversation from time to time, SSHS members' primary passions and sets of concerns revolve around local affairs. As a result, it is understandable that Mary and Marcie found it challenging to talk with the pastor of Bethel Outreach after the meeting that evening.

Mary recounted the exchange: "Well, Marcie and I talked to him, and he told both of us, he said, 'I don't care about history, I don't care about the past. We care about the future and the present.' And he said, 'Why do you care about the past?'" As sometimes happens when something is glaringly obvious to a person, Mary was at a loss for words. "I didn't know how to explain it to him," she told me. Mary continued, speculating on what mistruths or "bill of goods" the minister may have spread as a way of ensuring turnout, and then said: "I mean, what do they know about preservation? None of these people cared or knew about or even understood the process, they didn't understand anything else that was going on."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast with SSHS members, people involved with other civic groups, including IMPACT Silver Spring, often have a strong religious identification. Churches, as noted, have been a major source of participants for IMPACT's community leadership training program. However, Mary explained, church is something of a red flag for preservationists. "Churches...and I'm not religious...I'm

not against religion, I'm just not religious. But I've got to tell you, and a lot of civic activists will tell you, that the churches, like the universities, can be horrible for neighborhoods and communities. Horrible! The Catholic Church, Protestant churches, not just these relatively new churches, but traditional, older churches too." She proceeded to give a number of examples, including the destruction of one of Chicago's historic Italian neighborhoods and later Maxwell Street, home of the Chicago blues, due to university expansion. Mary and Judy were outraged and worked on the campaign to save Maxwell Street.

I was curious to know what Mary would like to tell the Bethel Outreach congregation if she could. "Well," she replied, "I'd ask them if they care about their own history. And if that is so, we would expect you to, we respect your traditions, so we would expect you to respect ours....I'd want to know whether they care about their own traditions and their own history. If yours, then why not ours too?"

Over the course of this project, I often wondered whether SSHS members did respect or have an interest in the traditions, histories, and belief systems of community residents who they deemed their opponents. This was a more glaring case of differences than most, but it adhered to a pattern that I had observed countless times, and not just with this organization. Because in Silver Spring and Montgomery County, as in so many communities, decisions are made through processes that accentuate differences and divide people into us vs. them camps, dialogue rarely occurs. When given an opportunity to testify, people are required to follow procedures, adhere to time limits, and to present their case as strongly as possible. The goal is to win. Contests are talked about in militaristic terms, as "battles,"

"fights," and "wars." And for those who *are* heavily engaged in civic affairs, it may become difficult to respect fellow citizens who are not.

Judy, who spoke often and proudly of her New Left background, admitted having developed a great deal of skepticism about democracy. At one point, during our second interview, she told me: "Well, I think people basically, people are not very bright. They're just not. I mean your average person is a person of basic intelligence. What can I say? They're average people and they're selfish. They look after themselves and their families. I have a very jaded view...I almost disbelieve in democracy because it isn't working, you know? Maybe we should have a means test for voting." Later in our session, I mentioned a William Greider op-ed piece that recommended politicians talk with everyday people, to which she replied again: "I think that the people are stupid. Isn't that always the best thing to say, 'listen to the people'? To hell with the people, you know? I used to be a real democrat, you know, small 'd' and thought yeah, you have to listen to the people, let the people decide. That was SDS's motto. What if they decide that they have an inalienable right to an SUV?"<sup>44</sup> Based on various comments I had heard about the bank building controversy, I sensed that the SSHS view of those who filled the room at the M-NCPPC that night was that they were ignorant.

Core SSHS members typically characterize people as being either "good guys" or "bad guys." Those with opposing views are sometimes described as "evil." Knowing that other players in the redevelopment process are prone to do the same thing, I asked Mary what bothers her most about some of the common perceptions others have of preservationists. "It doesn't bother me per se," she responded. "It only

bothers me because we might not be able to accomplish what we want to accomplish. I don't care what people think, really. In itself, I really don't care. But if it affects what we're trying to accomplish, I care." And then she added: "Because I think we're right. And they're wrong."<sup>45</sup>

This tendency to divide others into categories, friend or foe, right or wrong, good or evil, has implications for SSHS members as they navigate the increasingly diverse social landscape of Silver Spring. This is evident in situations such as the confrontations that have begun to occur with Bethel World Outreach Church. When pressed, SSHS members may express an interest in issues of cultural diversity, but it is not something they voluntarily bring up. Nor have steps so far been taken to diversify membership, incorporate lost histories into narratives, or to acknowledge that there is legitimacy in the different meanings buildings hold for others. Choosing not to take such steps could, as Jerry recognizes, portend further conflicts in the future.

One constant sticking point for SSHS members that is accentuated by the increasing demographic diversity is that they focus on origins as opposed to multiple histories of use over time. This approach privileges a structure's original appearance or façade, those responsible for its construction, and those who first used it, over anything that has transpired since. This can strike many, particularly those who find their stories missing, as exclusionary. So for example, in the narratives developed by Jerry for his walking tours, the Silver Spring National Bank building is still referred to as if it is the bank building, even though it has not housed a bank in many years. Meanwhile, its current use as an office building for a large African immigrant church

is downplayed, as are any intervening chapters in its history. In terms of preservation, SSHS's aim is to see that at least the *exteriors* of buildings are preserved as they were initially designed. This means, for example, that when SSHS members recently realized that alterations were being made to the front entrance of the bank building (its doors were being replaced) steps were taken to halt the process.<sup>46</sup>

If SSHS members were to base their work on the notion of struggle and contested points of view, as Mitchell Schwarzer recommends and as the larger preservation movement is doing, they might develop a deeper sense of understanding of the histories of the bank building and Little Tavern hamburger stand. Schwarzer, a professor of architectural history and theory with a background as a preservation planner, points out that the focus on buildings' origins is an ideological choice and that other approaches might be selected.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting changes in the field, he argues that preservationists, particularly those working in culturally diverse societies, need to entertain some of the alternatives. "For historic preservation...one of the implications of cultural diversity is a reorientation of historical meanings away from the notion of originality and toward a perspective that includes those who used and contributed to a building over its life history."<sup>48</sup> Elaborating on why this is so important, he comments that "buildings lose their original intent and acquire new meanings. They become potent images of a society constructed around movement, assimilation and, unfortunately, exclusion."<sup>49</sup>

Entertaining alternatives of this sort is possible in Silver Spring if SSHS members take steps to engage in dialogue, something that happens too infrequently in Silver Spring. Dialogue demands openness, a willingness to listen, and a respect for

diverse points of view, something that is challenging given both the community's history and its political structures, most notably the public hearing. It is also important to be well-versed in prevailing developments in the field of historic preservation.

*God Bless America and Barber Shop Quartets,  
Celebrating One Version of the Past*

Pulling open the heavy wooden and glass-plated door of the B & O Station in November 2002, I was surprised to find a room filled with people. Some were seated in refurbished, period, tubular chrome chairs and couches, their Naugahyde coverings adding splashes of maroon to a room dominated by pale green and cream. Many others milled about, visiting with friends and neighbors, or checking out various railroad displays and historic preservation literature. Glancing over the crowd, I saw familiar faces. Jerry was dressed in black turtleneck and a natty wool sports jacket that day. Maria Hoey and Wayne Goldstein from MPI were there too. Maria, stepping down as president and moving out of state, would soon be succeeded by pony tailed Wayne. I also spotted Elaine McGuckian. Elaine was A.B.D., working on a doctoral dissertation in American Studies at George Washington University, when she decided to forego the academic path in favor of being a practitioner, doing public history and historic preservation work. She is now executive director of Peerless Rockville and directed the restoration of the train station. Finally, off to the side, I saw Nancy Urban. Nancy, accompanied by her husband Ed, graciously greeted people in her soft South Carolina accent.



Fig. 81. Jerry with retired B & O station manager

It would have been hard for anyone to miss seeing Walter Gottlieb running around the room that day. Walter is the intense local documentary filmmaker I first encountered at the Tastee Diner the last morning it was open for business at Georgia and Wayne in June 2000. With film crew for a new project on the train station in tow, I watched as Walter invited attendees to offer reminiscences or to speak about ways that this building contributes to Silver Spring's "sense of place."

Elected officials were visible too, including Ida Ruben, the Maryland State Senator with the trademark, platinum blond beehive do, and Blair Ewing, the recently defeated Montgomery County Council Member. Long popular with historic preservationists and other "Slow Growth" folks, Ewing is not a favorite of "Pro-Growth" advocates, most notably County Executive Doug Duncan who masterminded an aggressive and costly campaign to see Ewing ousted from office. Duncan, widely known to be pinning his political fortunes in part on the "revitalization" of downtown Silver Spring was absent from the event. But former

station manager Robert Davis was there. So were Bruce Elliott from the B & O Railway Historical Society, dressed in blue conductor's suit, and the four-member MarChuck Construction Company crew which carried out the meticulous restoration.

It took only seconds before I was struck by something else about the group that had gathered. With the exception of one MARC commuter train employee, here for work, all of the attendees, guests of honor, and presenters were white. Accustomed to walking downtown Silver Spring's streets and to patronizing places like the Tastee Diner, Kefa Cafe, and City Place Mall, this was a bit jarring, especially given that Silver Spring is a majority non-white community. But you would have never known it from the assembled crowd. Nor would you have guessed it from the various speakers pontificating on the historical significance of this structure. And you most certainly would not have sensed it from the entertainment, the Potomac River Rascals Barbershop Quartet, a group of white-haired men donning white shirts, bright red vests and bow ties. Topped with straw hats decorated with stars-and-stripes, they performed renditions of such popular and patriotic standards as "I've Been Working on the Railroad" and "God Bless America." Taking this all in, I felt as if I had engaged in a bit of time travel. To borrow a phrase from urban planner Kevin Lynch, I found myself asking, "What time is this place?"<sup>50</sup>

But it was not only people of color who were missing; none of the white civic activists I had met outside of the small historic preservationist circle were there. As I continued looking around the room, it occurred to me that who is absent in any particular setting is often as revealing as who is present. This has been true at other events sponsored by the historical society, including its tours.



Fig. 82. Potomac River Rascals perform at rededication ceremony

On another occasion, an annual meeting of the Historical Society, also held at the train station, a discussion of how to decorate the Silver Spring train station was revealing of problematic attitudes some members have regarding multiculturalism. Eighteen people were present that evening, six men and twelve women, all white, and most over fifty years old. Toward the end of what turned out to be a heated meeting—more on that will follow—Nancy Urban proposed a Christmas tree project. What she envisioned, she told the others, was placing a Christmas tree in front of one of the windows at the back of the main room of the train station. This would make it visible for passengers on the Metro trains as they passed by. Keeping the tree in character of the setting, Nancy said that she planned on covering it with decorations from the 1940s and 1950s. Jerry, who appeared relieved to have gotten past some of the tense moments of the evening, volunteered that he had an artificial tree to donate.

At this point one of the attendees, noting that not everyone in Silver Spring shares the same religious traditions or symbols, wondered if something should be

done to address that fact. "A tree is not religious," countered one of the core members. "Do we need to feature symbols of all the major religions?" one of the older members asked. "I'd feel bad if we couldn't have a tree because it's not politically correct," she added. Jerry agreed, "But, Montgomery County is what it is, so you have to count on there being objections." To which the member who argued that a tree is not a religious symbol said, to scattered laughter, "Well, maybe we need to call it the Diversity Tree." The discussion dropped at that point with Jerry putting forth his motion to donate the tree and Nancy and one of the other members talking about the ornaments they planned on contributing, all of which Nancy stressed again must come from the 1940s and 1950s.

*Keeping the Door Closed, Historic Preservationists among Themselves and Others*

Gary Fine writes that, "Every group—of whatever size and with whatever instrumental goals—develops a culture: a bounded set of images and traditions that come to characterize those individuals to themselves and often to outsiders.... This culture is a constitutive feature of the group, and it distinguishes insiders from those outside of the group's boundary."<sup>51</sup>

At the close of the annual membership meeting Jerry confided with several people that the conflicts that erupted during the evening had left him sick to his stomach, wanting to go home and throw up. He wondered how he could continue to be president of the organization. This meeting had been delayed six months because of suspicions on the part of at least one of the group's officers and some of its core members that some people had joined the Historical Society en mass as a way of

overthrowing its leadership when elections were held. In particular, they noted that members of the pro-business, pro-development Chamber of Commerce had joined and that the Chamber had always been opposed to historic preservation. While the election went off without a hitch, none of those members being present, and the current slate of officers facing no opposition, tempers flared among long-time members over another matter.

What became apparent that evening was just how insular the core group of the historical society is. Toward the beginning of the session two women, both involved in other groups as well (including the Silver Spring Women's Club and Friends of the Silver Spring Library) made known their displeasure with officers and a handful of other members making "major decisions exclusive of the whole group." Having been included in some of the email exchanges between key members, I had wondered about this myself. Whatever the issue it seemed that a select group, usually the same or nearly the same in composition was invited to be part of exchanges, but never were all seventy-five or eighty members included.

The woman who first spoke up said that she was "resentful," that she wanted the organization to be "democratic." Judy and Mary Reardon were defensive, Mary pointing out that this was a group with "limited resources," and questioning whether all members needed to have a vote on "everything the organization does." To this statement, a second woman who shared the feeling of being shut off from an inner circle took things a step further. "I want this to be a democratic group, too, and I think that all members should be polled before a decision is made." And then it became

apparent why communications were restricted. "It's ridiculous to save everything," said the woman.

As I later learned, officers and other preservation activists had never trusted this person because she had never been consistent on the issue of preservation and had not always aligned with them on which buildings merited saving and which did not, nor on revitalization proposals. Trying to soften the exchange a bit, her cohort stated again, "This [democratically] is how things function in our society," adding: "We are preservationists and we want to back you, but we need to be part of the decision-making." Addressing the two, the core member known for taking the preservationist cause to its extreme (i.e. for wanting to save everything) said, "We will fight to save everything because we're a preservationist organization." This point of view, which I knew was not shared by others, provoked Jerry to say, "It's a fantasy to think we can save everything."

Emotions on both sides heated up as the conversation continued. One of the core members explained to those pressing for regular communications that in the midst of a crisis it was impossible to do what they needed to do, to act quickly and mobilize, if they needed to alert the full membership. "You act as if we don't have telephones and email," responded one of the women. That comment irked Judy, who told the woman: "I belong to a lot of organizations and I don't remember them checking in to make decisions. They don't ask me and I trust them because I believe in their mission." As things started to wind down, Judy asked, "The inactive people want to make decisions about what the active members are doing?" To which one of

the women on the opposite side said, "People join, we pay a fee, so we want and have a right to know what's going on."

The next day Jerry wrote me: "Last night was awful. I was so stressed out when I left I went home and had a beer (and I don't even drink beer!) Hopefully you acquired some fodder for your dissertation. Historic preservation...what a friggin' incendiary subject."<sup>52</sup> I did acquire some fodder that evening. Too often active members of the Silver Spring Historical Society seem intent on maintaining existing conflicts. There appears to be little openness to those who hold views different from theirs on matters related to preservation and the built environment. Face-to-face meetings seldom occur even with the full membership, allowing the maintenance of the cohesion that has formed among those in the inner circle, and little, if any effort is made to expand the group and to bring in members of diverse backgrounds or viewpoints. Only members who share the worldview of the half dozen or so at the center are consulted and then only on occasion.

By contrast, as we shall see, those involved with IMPACT have face-to-face meetings regularly and engage in many other deliberate efforts to work with communities directly. Graduates of the leadership training program come together monthly to continue working on projects, board and staff members meet more regularly than that, and members of the community of various backgrounds and viewpoints are invited to be part of those and other gatherings. Leadership through the facilitation of meetings is shared and an atmosphere of respect leads to all present being heard. Although those involved with both groups convey passion for their community, what is noticeable is that there is no crossover between these groups, a

matter that will be explored in further detail in the conclusion. Both organizations, I contend, could benefit from exchanges with one another. Lacking such opportunities, stereotyping continues, and individuals involved in the two groups are kept from appreciating what others know and value about the community.

### *Appreciating Members' Remembered and Imagined Pasts*

Even with its shortcomings—the areas noted where SSHS could benefit from self-evaluation and concerted work—it is important not to lose sight of the value of the vision that many of those in SSHS cling to. In some ways, the nostalgia for small businesses where shop owners and staff recognize their customers and take the time to make friendly conversation and to develop relationships, intersects with values of other civic activists. For example, as I will explain in later chapters, those aligned with IMPACT Silver Spring fear that revitalization will contribute to the loss of independently owned businesses that give immigrants and people of color, among others, opportunities to become more integral members of the community. In the case of both organizations, whether fully accurate or not, the types of relationships that grow out of such commercial enterprises are viewed in stark contrast to the encounters one has in chain stores.

Furthermore, having spent hours talking with people like Judy and Jerry, exchanging emails with them, taking Jerry's tour, it becomes hard to overlook the delight that SSHS members find in the landscape of Silver Spring's CBD or the passion that guides them. I think of Judy telling me more than once about how much she enjoyed the old thrift shops, especially the store that sold used books and tropical fish, and the restaurant on Bonifant that was shaped like a boat. Another occasion

where this pleasure was evident came from Jerry's successful recruitment of "Zippy the Pinhead" cartoonist Bill Griffith to devote a Sunday strip to the moving of the Taste Diner.<sup>53</sup>

The more passionate political perspective of people like the Reardons, Joyce, and Marcie is also worth remembering, it seeming appropriate given the scale of changes taking place and the lack of local representation in unincorporated Silver Spring. These members voice the belief that historic preservation is about agency and control, more than anything else. Without the zeal of the current group of preservation advocates and those who preceded them, the landscape of downtown Silver Spring would likely lack some of the character and history that it has maintained. And in the summer of 2005, with the new Downtown Silver Spring project having proven to be a success, increasing numbers of people in the wider community are developing an appreciation for historic preservation and local history. Jerry shares with me that he has recently been approached by the manager of a new Trader Joe's grocery store to serve as a consultant on its décor, which will prominently feature symbols of Silver Spring's history. He also tells me that a developer of a future condominium project has solicited his advice for a mural of historic Silver Spring scenes that will grace one of the exterior expanses.

In the following chapters, I will consider additional reasons that local preservationists find themselves in conflict with fellow civic activists, but first I want to turn to a more in-depth look at a group of residents who have had a very different relationship with the built environment of downtown Silver Spring, and who therefore view its history in sharply different terms.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 389 and 397-9. See also: Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, "The Dimensions of Nostalgia," in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989), 1-17; Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (NY: The Free Press, 1979); Greg Dickinson, "Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 1 (1997): 1-27; Paul Grange, "Theorizing Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be," chapter in *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 19-40; Thomas Hine, "Preservation's Shackles: Is the Movement Doomed to Enshrine an Imagined Past?," *Architectural Record* (November 2001), 90-2; Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Christopher Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," *Harper's*, November 1984, 65-70; Jackson Lears, "Looking Backward: In Defense of Nostalgia," *Lingua Franca* (December/January 1998), 59-66; David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (1975): 1-36; Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): 453-64; Keith Tester, *The Life and Times of Post-Modernity* (NY: Routledge, 1993); Bryan Turner, "A Note on Nostalgia," *Theory, Culture & Society* 4 (1987): 147-56; Elizabeth Wilson, "Looking Backward: Nostalgia and the City," in *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory*, ed. Sallie Westwood and John Williams (NY: Routledge, 1997), 125-39.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert E. Stipe (ed.), *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place," 28.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Silver Spring Then & Again," *Silver Spring Voice*, June 2003, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Silver Spring Then & Again," *Silver Spring Voice*, November 2003, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> McCoy, interview, 13 August 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Judy Reardon, interview, 11 November 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Judy Reardon, interview, 3 June 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Silver Spring Then & Again," *Silver Spring Voice*, May 2003, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Davis, "Miracle Mile Revisited": 107.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Wood, "Vietnamese American Place Making in Northern Virginia," *The Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1997): 58-72.

<sup>13</sup> Jaeggi, interview, 23 July 2003.

<sup>14</sup> David Snyder, "In Silver Spring, Meals on Wheels: Loyal Customers Toast Taster Diner as Eatery Moves On Down the Road," *Washington Post*, 28 June 2000, sec. C, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Hurley, "From Hash House": 1301.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, Perseus Book Group, 2001), 89-91.

<sup>17</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Spare Bowl America Building," *Gazette*, 7 May 2003, sec. A, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys*, 185, 189.

<sup>19</sup> Wiley Miller, "Non Sequitur," Universal Press Syndicate, 17 February 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Silver Spring Then & Again," *Silver Spring Voice*, May 2003, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 20 June 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Wayne Goldstein, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 21 June 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 21 June 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Garance Burke, "Little Taste of History in Silver Spring: Preservationists Hope to Save Burger Joint that Stands in Arts Group's Way," *Washington Post*, 27 June 2003, sec. B, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> McCoy, "Silver Spring Then & Again, May 2003.

<sup>26</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 31 July 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Burke, "Little Taste of History."

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous letter (names withheld) to Susan Velasquez, Chair, Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, 9 July 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Gottlieb, *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*.

<sup>30</sup> History Buffs Lament Sale of Café on eBay," *USA Today*, 20 March 2003, <[http://www.usatoday.com/tech/webguide/internetlife/2003-03-20-ebay-tavern\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/webguide/internetlife/2003-03-20-ebay-tavern_x.htm)> (13 May 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Garance Burke, "At Former Tavern, History Is Served," *Washington Post*, 27 July 2003, sec. C, p. 6.

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<sup>32</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, "Historic—Warts and All," *Washington Post*, 2 August 2003, sec. A, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Minneapolis and St. Paul have established reputations as cities with long progressive or liberal histories, home to leaders like Hubert Humphrey, a national champion of civil rights. Like liberal/progressive Montgomery County, Maryland, stories of segregated suburbs and racist practices in places like hotels and restaurants are not widely circulated. As Donna Gaines, paraphrasing Paulo Freire, writes in *Teenage Wasteland*: "History is always written by those who survive, rarely by those silenced in it." (12) She goes on to describe how, like all towns, Bergenfeld, New Jersey, the site of her ethnographic research, "has no 'real' history. There are several histories running concurrently, overlapping as each generation imposes itself upon the terrain." (47) These include the "official history," the history that is repeated over and over again in government documents, commissioned reports, and too often by local historical societies that emphasize "heritage," and then the much less public oral histories, histories that largely remain unnoticed by the dominant social group.

<sup>34</sup> Marc Fisher, "Montgomery's Past is Nothing to Sniff At," *Washington Post*, 21 June 2005, sec. B, p. 1; Kathryn Lynch, "Glen Echo Looks Back at Past, Warts and All," *Washington Post*, 23 June 2005, sec. ME, p. 13; and Ann E. Marrimow, "Marking a Park's Social Revolution," *Washington Post*, 11 September 2005, sec. C, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Montgomery County Archives, Lincoln Park Historical Foundation and Society, <<http://www.montgomerycountychives36.html.Lincoln>> (3 December 4, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> McCoy, interview, 13 August 2003.

<sup>37</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 3 June 2003.

<sup>38</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 5 June 2003.

<sup>39</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 11 November 2002.

<sup>40</sup> M. Reardon, e-mail message to select members, 25 July 2003.

<sup>41</sup> M. Reardon, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 28 July 2003.

<sup>42</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 31 July 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 11 November 2002.

<sup>45</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 31 July 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to select SSHS members, 30 July 2004; Text of initial message sent was as follows:

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All,

I saw NO permitting signs on the building.

The entire Georgia Avenue entrance was replaced with new glass with thin, brushed white metal dividers.

They are obviously, to anyone looking at them, new and out of character with the building.

The doors themselves are the worse. They are glass doors with the same metal frames. But the left door has a contemporary tubular, vertically positioned "C"-shaped handle while the right door has a horizontally positioned latch handle that you push down to open the door!

Oh how I am kicking myself for not taking photos of the 50+ year old doors that were there, especially those wonderful, "meaty" aluminum handles that always reminded me of the tail fins on 1950s automobiles!

The owners have NO IDEA and certainly DON'T CARE that they are destroying the historical integrity of this building.

I PREDICT that the next stage is to envelope the entire facade in the beige and cream Dryvit so it will "blend" in with the movie theater that they have already completely destroyed.

Jerry

<sup>47</sup> Mitchell Schwarzer, "Historic Character and the Representation of Cultural Diversity," *Historic Preservation Forum* (November/December 1993): 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

<sup>51</sup> Gary Alan Fine, "Public Narration and Group Culture: Discerning Discourse in Social Movements," in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 128-9.

<sup>52</sup> Jerry A. McCoy, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 5 November 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Liz M. Zylwitis, "'Zippy' to Feature Tastee: Diner Will be Subject of Nationally Syndicated Comic Strip Oct. 22," *Gazette*, 4 October 2000, sec. A, p. 4; and Michael E. Ruane, "Diner Moves Into Sunday Comics," *Washington Post*, 26 October 2000, sec. ME, p. 27.

CHAPTER 6:  
ONION SOUP AT CRIVELLA'S:  
MEMORIES OF A SEGREGATED DOWNTOWN SILVER SPRING

The Anchor Inn is a large, family-owned seafood restaurant in Wheaton, a suburb that borders Silver Spring.<sup>1</sup> Approaching it one rainy afternoon, I was aware that had this been the early 1960s rather than June 2003, I would not be joining Roscoe Nix for a meal there. I would have been seated, but he would not. On this day, however, there was nothing out of the ordinary in a white man and a black man meeting for lunch.

This chapter examines the built environment of downtown Silver Spring from the perspective of four long-time African American residents. Three are in their seventies and eighties now, and were introduced to Silver Spring when it was highly segregated. Two were "trailblazers," Roscoe Nix fighting for the enforcement of the county's public accommodations law and Ruby Rubens and her husband integrating Silver Spring neighborhoods. Like "Stan," a third person featured, they express ambivalence about revitalization and show little interest in preserving a past that was not inclusive of people of color. By contrast, Virginia Mahoney who is a younger and a somewhat more recent arrival is featured in part because her experience with downtown Silver Spring has been different from theirs. Although she and her husband experienced some of the effects of a history of segregation when they first

moved to the area in the 1970s, things had begun to change and Virginia expresses warmer memories of the period prior to revitalization. She says that she felt more positively about the community then than she does today. This precipitated her recent move to a nearby Washington, D.C. neighborhood.

I will look at the life histories of all four of these individuals and show how their backgrounds have affected how they think about changes that have occurred and are occurring in the built and social environments of Silver Spring. This will reveal contrasts between the historical narratives that they carry with them, and those held by residents introduced in the previous chapter. In this way, this chapter serves to fill some of the historical gaps illustrated in that chapter. It shows, too, why some in the community are less prone to being nostalgic about third places such as the Little Tavern chain.

*"This Is a Private Club": Roscoe Nix and the Right to Be Served*

As soon as I opened the door to the Anchor Inn, I spotted him, a neatly dressed man in his early eighties leaning on a cane. After briefly introducing ourselves, we were ushered to a table in the corner of one of the restaurant's crowded and spacious dining rooms, assuming it would be a relatively quiet place to visit. For several minutes we sat in silence mulling over what to order from the restaurant's extensive menu of chowders, sandwiches, and salads. This was unlike other experiences I had had, in which the people I was interviewing were so eager to talk that we had launched into conversation immediately, with menus left closed until the third or fourth interruption from the server.

Upon giving our waiter our orders, Roscoe Nix and I began a wide-ranging conversation, touching on subjects as varied as the sorry state of the current political scene and his regrets that Paul Robeson had chosen to align himself with the Communist Party. Mostly, though, we focused on his experiences with places that had over the course of his lifetime excluded or in other ways discriminated against him, as well as his active resistance against such practices. Soft-spoken, with a sharp mind and keen sense of detail, Nix described his childhood in segregated Alabama, his service in a racist military, the liberating experience of attending Howard University, and other events that led him to become a civil rights and community leader in Montgomery County. Most notably, he has served as President of the County chapter of the NAACP in the 1980s, as Director of the Maryland Human Relations Commission, and took his place as the only black member of the Montgomery County School Board from 1974 to 1978.

If there is one pivotal event that propelled Nix to become a prominent local figure in the civil rights movement it is one that involved a seemingly simple decision parallel to the one that the two of us had made. Only in that case it concerned where to eat lunch with an African American friend, his minister, in downtown Silver Spring in 1962, shortly after Montgomery County's Public Accommodations Ordinance had taken effect.

"When I came out here to work [for the U.S. Labor Department]," he recalls, "there were three kinds of places. There were places African Americans could go into if they were in the company of whites. There were those places that wouldn't serve you if you were by yourself. And there were those who wouldn't serve you if you

were in the presence of whites OR by yourself."<sup>2</sup> Even though the County Council had passed its anti-discrimination ordinance in January of 1962 (to take effect on February 15<sup>th</sup>) there were complications, Nix explained. "The Council had passed an ordinance in which if a restaurant had a Class B license [which allowed sale of wine or beer, but 'average daily receipts from the sale of food exceed income from alcoholic beverages,'] they had to serve you, but if it was a Class D, and most of their business was in liquor, they didn't have to serve you."<sup>3</sup> This provision had been a bone of contention. After the ordinance was put into effect with its tavern exemption, the editorial staff of the *Montgomery Sentinel* wrote:

The question now arises—why should bars and taverns be permitted to continue to discriminate while other businesses are ordered by law not to? Councilman William F. Hickey claims this is necessary because they are the most likely scenes of disturbances. The implication, therefore, appears to be that if you drink beer or wine in a restaurant, you are less likely to be offended by the presence of a Negro than if you drink in a bar or tavern.

We find this more than a bit far-fetched. Our observations, strictly as a teetotaler in search of the facts, has been that people can and do get just as obnoxious in restaurants as in bars, after they have drunk overmuch.<sup>4</sup>

Roscoe Nix was well aware that Montgomery County had passed the ordinance and knew of the tavern exemption, but mainly because Crivella's Wayside Restaurant was not a bar, he could see no reason why he and an African American friend should not lunch at the downtown Silver Spring family-owned business. "I had a friend who was a minister who came out to have lunch with me one day," he remembers. "We were looking for a place to eat lunch and spotted one." The friend asked if they were welcome to go inside, to which Nix replied, "Sure, we can go in there." So they did. He recounts what happened next:

We went in there and immediately this waitress came over and told us 'all of these places are reserved, so you can't sit down.' So we left. He [the friend] said, 'I think she's lying.' So what we did, we had a friend who looked Caucasian and we decided that we were going to go in there at around 11:45, this may have been a couple of days or a week later even. And we said to her, 'Get something on the table, whatever it is.' The quickest thing she could get was something she didn't like, onion soup.

After Peggy, a co-worker from the Labor Department, had placed her order, Roscoe entered with a second African American woman friend. This other woman, he said, "was obviously black. And the two of us, we went in and she [Peggy] said, 'Come on over and have a seat.' The waitress said, 'you can't sit there.' And we said, 'Why?'" At their request, the waitress brought the manager to them. "He said, 'This is a private club,'" to which Peggy responded, "Well, I'm not a member of the club." The manager told Peggy that there would be no charge for her soup and then called the police. As Nix remembers, the officer was polite but said that there was nothing he could do about the refusal of service. "Trying to be nice, he said, 'Well, you know, they can refuse to serve you. They can refuse to serve a dirty white man.' So we left."

Some of the ambiguities and weaknesses of the ordinance were becoming obvious, says Nix, and he and others wanted to take action to make sure that it was being fairly and fully enforced. His early notoriety in Silver Spring and Montgomery stemmed from the picket lines he organized and then a complaint he filed to the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission stemming from the treatment he and others had received at Crivella's. Both acts, he explains, had deep roots in his life history.

Greenville, Alabama with a population of 5,500 to 6,000 was, says Nix, a "one-street town." And because his family was African American, he points out, their

access to places on that street was severely restricted. "You couldn't go to the movies," he says, before correcting himself: "Well, you could go to the movies and sit up in the balcony, but our father wouldn't let us." As in so many communities—including Silver Spring and Washington, D.C.—black residents at that time had separate rules that they were expected to follow, as well as their own enclaves with parallel, though much more limited, sets of stores and activities. "There was in the African American community a movie Sunday night that was as current as the movie downtown," Nix tells me. "So that was the only movie he [his father] would take us to. He didn't want to put us through the humiliation of going through the side door [at the theater downtown]." To enter a separate door and be seated in a balcony, in his father's view, would have been tantamount to "cooperating with segregation."

Because public education in Alabama was so bad, especially for blacks in all-black schools, Nix's parents paid for each of their nine children (he was the second oldest) to attend private schools. In his teens, Nix was sent to school at the Calhoun Colored School, a boarding school founded with assistance from Booker T. Washington. It was a school that he describes as "very strict academically." Looking back, Nix recalls that the Calhoun Colored School was heavily influenced by the missionary movement of the Old Congregational Church. Its white teachers came from New England colleges and its buildings were very much out of place in Alabama. "If you were walking in the woods," he remembers, "you'd come upon what was called a 'New England community'—white buildings with green shutters, a chapel in the middle of the campus, brick walls, and a grove." Although attending the school separated him from family and peers, Nix views it as having been a positive

experience, one that helped him qualify for college. Before entering the Army in 1943, he completed three years of higher education at Alabama A & M University.

More painful than anything that happened to him in those early years, in Greenville or at school was his discovery of how servicemen were treated in the U.S. Army. "The worst discrimination I ever experienced in my life," he offers, "was in the United States Army. You have to realize that I was born in the South, raised in the South, but that wasn't a traumatic experience for me. In addition to my father doing everything he could to protect us from the worst forms of it, at the end of the day, you were in a warm community." By contrast, the Army put him in close and constant contact with whites who were hovering over him day and night and "who thought of African Americans as innately inferior and incapable." If you, as a black man, were accused of doing something, he says, you were guilty. Nix recounts once being assigned KP duty because a fellow white officer had accidentally left his shoes out from under his bed after sweeping. Another time he was denied the opportunity to go out on a date that he had arranged. "The officer said he thought he might see some dust on my gas mask." African Americans were not equal and were always expected to know their place. "When a black officer dared sit at a white table, he was sent to a psychiatrist, he was seen as crazy," Nix says. In a 1988 article in the *Post*, Nix echoed what he told me: "The thing that traumatized me was to be under racism constantly and not to have an interlude."<sup>5</sup> Having entered the service thinking that he would go on to officer's school, Nix knew after nineteen weeks of basic training that he would leave as quickly as he could, telling me that his total time in the Army was two years, nine months, six days, and five hours.

Putting the Army behind him, Nix found himself headed to Washington, D.C., where he had enrolled at Howard University in the fall of 1948. To this day, he credits his exposure to renowned thinkers at the prestigious black university for having deepened his convictions and making him well informed on topics ranging from world history, the economic system, and racial politics to international policy. As the *Post* profile reveals, the power of Nix's experience in the Army did not subside during his tenure at Howard. "On his second day in Washington, he was sightseeing on Constitution Avenue when he joined a group picketing the White House over a recent lynching in Georgia. It was his first protest. Soon his letters to editors began, protesting the postponement of a television program featuring singer Paul Robeson and touting the work of the NAACP."<sup>6</sup>

This need on the part of a discharged African American serviceman to speak out and to take action against racial injustice was not uncommon according to several historians. In his book *Race Rebels*, Robin D.G. Kelley elaborates on the roots of such expectations:

Black Americans were expected to support a war against Hitler—whose plan for Aryan supremacy was treated as a threat to Western democracy—while white supremacy and segregation continued to be a way of life (at home). African Americans, especially the youth, believed racism could no longer be justified on home soil, and those who were unwilling to tolerate it any longer exhibited greater militancy in public spaces....

He continues:

Contrary to the experiences of white workers, for whom public space eventually became a kind of 'democratic space' where people of different class backgrounds shared city theaters, public conveyances, streets, and parks, for black people white-dominated public space was vigilantly undemocratic and potentially dangerous."<sup>7</sup>

As Lizabeth Cohen notes:

Above all, in community after community north and south during the late 1940s and the 1950s, ordinary people waged the first stage of the postwar civil rights struggle at the grass roots by demanding access to public accommodations—to the stores, restaurants, hotels, housing developments, theaters, bowling alleys, and other sites of consumption where consumers were expected, and black Americans increasingly expected, to fulfill their rights and obligations of purchasers as citizens.<sup>8</sup>

It was within the context of his upbringing, the discrimination he had experienced, and knowing that he was part of a larger movement to help correct widespread injustices, that Nix, along with his friends and colleagues, responded quickly and forcefully to their treatment at Crivella's Wayside in downtown Silver Spring.

The case against Crivella's is especially significant historically because it was the first to be aired publicly before the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission. "What we were trying to do was get them [the owners] into court," Nix explains. The complaint filed to the commission lists Roscoe Nix along with four women: Peggy Wayne, Muriel Johnson, Gwendolyn Johnson, and Minnie Blair. The group alleged that incidents of racial discrimination had occurred at Crivella's on at least four different occasions over the course of four months, April through June of 1962.<sup>9</sup> After failing to conciliate complaints over the course of a three-month period, which was its primary function, the Commission held a public hearing.

Much attention was devoted to testimony in the local and area press. The headline of a front-page story in the *Sentinel* on July 5, 1962, stated: "Anti-Bias Law to Get First Test." The story went on to note that Samuel Crivella, the restaurant owner who had been served the four-count complaint, had been in business in the

Silver Spring area for almost thirty years, ten at his then current location on East-West Highway. If evidence showed that Crivella was guilty of discrimination and non-compliance with the ordinance, he would be issued an order to "cease and desist" his defiance of the law. If he failed to obey the Commission's order to do so, the case would then be turned over to the County or State's Attorney as either a civil or a criminal matter. Penalties of up to \$1000 and six months in jail were possible if the courts decided that Crivella was guilty.<sup>10</sup>

Two weeks later, the *Sentinel* featured a front-page story reporting that the atmosphere was "charged" at the first hearing. "Negroes, embittered over being treated differently from other Americans when it comes to food and lodging, were there in an uncompromising mood. Equally hostile in mood were the segregationists and those who resent bitterly Montgomery County's new law telling restaurateurs and hotel keepers they cannot refuse service to any well-behaved patron—regardless of his color."<sup>11</sup> As the case proceeded, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was joined by the Montgomery County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in monitoring and voicing complaints about how the Commission conducted itself in the Crivella case. The procedures that the Commission followed sought to achieve desegregation by conciliatory rather than punitive means.<sup>12</sup>

The outcome of the hearing was that Crivella "agreed to serve orderly customers in the future regardless of their race, color, creed, ancestry, or national origin," but with one significant stipulation. The Commission on Human Relations accepted an amendment allowing the owner to reserve "the right to determine...those

who will or will not be served for any other reason or reasons than those stated" in the ordinance.<sup>13</sup> As a result, complaints against Crivella's Wayside continued to surface, including one by Mrs. Richard A. Bernstein, "who had been in no way connected with the earlier complaints or the hearing." A story in the *Sentinel* reported that Bernstein, her two young sons, and two African American domestic workers, a maid and babysitter, were turned away from Crivella's during the dinner hour. "Mrs. Bernstein, the Commission reported, said she was told that the 'county has not yet adopted an [anti-discrimination] ordinance, although one is being considered,' and was asked to prove that she and her party 'were not members of any organization.'"<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, further actions were taken by the Commission to see that owner Sam Crivella complied. At one of its most dramatic points, that body certified the case to the County Attorney for co-action, just what Nix had hoped would happen. It was reported in the *Montgomery Sentinel* that the Assistant County Attorney speculated that the county's first judicial attempt to enforce its public accommodations ordinance might even end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>15</sup>

Two things happened to prevent the case from going forward in the courts and Roscoe Nix seeing the outcome that he and others had desired. One was that an accountant documented that purchases of alcoholic beverages exceeded those for food at Crivella's. While the owner did not have the license required of establishments that primarily sold alcohol, it was decided by the commission that Crivella would be exempt from the ordinance and that the original complaint could be dismissed. This says Nix, coincided with the election of a more conservative, "a majority segregationist" County Council. "The Human Relations Commission got scared," he

states bluntly, and consequently it permitted the case to be dropped even though Crivella's did not have the required Class B license. In 1963 the Republican-dominated Council (unusual for the County) attempted to repeal the ordinance, something which brought record turnout to public hearings and ultimately failed.<sup>16</sup> A 1983 *Washington Post* article about Roscoe Nix describes the outcome of his complaint against Crivella's, in the midst of this shift in the political culture, as "a rare defeat" for him.<sup>17</sup> The tavern exemption was repealed in 1967 after a new, more liberal council was elected.

Perhaps one of the reasons that the case received as much attention as it did, Nix speculates, is that then as now, Montgomery County residents and elected officials wanted to think of themselves as living in and representing an area that was more progressive than the rest of the state. He explains: "Montgomery County was emerging as a community that was supposed to be different from Maryland, different in the sense that Maryland had all the sympathies of the old Confederacy. It was segregated. Its schools were segregated." In a 1969 oral history interview with civic leader Henry Bain, Bain said that "the overwhelming fact that shaped Maryland Politics for many years...as was true throughout the South, was the role of the Negro in politics...." He added that Maryland, as a border state, was both a slave state and not a secessionist state, and that "...we do have a strong Southern element in our background." Bain also pointed out that the state's southern counties were tobacco counties with far larger slave and plantation economies than any other part of the state.<sup>18</sup> Still, Montgomery County had a tobacco economy and therefore required many slaves. As is clear from reading contemporary "official histories" of Silver

Spring and Montgomery County, "most people," in Nix's words, "don't want to identify with that past." This has been especially true, he contends, because so much of Montgomery County's population consists of newcomers who have moved to the area from other states, and who tend to be highly educated, well-paid professionals. Voters are overwhelmingly liberal and elected officials are nearly all affiliated with the Democratic Party.

When the County passed its ordinance, the *Washington Post* editorial staff had praised it as "a model of quiet decency," and concluded that it "has lived up to its [Montgomery County's] fine tradition of equitable government for all its people."<sup>19</sup> Even the rare Republican officeholder, such as David Scull—who served as chairman of the Montgomery County Republican Central Committee and of the State Central Committee in the late 1950s and early 1960s—was known for taking liberal stances on issues related to racism.<sup>20</sup>

As noted elsewhere, despite the long history of discrimination and the fight to end it, local histories typically fail to acknowledge these aspects of the past. Reading them one remains oblivious to the racism that shaped the community's past and the ongoing perceptions of many residents. Similarly, monthly SSHS tours and "Silver Spring Then and Again" columns neglect to mention one of the most fundamental facets of the area's historical development. SSHS's emphasis on heritage and the county's on public relations play a role in such erasures.

Other materials, though smaller in number, reveal that through much of its history the suburbs of Montgomery County were not fully accessible to people of color. For example, Constance Green's *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations*

*in the Nation's Capital* shows that while Federal Housing Authority policies encouraged white flight from the District of Columbia to nearby suburbs like Silver Spring, it restricted people of color, primarily African Americans, from following suit. She writes:

...none of this outward movement benefited Negroes. Virginia and Maryland property-owners, real estate dealers, and builders stood fast against renting or selling to colored families irrespective of their financial resources. Relying on a clause in the Federal Housing Act stipulating that guaranteed loans must be confined to projects that would not disrupt neighborhoods, banks refused to make Negroes loans for houses outside predominantly colored areas.<sup>21</sup>

Steven Lubar's "Trolley Lines, Land Speculation and Community-Building," cited in the Introduction, illustrates that from the start development companies in the Washington D.C. suburb instituted the types of racist policies Green describes. He writes that the Chevy Chase Land Company, founded in 1890, was the first and most important of these companies, and had a "vision" that included restrictions on home ownership. "The Chevy Chase Land Company set the style for developments for the next fifty years," Lubar says.<sup>22</sup> But Lubar devotes much of his attention to The Woodside Development Corporation. Founded in 1922, it sought to take advantage of the growing interest in suburbia by advertising that its development, Woodside Park, offered scenic beauty, community, and convenient location, all at affordable prices. According to Lubar, its ads and brochures also stressed that it provided "restrictions to insure the proper development of the area."<sup>23</sup> Prospective residents were promised in promotional materials that a civic association "will have entire charge of maintaining the improvements, enforcing the restrictions, and promoting the general welfare of the community."<sup>24</sup> Again, if there were any doubts about what these restrictions were, they were spelled out more clearly in deeds, and one of the clauses

which read: "For the purpose of sanitation and health, no owner will sell or lease the said land to any one of a race whose death rate is at a higher percentage than the white race."<sup>25</sup> Lubar comments that such statements were typical for subdivisions built during the period.

In 1968, the year the County passed its Fair Housing Law, Nix and his wife purchased a home in the Kemp Mill section of Silver Spring. The experience that they had was quite different from what others described in testimony in favor of such a law, some of which is featured below. "It was not problematical, at least as far as that community was concerned. Most of the neighbors were friendly, though there were a few exceptions." He tells me that though it was "overwhelmingly white" at the time, he and his wife were not trailblazers when it came to neighborhood integration. There were other blacks living there. "Now there are Asians and Hispanics as well," he adds.

Nix expresses ambivalence about downtown Silver Spring's revitalization, largely because of its likely effect on the community's diversity. He says that he is pleased to see something being done. "I think that it should have been done before. I'm glad that it's going to happen." But he goes on to voice concern about displacement, "People who will be able to populate Silver Spring now will be people who are upper middle class," he says. Others, in his view, will end up in Prince George's County and other, more affordable parts of the area. He makes a connection between Silver Spring and the U Street neighborhood of Washington, D.C. "U Street used to be the central street in D.C., where black folks would put on their fine clothes and walk up and down. It will become another Georgetown." Nix described for me

his last visit to the neighborhood. "The last time I was in Ben's Chili Bowl, most of the people in there were white and when I walked down U Street, most of the folks were white. And there's a Starbucks down there and townhouses selling for \$300,000. They'll be higher than that. But you know," he concludes, "that's American history." It is this same tide of history, he points out, that is having its impact on suburban Silver Spring.

*"Whose Story Is His-Story?": Stan's Travels Through Silver Spring's Past*

Ten years Roscoe Nix's junior, a retired pharmacist and artist who I will call "Stan" is an African American who grew up in a segregated neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C. at a time when Silver Spring was considered unfriendly territory by most blacks. Because the trolley and then bus lines crossed the District's border into Silver Spring, Stan and his peers were very much conscious of it. It was part of their mental map of the metropolitan area. On occasion, for adventure and to satisfy their curiosity, he and his teenaged friends would take mass transit into the white suburb, even though they knew that they were unwanted there and were restricted from going into shops and restaurants. I met with Stan for coffee at Mayorga a few months after my conversation with Roscoe Nix. When I had proposed it as a meeting place over the phone, he responded with a: "Yeah, man. That's cool. Mayorga's a cool place." Dressed casually, laughing frequently, and at times fairly boisterous, Stan's personality and attire were in sharp contrast to Nix's, as were many of his life experiences, or at least his perceptions of them.

"Ah, it was paradise. And it was segregated," Stan says in describing his old D.C. neighborhood. "It was paradise because we controlled our own destiny, our own

definitions, our own social patterns."<sup>26</sup> Elaborating on what it was like, he tells me that "everybody knew everybody" and there were not the distinctions that there are today separating African Americans from one another by status. "We all had to sit at the back of the bus if we were on the bus so there was no bullshit. 'I'm better than you.' Because you got leveled when you had to get on that bus." At another point in our conversation, Stan adds: "It was who you were in the community that mattered, what your neighbor thought of you. Not how you made your money....Because we know you're doing this because it's the only job around. Trash man, garbage man, bootblack, whatever. It has no connection with you."

While remembering it as "paradise," living in a segregated metropolitan area also meant that black residents grew up being very conscious of boundaries, according to Stan. When I ask him what his boundaries were during his youth, he exclaims, "Good! Good question! North Capitol Street, Fourteenth Street on the east, west Fourteenth Street, probably down to Rhode Island Avenue on the south and Park Road on the north." Then he adds: "Now inside those boundaries there were certain places that you knew you were going to have to fight your way in and out of." This, he explains, was because of "turf," which was partially though not entirely racially defined. "These are Afro-Americans that were really tough. Other Afro-Americans. You know, turf, turf, this was turf....The, what were called 'European neighborhoods,' they were just as rough, but you didn't go in there. And they didn't venture into ours because that was just turf. You didn't do that."

Downtown Washington was one of the places that he enjoyed spending time in as a teen. "Oh yeah, that was cool. There was no problem with that," he says,

adding: "But there were certain shops you couldn't go into. They wouldn't serve you." When pressed to tell me which places were accessible and which were off limits, Stan responds quickly. "Oh, Garfinkel's [a defunct department store] was off limits....Some of the shoe stores wouldn't. None of the downtown theaters; you couldn't go to any of the theaters downtown, none of the entertainment spots." The category of place he recalls being most inclusive were the city's museums. "The museums were available. I used to get on the streetcar every Sunday and ride down to the Smithsonian Museum. Ten cents, down and back....Ran straight down Seventh Street."

It was this same streetcar that Stan would occasionally ride on to Silver Spring in his youth, never imagining that one day he would be able or choose to live there. "In fact that streetcar came all the way up to Georgia and Alaska, which was right down the street from where we are now. And then it would turn around and go back. And you could ride up here." Doing so, however, was accompanied with a certain degree of risk. "Getting off was," Stan says, "you subjected yourself to harassment." Still, when asked if that was something that he did, Stan replies: "Oh, sure, man, that was a Sunday thing. Get off, walk a couple of blocks, and be very careful." Growing up, he says, his impression of the suburban community was that it was "foreign. It was like going to a foreign country." Because it held the exoticism or mystery of another land, much of Silver Spring's appeal came from seeing the natives. "Let's go visit them," he laughs. "Let's go see what they're doing. Let's go peep on them," is what Stan remembers saying and thinking. When I ask him what he discovered "them" doing, Stan laughs again: "Nothing. The same thing we were doing. They just

wouldn't let us participate. It's like Bill Withers. 'When you go to watch a monkey in the zoo, remember, the monkey's looking back at you.' That was that kind of thing." As for how he was received by people on the streets of Silver Spring, Stan tells me, "People would look at you like, 'What are you doing here?' but they wouldn't say anything." On top of receiving a cold reception, there was little that he or other African Americans venturing to the suburban downtown could do once there. "You couldn't go into any of the stores, the shops. You couldn't shop."

Like Roscoe Nix, Stan describes a world in which blacks knew what was expected of them, and as long as they "stayed in their place," it was unlikely that they would be recipients of blatant hostility. "No, no. You knew what you were supposed to do and they made you do it or hope that you would do it. There were places that we used to call 'cool.'" As an adult, Stan would discover that those places that were *not* cool for him to patronize tended to be settings where men and women of different races might mix. "There was a bar on Fourteenth Street, it was a hillbilly bar, and I used to love hillbilly music and the guys would put me out always. And I was a pharmacist, right? And they'd go, 'No, you can't come in, Doc.'" He laughs. "And I'd say, 'Man, I'm not in here to fool with your women. I just want to hear the music.'" In large part because of his status in the community, the bar's staff finally relented. "They'd let me sit on the end of the bar and I'd listen to the music." As he became something of a fixture there, things began to shift in his relationships to the place, but never fully. "Pretty soon that's how friendships develop, you know, they give you a nod, there's a seat here so you can come hear the music." However, when asked if he was no longer given any trouble by staff, he reports, "No, no. But I didn't fool with

any of their women. That was the main thing. They didn't want you fooling with their women. 'These are my women, man,'" he laughs.

Stan says he knows the stories of how blacks were treated in Silver Spring third places, including the Tastee Diner and Little Tavern, but having moved to the community a full decade after the public accommodations ordinance was instituted he did not experience discrimination in them firsthand. By the early 1970s when Stan and his wife decided that they wanted to leave D.C. for the suburbs because of differences in the quality of schools, Silver Spring was the one place where they looked. "It was just close to home, just nearby," he offers. "I didn't do any big looking around. My brother found the house and said, 'hey, let's do it.'" When asked about Tastee, he says he is aware that, "Yeah, yeah. You'd go around back. You'd put your order in around back and then you didn't get it until everybody up front was served....That was routine." As for the Little Tavern chain, Stan says: "We had a joke. The guys [behind the counter] would say, 'We don't serve colored people.' And the answer was, 'Good, we don't eat them. Give me a hotdog.'"

Knowledge of the Little Tavern chain's reputation, combined with pleasure over some of the changes being made to the CBD, particularly with the arts, led Stan to draft a letter to the M-NCPPC expressing opposition to saving Little Tavern and in favor of Pyramid Atlantic's project. Writing such a letter was something that was uncharacteristic, he explains, and therefore proof of how angry he was about the whole situation. "Not only did I write the letter," he notes, "I wrote two of them and took them personally to Parks and Planning. I don't usually do that. I lick a stamp, put a stamp on it." Here is the text of the letter that he sent to Susan Velasquez, Chair of

the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, which was read at the special hearing on Little Tavern's status:

I was born 7 decades ago in Northwest Washington, D.C. My wife and I have lived in Silver Spring for 30 years. We would like to register our support for The Pyramid Atlantic Project.

In my view, The Little Tavern should not be allowed to stand in the way of progress. The Pyramid Atlantic Project will bring another 'world class facility' to Silver Spring.

As you may know, the Little Tavern was a place that was 'very unfriendly' to people of 'color,' as were many other places in Silver Spring. Happily, those days are gone. I understand that a sculpture garden is planned for the site of the edifice. That will be nice.

Please allow the Pyramid Atlantic Project to proceed without delay.<sup>27</sup>

Stan's reaction to the Little Tavern conflict illustrates why historic preservation as it has been practiced in Silver Spring is often of little interest to African Americans, and why it is responded to with apathy, opposition, or hostility. "As long as you try to preserve it [a building], it seems to me that you're trying to give it some credence," he tells me. In the case of Little Tavern, he says, "You know, you're giving it some validity, behind the fact that it [racism] was a tradition. Phew, I don't get that." Stan says he knew nothing of the Silver Spring Historical Society before the controversy over the Little Tavern building began and was not pleased with what he learned. "It was just that I was really angry that they wanted to preserve it [LT] on the basis of quote 'tradition' and 'heritage.' You know, slavery was a tradition and a heritage, you know. What is this 'history'? And that's the magic word. I'm supposed to be mesmerized with this magic word. History? I know history."

When I tell him that I was glad his letter was read at the public hearing, because it filled in a part of the story of Silver Spring that is usually left out, he responds: "It all depends on who's doing the telling. You know, it's whose story is 'his story'? Whose story? It's said that the man who wins the war, writes the history." After noting that in Silver Spring most of those who have provided written histories of the community are white, Stan adds that whites "have a vested interest in the mythology." By producing revisionist accounts, whites "absolve themselves of responsibility for historical truths that they would rather not acknowledge," and remain blind to the associations others have with buildings such as the Little Tavern, that differ from their own.

*"We Were Warned about the Hinterlands":  
Ruby Rubens' Introduction to Silver Spring*

For Ruby Rubens, who arrived from New York City to attend Howard University in 1952, it came as a shock to discover that African Americans were openly discriminated against in terms of where they could live and where they were permitted to shop, eat, and find entertainment.

Ruby and I sat down at Mayorga for a lengthy conversation one September morning in 2003 to discuss her life and the various forms of racism she had encountered in Washington and suburban Maryland. During her years in Silver Spring, she has served in a number of county housing positions, including Fair Housing Manager for the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Development. She has also been special assistant to a former County Executive, the County's ombudsman for schools, an educational consultant, a mentor

for participants in IMPACT Silver Spring's CEP training, a founding member of the Coalition for Equitable Representation in Government, active in the NAACP, and continues to work with the Montgomery County Schools Study Circle staff.



Fig. 83. Ruby Rubens (Courtesy IMPACT Silver Spring)

Ruby, who is roughly the same age as Stan, grew up at the tip of New York's Harlem between 115<sup>th</sup> and 116<sup>th</sup>, near Columbia University's Morningside campus, a world which she remembers as being very different from ones that she would come to know beginning in college. "As far as school, as far as work, whatever, it was very diverse, very integrated," she says. By contrast, "Washington, D.C., for all intents and purposes, was still pretty much segregated by race."<sup>28</sup> Ruby describes U Street at the time as being "the hub of the black, Latin American community....Very vibrant, retail shops, entertainment, movies, the whole gamut. And most of us as students had come really from all over the world. We had a very large African and Caribbean student body." This was also a significant difference from her upbringing in New York. "In

terms of the broad color range, in terms of the language, culture, background," Ruby found greater diversity among her own race than she had known in the past.

The diversity of Howard University led to self-segregation among students similar to what Ruby encounters today when facilitating study circles with high school kids in Montgomery County. "The kids from New York and New Jersey [at Howard] kind of came together. We didn't even associate with the Southern kids...." This included natives of Washington, D.C., also viewed as "country bumpkins." Those, like Ruby, who had grown up in more cosmopolitan New York City, tended to be the most adventurous, exploring beyond the boundaries of U Street, even venturing into Silver Spring. What came as a "shock," she says, was that Howard is located "pretty much in the heart of the city, but yet once you got below U Street, it was like another world."

In the 1950s, Ruby explained, "the major, city-wide shopping was on F Street, where you had your upscale stores, as well as all your stores." She and other Howard students quickly learned they "were not welcome there." In contrast with their Southern classmates, Ruby says that being unwanted did not stop her group from venturing to such places. In fact, she tells me, they even had some subversive fun with the restrictions. "We always laughed because the Africans were much more accepted [than the African Americans], so all you had to do was put on some African garb," she laughs, "and then you were o.k." There were also those who, by virtue of lighter skin, could "pass" as white. "It was always a thrill, like at Garfinkel's or something where they didn't want you to try on stuff and we'd have one of the real pale females go in and try on all the clothes and not buy anything," she chuckles

again. "So you know," she observes, "we took it as something serious, but it was a challenge to kind of face it and laugh about it and find ways around it."

That such acts of resistance were engaged in by groups, rather than individually, was an important factor, according to Ruby. "We were all, for the most part, from families who had encouraged us...we were all kind of self-confident and aggressive." Girls in her sorority from states like Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Alabama, she recounts, had had very different experiences and ways of behaving. "The fear and the way that their parents had instilled in them a different concept of race and race relations," was striking, she says. "I think for the Southern kids, they were a little more reluctant than we were to branch out into the wider world, to dare to go to U Street and whatever and to insist on being served and waited on." She remembers at times nearly forcing some of those students into being escorted to stores like Jelleff's, "where you were waited on, but it was very reluctantly," to buy outfits that they needed for social functions. A similarly defiant attitude was reflected in her group's approach to downtown clubs. "I remember one club, oh god, what was that thing called? The Royal-something-or-other, that was downtown. And most of the guys at school got jobs down at those places. It had national entertainers and they'd come to town and again it was widely accepted that they didn't want African American customers. But we kind of knew a lot of the guys who worked there and when somebody with a big name would come, we'd just sort of say, 'We're going and let them throw us out.'"

Riding the trolley, as Stan did in his youth, was another source of entertainment, this one expanding the Howard students' boundaries even farther,

taking them out of the city and into the suburb of Silver Spring. "Interestingly, one of our Sunday afternoon excursions—at the time there was still the Georgia Avenue trolley and the end of the trolley line was Colesville Road—and it seemed like we were going to the country. We'd take the trolley, we'd get the trolley up off campus on Georgia Avenue and...not every Sunday, but when the weather was nice, in the spring and late fall. We'd get on the trolley and ride to the end of the line and the end of the line was downtown Silver Spring." As with their adventures in downtown D.C., Ruby and her cohorts knew that Silver Spring was not a place where they were welcome. "We'd already been warned about Silver Spring, and you know, the 'hinterlands.'" Ruby describes how the landscape changed the farther they got from the city. "You began to feel it as you rode up Georgia. And particularly you would feel it when, occasionally, you got over to Sixteenth Street. That was like a different world, you know up Sixteenth Street. You have these huge houses and we always admired them....Whenever we could find somebody that had a car we'd always ride up to [Sixteenth] and drive through and see the beautiful, like in the spring, the beautiful azaleas and the beautiful flowers and the lawns and we just thought that those houses were just mansions....At the time they were all white-owned....You could begin to see a difference as you came further and further north." What had she and the others been told about visiting the suburb? "We had sort of been told that 'you are not welcome there,' 'you don't go into the stores,' and 'really be careful, just be careful,' that sort of thing."

During her time living in D.C., Ruby began to see the city become more open and accessible to blacks, but changes in suburban Silver Spring would not occur until

much later. She credits Mary Church Terrell's efforts, in tandem with 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, with moving things forward in Washington. "One of the women who stood out in our minds was Mary Terrell, who was very instrumental in integrating Washington, D.C. schools and public accommodations....Her efforts in D.C. were immediately felt. The color line was basically broken down. It was like a whole new world." Questioned about how dramatic and complete the changes were, Ruby says, "Well, they weren't welcoming, but at least we knew we had a right to be there and that legally they couldn't do anything." Over time, she adds, shop owners came to appreciate that it was economically beneficial to cater to all customers regardless of race. "And here we were, college kids who had money, you know, and shopping we did love," she laughs. "Shoe stores, and Garfinkel's, all this stuff, we just really flooded those places. And the same with movie theaters and clubs, all that, yeah. Oh man. But it was, I'm sure, after awhile they felt the economic impact." At the same time, she offers, she and her friends continued to trek to Silver Spring. "Even after 1954, when most of the education and public accommodations kind of loosened up [in D.C.], we would still come out to Silver Spring...where nothing had really changed yet...." (Montgomery County's public schools were integrated in 1956.)

When Ruby left D.C. to return to New York in 1956 it was with the intention of pursuing social work with her degrees in Sociology and Psychology from Howard, not expecting that in time she would return to the area and purchase homes in Silver Spring or Colesville. Opting to take a position with the Social Security Administration in New York, Ruby found herself climbing the ranks of the agency,

becoming a supervisor and then an instructor. "In Baltimore, the headquarters for Social Security was as segregated as you would see anywhere in the South," she recalls. "When we sent trainees down to Baltimore for central training they could not stay at the downtown hotels. They had to stay in the few black hotels that were available or stay with families." There were no blacks working in administration positions there, nor were there any in training or in personnel, so Ruby and three others, including her husband-to-be were recruited. The two were married a year later and her husband was relocated to D.C. to integrate the offices there. "It seems we were always trailblazing," she remarks.

After trying to commute between New York and Baltimore, the couple decided to look for housing in the Washington metro area, starting out in an apartment in Southwest D.C. Meanwhile, Silver Spring had become a more familiar landscape to the two because her husband's boss lived there and was very active in St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, which was part of a larger multi-denominational Council of Churches that had begun hosting Sunday evening dialogs on race. Ruby and her husband were invited and began to participate in those exchanges. "They really solidified a lot of the faith community," she recalls. When the couple decided they wished to look for a house, his boss urged them to look in Silver Spring. A good deal of development was taking place in the area and her husband was a veteran being encouraged to seek FHA loans. In 1966 and 1967, Ruby points out, FHA was trying to integrate Northern Virginia and Montgomery County suburbs. However, when one of the real estate agents insisted that he wanted to take them to Northern Virginia, Ruby's response was, "No way!...I don't think so!" That was when her husband's

supervisor encouraged them to look at new development in Colesville, an unincorporated suburb of Montgomery County close to Silver Spring.

The encounter the couple had with the first real estate agent was not uncommon among African American homebuyers at the time, but it took Ruby and her husband by surprise. "The first model house where they have the office, the guy welcomed us, we sat down, and he never came back," Ruby laughs. "He said he had another customer to take care of and he never returned." They waited for forty-five minutes or an hour. "He just left the house totally," she remembers, still sounding amazed by what had transpired. "It was strange. At first we didn't even know whether to attribute it to racism. We were puzzled, because he had been so cordial and gracious and had invited us in and, 'have a seat, there's coffee and tea,' whatever. And we sat and we sat and we sat."

Fortunately, their next experience was better. About a quarter of a mile away in Silver Spring there was another development and as they approached it Ruby saw the street sign that said Morningside Drive. "I'd grown up on Morningside Avenue in New York, so took it as an omen." They pulled into the model home and Ruby remembers that "the little guy [who showed them around] was so great. It was obvious that they weren't playing the game." The couple settled on a lot.

Living there, it quickly became clear to Ruby that there was a lot of work to be done in terms of integrating the surrounding community. She and her husband continued to meet with the Council of Churches and became actively involved with their local civic association. Of primary concern to members of each were local real estate practices, they knowing that black families were being steered into black

communities and white families into white communities. "We felt that this was an illegal practice." Studying the issue more carefully, Ruby and others became aware that "there was some type of collusion taking place when people went to apply for loans." All of this was counter to the goals of the civic association. "We had a well-integrated community, involvement by everybody." Sunday afternoon teas, with rotating hosting duties, allowed everyone "to know your neighbors, so you got beyond any racial barriers or that sort of thing." Still, African Americans remained a clear minority within these new suburban subdivisions, most living instead in all-black enclaves, which had "no public sewage, nothing, while growth was going on all around them." Ruby lists Ford Lane, Sandy Spring, and Good Hope, among others.<sup>29</sup>

U.S. Census data illustrates how dramatically the population of Silver Spring has changed since 1920. Studying the figures by precinct, street, and home in 1920 it is clear that this was very much a segregated community during the period that it began to grow. Out of the first five hundred households there are six black residents listed, the rest being white. The occupations of the blacks listed in these entries are servant and cook, washer and ironer, maid and servant. In these cases the black residents were live-in help. Then, occasionally, there is a noticeable shift. Figures for the Sligo Village section of Silver Spring show a black population of about forty percent, mainly laborers and farm workers. These are black enclaves. Similar patterns are found in the 1930 census, roughly the time that "Stan" was born. On Thayer Avenue in downtown Silver Spring, there are listings for 248 white residents and one black. Sligo Avenue and Silver Spring Avenue show virtually the same thing. In Woodside there was one black and over three hundred whites.<sup>30</sup>

Continuing this legacy, archival records from the 1960s reveal that it remained a common experience for African Americans who wished to live in other sections of Silver Spring to be lied to about the availability of housing by real estate agents, refused an appointment or to find agents failing to keep their appointments. The testimony of Anne and Thomas Taylor before the Human Relations Commission in June 1966 captures the frustration of another couple on the receiving end of appointments not kept. African Americans with Master's Degrees in Social Work and parents of a young child, the Taylors grew so upset about their experience that they spoke with the developer of the subdivision that they had hoped to move to. "He told me quite frankly that he and his partner had considerable question about selling a home to a Negro in this early stage of their development."<sup>31</sup>

Don Callaway, a resident of Arizona offered a job in Silver Spring, described a similar experience while looking for housing in Silver Spring and Rockville. Having purchased homes in predominantly white areas in the past, and being treated like "just another person," he said his reaction to his treatment in Montgomery County "was one of offended sensibility." He asked the commissioners and others at the hearing: "Can you imagine your consternation [if a] landlord says, 'I rent to anyone but those who have an Irish ancestry?'"<sup>32</sup>

Some white newcomers to the area also expressed shock at finding racial covenants in deeds. In 1969, the year after the county's fair housing law was passed, Parker Palmer, now a well-known author and educator, wrote to the director of the commission:

My wife and I recently purchased a home in the 'Sligo Park Hills' subdivision of Silver Spring. On receiving our title insurance policy yesterday, we were

shocked and dismayed to find a 'restrictive covenant' appended to the insurance documents. The covenant reads: 'For purposes of sanitation and health, this property cannot be sold, transferred or rented to a member of a race whose death rate is greater than that of the white race, or to a member of the negro race.'<sup>33</sup>

Studies undertaken by the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission, testimonies and letters delivered at public hearings, and other archival documents show that Silver Spring remained much as it had been, a segregated community, mainly white with several black enclaves, until the Fair Housing Ordinance was enacted in 1968. That ordinance was, according to the HRC, widely considered to be one of the broadest in the nation. A federal fair housing law was passed the following year.

Prior to the passage of the public accommodations ordinance and the couple's move, Ruby says that she and her husband continued to remain careful about which places they entered in downtown Silver Spring. For example, they never went into restaurants. "We never attempted any out here," she laughs. "We could deal with department stores, but we couldn't deal with movies and restaurants. We weren't quite ready for restaurants, believe me." Like "Stan," she said they knew about the policies and reputations of specific places. Of the Tastee Diner, she remembers, "Yes, yes....You could pick up and take out."

Right after the ordinance took effect, Ruby remembers downtown Silver Spring remaining fairly healthy, but that would change, she says, as the demographics of the community shifted. "I think it was pretty vibrant then [in the mid- to late-1960s]. You still had the major shopping, you had nice little shops, you still had some of the stores that were downtown [D.C.] there....There were nice little shoe stores,

drugstores...." But like former Planning Commissioner Gus Bauman and Michael Beyard of the Urban Land Institute, she notes a connection between the health of the CBD and the residential shift in demographics. "The shift in, I guess, services and shopping seems to have occurred as we became more integrated. In a way it seems as though the businesses, and there was Penney's down there, there was a Hecht's....So why, all of a sudden, did those stores—and I don't really think that they were losing, you know, business—but it just seemed that as Silver Spring became more integrated that the retail began to disappear." Again, this explanation is far different from the one most commonly used in published histories and conveyed by members of the community, including SSHS members. The more conventional explanation is that customers fled Silver Spring for the more advanced retail concept of the enclosed shopping mall, which was available to them in nearby Wheaton. When offered the alternative interpretation, white residents interviewed dismissed it or questioned its validity.

Working as Special Assistant to a County Executive during the period that revitalization proposals were being entertained, Ruby found evidence to support her contention that racism was a significant factor affecting the state of the central business district. "It was my first conversation that I sat in on about revitalization and talking about the central business district and bringing back retail and so forth. And a guy sat in [my boss's] office and said, 'If we get certain kinds of stores in Silver Spring, we're going to attract people from across the [D.C.] border.'" She laughs. "I wonder what that means! He was a developer, talking about 'we're going to attract too many people from across the border.'" It was clearly a "code," she explains. Working

for that office she recalls hearing similar objections being voiced against affordable housing. "Well, there are going to be low-income people and if we're going to try to revitalize we really need to upscale," are the types of remarks she remembers.

Ruby is one of many people I spoke with who worry that such sentiments—based on viewing low-income residents and shoppers and people of color as threats to plans—remain very much alive amidst the current emphasis on "revitalization." She senses that African Americans who live in or own businesses in Silver Spring understand who is deemed valuable and who is considered expendable. "Now, in the black community, they're talking about, they're referring to changes in Silver Spring, as 'gentrification,' just like in Georgetown and Capitol Hill....They see the kind of development that's going on and are saying, 'well, people who've been here for years or the kinds of newcomers that are coming, can no longer afford to live in Silver Spring. Unless you already were a homeowner and so forth, you really can't afford to stay here.'" And she says that most of the people she talks to about recent changes perceive themselves as being "very outside the decision-making" process. All of this makes her pessimistic. "I'm not very optimistic. I'm not very optimistic. I see displacement of families. I see the disappearance of small business people. I see them being kind of wiped out of the Silver Spring market and I don't know where they're going to go."

*"It was a Friendly Place": Virginia Mahoney on Preserving  
Silver Spring's "Human Side"*

Virginia Mahoney, who has lived in Washington, D.C. and Silver Spring for most of the past twenty-five to thirty years, has similar worries. Affordability is what

brought the Senior Risk Manager for Fannie Mae and graduate of the second class of IMPACT's Community Empowerment Program to Silver Spring. However, now that the community is becoming more expensive, she notes that even middle-income people like teachers cannot afford to purchase or rent there.

Virginia and I first met at a screening of the documentary *Silver Spring, Story of an American Suburb*, at Frankie Blackburn's home, where I facilitated a discussion afterward. One of her interests was in documenting the stories of older African Americans living in the Lyttonsville neighborhood, a freed slave community of Silver Spring, through oral histories which would become part of a permanent exhibition in a community center there. We met multiple times at coffee shops and restaurants near her Northwest D.C. office, at Mayorga in Silver Spring, and for one of the SSHS walking tours, as well as at an IMPACT-sponsored town meeting on redevelopment-related issues. Virginia's perspectives were interesting to me in part because of some of the ways that they departed from others who have been involved with IMPACT and from other African American residents who have lived in the area longer than she has. Yet, there were clearly similarities in terms of long-range concerns.

Like Ruby, and countless other African Americans, Virginia and her husband received less than cordial treatment by real estate agents when they sought a place to live in the 1970s. The Texas native says that both in the District and in Silver Spring, they "ran into a lot of 'we don't have any vacancies' after we had called and we knew that they did." When they first lived in the area, beginning in 1973, it was as renters in D.C. The second time, in 1978, after a brief stint in Boston, they considered rental properties in both jurisdictions. Rosemary Village, an intentionally "mixed"

development, was the third or fourth place they looked in Silver Spring after less than welcoming encounters elsewhere. "The Falklands said that there were no vacancies, even though we knew there were. The Blair complex, across from Giant, said the same thing."<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 1. Virginia Mahoney, foreground, center, walking tour

However, Rosemary Village, founded by developer Morris Milgram, was different. Virginia tells me that she and her husband were assured that it was "multicultural, racially and economically integrated." And it was. She remembers it having been started as an "experiment," a rare "enclave of integrated housing" in what remained a segregated community. Milgram, who recounts the history of Rosemary Village in *Good Neighborhood: The Challenge of Open Housing*, writes that the 415-unit garden apartment complex on a fifteen-acre site in Silver Spring was the first such development to be "deliberately integrated south of the Mason-Dixon Line." He had become a general partner in it in 1964, and by 1973, residency was one-third black. Three years later that percentage had risen to fifty percent.<sup>35</sup>

This was very different from the community Virginia had grown up in in Houston, which she describes as a "totally separate but equal world." Much like Stan's reminiscences about segregated D.C., she remembers that environment with some fondness. Schools were segregated, and Virginia says that when talk of integration began with the Civil Rights Act in 1964, "We were saying, 'Why the hell would we want to go there?' I just couldn't comprehend it." From Virginia's perspective, education was better under segregation, and her high school, on the edge of the University of Houston, is one of several in the area that has remained a black school. Living in an all-black section of town also gave her the warmth of community that Roscoe Nix and Stan described, while at the same time sheltering her from some of the harsher aspects of racism.<sup>36</sup>

Virginia's first real encounter with racial discrimination, she tells me, was in college. The train she was traveling on from Des Moines broke down somewhere in Oklahoma or Arkansas—she cannot remember which—where she and the other passengers were transferred to a bus. "At one point [in a small town across the Texas border] we stopped at a diner because we hadn't had anything to eat, and they wouldn't let me have anything to eat." She was stunned. "I was just a kid, I didn't know how to react. They'd said, 'No black people allowed.' It was just that blatant." Virginia found herself returning to the bus alone, where she sat and waited for the others to return. Eventually, one of the men appeared carrying food for her. "Suddenly, it all hit home," she says, explaining that until then she had known about the Freedom Riders and other events surrounding civil rights, but had never been so intimately affected.<sup>37</sup>

This encounter had another impact. "It was only after that experience that I realized that there was racism in Texas, in Houston, in fact." When Virginia told her mother about her experience, her mother's response was: "You know those white people. Next time you pack a lunch." Looking back, she says that her parents never talked about whether they had had similar experiences, nor did they talk about such matters at all. "It got me interested in why things are the way they are," as nothing had before.

Even though she never experienced comparable discrimination in places of public accommodation in downtown Silver Spring or the vicinity, Virginia is aware that it existed. For example, she knows that African American patrons could only pick up orders from the back of the Tastee Diner, something that white residents are often surprised to hear, and that Glen Echo, one of her favorite places today, was a catalyst for civil rights activity in Montgomery County. An African American friend who she goes dancing with there has told her that when he was growing up, he could not go there. And she observes that that stigma has remained among local blacks. "Ninety-nine percent of the time we're the only black people there," she tells me.<sup>38</sup> However, the racially segregated Silver Spring she hears about from others is not the one that she remembers moving to in 1978.

Rather than remembering it as inhospitable, Virginia describes the central business district she encountered in the late 1970s and early 1980s as "typical hometown." "It had a lot of small businesses, everything you needed to live." She contrasts the commercial landscape then with what people are becoming accustomed to as the suburban norm today. "They [the shops] were in separate buildings. It wasn't

like going to Home Depot where you can get everything." Among the businesses she remembers most fondly are the lumber yard, where one could get keys made, a Greek carryout, Jamaica Joe's, the department stores, Penney's and Hecht's, and five-and-dimes like C.G. Murphy. In contrast with Roscoe Nix, Stan, and Ruby—and more like Jerry and the Reardons—she speaks nostalgically about that Silver Spring. "It was friendly. It was a friendly place." She recalls that as a mother she always appreciated it as an environment for raising kids. "You felt safe there." Children could ride their bikes, she tells me, "and you never thought twice about it." Virginia says that she would give her son and daughter \$5.00 and they would spend it at the C.G. Murphy store. "When the lumber yard was torn down for the big buildings by the Metro, they [her children] were upset," she says.<sup>39</sup>

Restaurants, especially those that are small, independently-owned, have always been important to Virginia, who says that they contribute a "sense of place and community" to Silver Spring and other places she has lived. Mentions of the Greek carryout, Jamaica Joe's, and the Tastee Diner come up frequently when she describes the losses she has witnessed over the years. It made no sense to her that so many small businesses, including those in the Silver Spring Shopping Center, were forced to close long before a final decision was made on how redevelopment would proceed. "They would have closed up the diner, too," she notes, "if people hadn't revolted, you know?" Virginia recalls that downtown Silver Spring "was becoming a ghost town" at the time that developer Lloyd Moore was calling for the closure and removal of the Tastee Diner. "It was almost the last place standing," she says. "If they had closed the diner when they wanted to close it, there would be no reason to go to

Silver Spring." She adds: "I think it was the last straw. This was like totally ridiculous."<sup>40</sup>

Although she, like others interviewed for this chapter, said that she was unaware of the Silver Spring Historical Society, Virginia stood out because she expressed interest in historic preservation as well as other ways of recovering and conveying local history. Combined with her long personal history with the community, she eventually became curious about learning more about the organization. However, when I first raised the subject in a conversation in June 2003, her response was: "I'm not familiar with...them. I just haven't been involved in that side of Silver Spring." This and additional comments revealed that even though she knew nothing of the organization, its name had certain connotations. "I've always been involved, I guess, with the underdog side," Virginia explained. "And I view those societies as, you know, they have their own agenda and their agenda's shaped by their own values and experiences and they don't coincide with mine." As a result, "I have never sought out those organizations for any reason."<sup>41</sup> The more we talked, though, the more it became clear that some of her interests overlapped with the interests of SSHS members in the realm of preservation. For a time, she said, she had worked for a development company in Baltimore and had learned from that experience that historic preservation did not necessarily lead to gentrification and displacement. In that case, the company had restored older buildings, some of which lacked indoor plumbing and had potbelly stoves, into lower- and moderate-income housing.

Through her involvement with neighborhood and housing issues, as well as her long-standing interest in local African American communities, Virginia told me that she had come to conclude, "that if old buildings aren't protected, much of the community's history is lost." In a more recent conversation, she added, "I'm a proponent of preservation. I just think it's very important to understanding where we come from."<sup>42</sup> Such statements are similar in content to those made by SSHS members, as are observations about how preserving older buildings lends communities a "human feel," what SSHS members often refer to as "texture." She sees this in Lyttonsville, the black enclave in Silver Spring that she fears will be forgotten if no one steps in to work on an oral history and if some of the remaining buildings are not recognized as historic and protected. While some of those buildings, she says, do have a "distinct architectural style," many "have no such architectural significance" but are historic nonetheless. She mentions a chicken coop across the street from where she once lived, a remnant of the community's African American past. "In that sense it has historical significance, but, you know, you can't classify it as any particular type of architecture or genre or period, but it's interesting."<sup>43</sup>

When I explain that local preservationists adhere to several types of criteria, Virginia expresses surprise. "Oh really? Is that how they do it?" Still, she voiced concern that places like Lyttonsville that are important to her and to other African American residents are unlikely to attain the recognition that other parts of the built environment have.<sup>44</sup> This impression is reinforced several months after our first meeting, when Virginia accompanies me on one of Jerry's monthly walking tours. When I introduce her to Jerry she is somewhat stunned to discover that he is

completely unaware of Lyttonsville. "Oh, wasn't that a surprise?" she says to me afterward. "I mean, how can you not [know about it] if you're supposed to be about Silver Spring? He didn't even know where it was."<sup>45</sup> Jerry would explain that his interest in Silver Spring is limited primarily to its downtown. But to Virginia the exchange illustrates why African Americans need to be more active in gathering and preserving history, something she is doubtful will happen on a wide scale any time soon. "Usually with black people, we don't have the power.... We might want to keep old buildings, but it would take so much sacrifice in order to do it.... But nobody has the time; sometimes they don't have the energy. And it would have to be something extremely important, almost connected to future survival in order for people to make that kind of sacrifice." She agrees with white members of SSHS that class is a significant part of the equation. "It all comes down to economics. If things were different, then yeah, I think that blacks and Latinos would be just as interested as anybody else....I mean, we blacks and Latinos have a hard time even getting to the schools to find out what's going on with our kids."<sup>46</sup>

Concerned that Virginia, like SSHS members I interviewed, is restricting her views of people of color to those at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, I ask about African Americans who are firmly middle- or upper-middle class. "Now that's a whole different story," she laughs. Admitting that she herself falls into the middle-class category, she goes on to note, "but you know, I prefer people who are not so wealthy." Among those African Americans who are middle-class or above, she says, there is a "psyche." "Most of them feel that they've worked hard for what they get and it's amazing how many of them feel that 'if I did it, so can you.'" The result, she says,

is not only that they are judgmental, but that they, like whites with money, become focused selfishly on their own personal material condition. Such a focus, in Virginia's view, leaves them with little time for the community and without a conception of "the common good," something guiding Virginia and others associated with IMPACT. She contrasts her sister and white brother-in-law, who are "very wealthy" and did nothing to help Virginia fifteen years ago when her husband died, with herself, who "doesn't think twice" when her brother or others seek assistance.<sup>47</sup> Virginia's outreach to others extends widely into the community. Over the years she has been the president of her local community association, president of the Rosemary Hills Cooperative, president of its tenants association, and an active participant in IMPACT Silver Spring. She is also a regular attendee at public hearings on matters concerning development, both of housing and retail.

Virginia joined the Silver Spring Historical Society at my suggestion when she met me for the monthly walking tour, making her the first person of color to become a member. In part due to other commitments—in the community and with her job at Fannie Mae—she has not been active beyond taking the tour. She tells me, though, that she might be inclined to give preservation more of her time if she perceived that the organization had an interest in expanding its function. When I ask her what the role or function of a local historical society should be, Virginia responds: "Well, obviously the one that they have now, preserving the buildings. But I think that their role should be broader than that, in that buildings had a culture. There were people there. And I think that they should find a way to incorporate or preserve at least the memory of what was there." In other words, strictly preserving a structure's

façade is too limited. For example, when a bottling plant becomes an entryway for luxury housing, successive generations are unlikely to gain any knowledge about the building's past. Alternatively, says Virginia, "When they incorporate what was happening, pictures of the people, that makes a difference."<sup>48</sup> Such statements bear a strong resemblance to concerns voiced by Richard Jaeggi, another person who sees value in preserving buildings, but believes that the focus should include social histories that he perceives as the "real life" of the buildings. This thinking is in line with trends in historic preservation that are more people-centered.

Whereas Jerry and other historical society members are primarily interested in downtown Silver Spring—again, a principal reason that he was unaware of Lyttonsville—Virginia's concerns, like many of those involved with IMPACT, encompass more than the central business district. As I learned through my discussion of Walter Gottlieb's documentary with people affiliated with IMPACT, neighborhoods outside the downtown core are often a priority, and there is some resentment that they fall outside the boundaries of the historical society's vision. For Virginia, however, both the CBD and other sections of Silver Spring have been of concern. Our conversations revealed that she has followed the controversies about different redevelopment proposals very closely, and is monitoring the effects the one that is being built is having on communities of color and low-income residents. In several important ways, her perspective incorporates matters that concern SSHS members, IMPACT participants, and African American residents interviewed for this chapter.

Especially disturbing to Virginia, as it was to Silver Spring Historical Society members, was the "American Dream" plan. "I have never been so opposed to anything in my life," she says, "it was terrible, so far removed from my vision of Silver Spring."<sup>49</sup> Like members of the historical society, she was also angry about the decision to demolish the Armory as a way to accommodate new development. "I didn't work actively on that. Believe me, it had all the help it could get," but she did attend several meetings and hearings. "I was just as shocked as anyone else," she says, "angry at the County" when the County came forward with its plan to build the American Dream. Virginia exclaims: "I was...too through with the County; they could have burned Silver Spring down, you know?" She laughs, but adds, "...anybody that has an affinity for Silver Spring should have been upset about what happened there."<sup>50</sup>

As opposed to others who will be introduced in the next chapter, Virginia uses language similar to SSHS members when talking about the decision to level the Armory to make way for revitalization. "Maybe my relationship with the Armory was different from other people's. I'd go to Sweet Sixteen parties there or birthday parties or the cultural festivals. It was like the heart, the closest thing to the heart of the community that we had." To replace the richness associated with that building with a wave pool was "outrageous."

At the same time, Virginia stresses that the plan that was chosen to revitalize the core does not match her vision for the community either. Planners, developers, and elected officials had what she calls "a unique opportunity for Montgomery County to create a model diverse community."<sup>51</sup> This is something that Frankie

Blackburn and others often talk about as well. And in somewhat harsher terms, Ruby told me, "...the people who've contributed greatly to Montgomery County, in making it the unique place that it is, those are the very people who will suffer as a result of what's going on."<sup>52</sup> Rather than recognizing the possibility of creating a "model diverse community," and putting or keeping it at the center of any plans, Virginia contends, "they adopted policies that were more consistent with the traditional way of doing things...either it's the best or it's not, either it's big business or it's nothing." She argues that there are parallels between the ways things operate at the local level, in a government dominated by Democrats, and in the presidential administration of Republican administration of George W. Bush. "They have their vision of the world, just like George Bush if you ask me. They have their vision of the world and they'll do anything to advocate their vision. They don't see the world as being made up of anybody or anybody's needs having to be met. They have one vision and it's arrogant."<sup>53</sup> Having been appointed by a former County Executive to serve as Housing Opportunities Commissioner in the 1990s, Virginia, like Ruby, has been privy to an insider's view of how things operate.

Among other things, it disturbs Virginia that the vision of Montgomery County decision-makers does not appear to extend to small businesses, which in her view are a fundamental part of what makes Silver Spring a community. She gives several examples of shops and streets that she does not want to see disappear. "I would hate to see that [the shops on Georgia, Bonifant, Fenton, and Thayer] go. There's something about it, it's connected to something." The new chain stores, by contrast, hold no appeal. "I don't want to go to Chipotles," she tells me. "I want to go

to, there's a little Peruvian place on the other side of the World Building...it's just a man and his daughter and his wife....I think they deserve to be supported." Yet, she adds, such businesses have no advocates on the County Council. (At the time we spoke, Tom Perez, a freshman member, had yet to publicly come forward on the issue.) "They've practically been run out of town."<sup>54</sup>

Whereas Stan and Roscoe Nix see some positive aspects in Silver Spring's revitalization, particularly in terms of accessibility and diminished discrimination, Virginia is adamant that in most ways things are "going backward," even in terms of race relations. Beginning in the late 1980s, she contends, "the police decided that they were going to be Gestapos." Until that time, she says that she had never experienced any antagonisms. Part of this, she reflects, is because she and her family were living in Rosemary Village, and "white people who lived there, wanted to live there." But she also holds firmly to the belief that those holding power, the decision-makers for the community, "don't want it to be diverse," and have never wanted it to be diverse. She observes that this is at odds with those who have chosen to live in Silver Spring and have done so, at least in part, because of its diversity. "I have lots of white friends. In fact, I don't think about whether they're white or black. People live here because they want to live here...."<sup>55</sup> In another exchange, she says: "Just the fact that a person or family chooses to live in diversity, says something about that family. And if you seek out an all-white community that says something about you too." She laughs, "I'm not talking you, just in general. You live in Takoma Park. You're o.k." In another conversation she told me, "...except for the people in Takoma Park, nobody else really believes in diversity yet, if you ask me."<sup>56</sup>

Much of Virginia's perspective on race relations comes from encounters her son had with Montgomery County police during his teen years. He was never arrested for anything, but he was stopped and questioned one too many times, simply because of his appearance. Viewing racial profiling of young African American men as a real problem in Silver Spring, she moved across the border to the District, although there, too, the combination of his race, gender and age has been a problem. "I have a typical, eighteen-year-old teenage black boy," she says, "and he and his friends if they're in front of the house, people are looking at them like, 'what are they doing here?'" Virginia adds that, "all of them go to private schools, you know, very well-educated, all college students." She expresses shock that her block captain came to her to say that the youths had been the subject of a meeting. "Can you believe that?...My son and his friends listen to hip-hop. They drive those old police cars. It's the look," she says. It is not only her son, she insists, who receives such treatment. She recounts the story of an intern who had come from Morehouse College and lived at her house one summer. "Whenever he went out, he was stopped and questioned, almost every day he was here," something she says the young man had never experienced before. Her son is now in college in North Carolina, working on a degree in engineering. Like Nix, she observes that little public attention is given such matters as profiling and ongoing racial discrimination because they contradict Montgomery County's progressive reputation.<sup>57</sup>

### *The New Silver Spring and the Challenges of Race and Class*

Like Roscoe Nix and Virginia Mahoney, Ruby Rubens points out that there are discrepancies between the desired image of Montgomery County and Silver

Spring as inclusive communities, and what she sees as the reality. "They [government agencies, the Council, the Board of Education, etc.] don't grant the real issue that underlies much of their decision-making and policy and it's purely race. And yet they're insulted, in total denial, when you say, 'I'm not calling you a racist, but I am saying you're exhibiting racist behavior.'" She adds: "They talk a good game, when they're at the table, but when it comes down to really translating your so-called beliefs into actual practice, it just never happens." Quoting Roscoe Nix, who is a close friend of hers, she says, "We're still being controlled by the 'old guard' in Montgomery County." She explains to me that both in the political arena and in the schools, "...you have gatekeepers who've been around for years, and they're still guarding the house. They're guarding, they're keeping the gate closed or whatever, or maybe letting it open a little. But as soon as it becomes too uncomfortable, the gate gets slammed."<sup>58</sup>

Not only do matters of race trouble Virginia and Ruby; like others I interviewed, so do those related to class. The affordability that was initially attractive to Virginia and others I spoke with has in her view diminished as revitalization has proceeded. And as it has diminished, so has diversity. "Now, I think Silver Spring is a lot more diverse than a lot of areas around here, from Sixteenth Street over this way, only because of the affordability issue." However, as Virginia watches how developers have skirted their obligation to provide affordable units of housing, she argues that even projects that were supposed to place a priority on offering less expensive rental units, like the Gramex Building, are out of reach of large numbers of workers. In a conversation at an IMPACT Silver Spring town forum on revitalization

in 2004, she recounts talking with a teacher recently who was interested but could not afford to live there on her single income.

Meanwhile, Ruby asks the question that I often ask as piece-by-piece neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan area undergo redevelopment with the goal of attracting new wealthier residents. "Where are they [the original residents] going to go? Where are they going to go?" Echoing Virginia, she says, "When we even look at our educators, our police, our firemen, who are moderate-income people, they can't afford to live here." Nor, she adds, can the employees of the new businesses coming in. "We're having more and more upscale restaurants and other stores, retail and all that. Who are the workers? Who can afford to live here? Who's going to work in those places? And the people who work there, can't afford to live here."<sup>59</sup>

Manny Hidalgo, former development director for CASA de Maryland who is profiled in the next chapter, agrees, noting that few of that organization's clients, many of whom are day laborers or working in other low pay jobs, can afford the rents in Silver Spring now. The result is that people of color, many of them recent immigrants, work in service jobs in communities like Bethesda and now Silver Spring, commuting by bus to more affordable areas like Langley Park. From experience I know that late evening busses from Bethesda to Silver Spring can be so full with low-wage workers on their way home to Langley Park after upscale Montgomery Mall closes, that drivers have to refuse many passengers. Similar responses and concerns to redevelopment were expressed in a roundtable discussion with several community leaders facilitated by the *Washington Post*.<sup>60</sup>

What is occurring today in Silver Spring is happening in other parts of the Washington, D.C. metro area and in cities across the United States. Similar commercial revitalization is under way in D.C.'s Chinatown, U Street-Cardoza, Logan Circle, Columbia Heights, and Anacostia neighborhoods, and is beginning to take place in other Montgomery County suburbs, most notably Wheaton. In each case, historic areas that have long been identified with a particular social group, been centers of diversity, and offered a wide range of unique shops and restaurants, are being homogenized and upscaled as a way of revitalizing their economies. While historic preservationists fear losing important vestiges of the past, others who are more concerned with maintaining this level of diversity tend to question the value in preserving buildings or their facades if little remains of the original structures or the social life of the community that once used them. A common criticism of historic preservation, not just in Silver Spring but in nearly all communities undergoing such transformations, is that knowingly or not it makes neighborhoods attractive to new, wealthier residents, simultaneously displacing those who can no longer afford to live there.

There seems little question that a primary goal of redevelopment projects, including Silver Spring's, is to make predominantly urban settings more attractive and/or safe to upwardly mobile professionals with disposable incomes. A May 2004 advertising supplement in the *Washington Business Journal* is clear about which people are being wooed to Silver Spring. "From the renovation of the Gramex Building to the various condominiums to the highly anticipated project at the beloved Canada Dry Bottling Plant, downtown Silver Spring will host an increasingly *affluent*

*and youthful population*" [emphasis mine].<sup>61</sup> As in urban counterparts in Washington, D.C. neighborhoods, many prominently placed, expensive condominiums, high rise apartments, and townhouses signal the gentrification of downtown Silver Spring. However, housing of this type cannot stand by itself. In order to draw buyers and renters, and shoppers too, the commercial landscape must be appealing as well. In the case of downtown Silver Spring, designing a vibrant retail and entertainment district was viewed as an essential first step, with new housing construction following closely behind.

What disturbs some residents of this and other communities is that in catering to certain socioeconomic classes, the needs of other groups are largely dismissed. As Bart Eeckhout writes, "Active social engineering of the kind that seeks to bridge class barriers has never been on the redevelopment agenda."<sup>62</sup> This means that older residents on fixed incomes, homeless people, and working-class whites, blacks, and recent immigrants, all of whom lend Silver Spring its diversity, yet struggle to get by, are likely to find less of use or accessible to them as revitalization continues. In the process, the social landscape may change drastically.

Simultaneously, developers and elected officials are prone to choosing the least risky option for their projects. The result is that easily replicated, generic architecture prevails over designs that are more unusual and in keeping with the character of the locale, and chain businesses more certain to draw customers and able to pay higher rents, are selected over one-of-a-kind types, specific to the local culture. Starbucks and Red Lobster become symbols of "revitalization," while their counterparts, independent businesses like Kefa Café and Crisfield that pre-date the

revitalization project, are marginalized. As seen in chapter two, a vast number of the latter are owned by immigrants and people of color. Recognizing that decisions made by developers, regional planners, and elected county officials affect the physical or material landscape in significant ways, civic activists of various stripes are concerned about the consequences for the *culture* of Silver Spring. However, they are unable to agree upon what constitutes the local culture, whether that culture is located in an imagined past or if it is better entertained from the standpoint of the present or an imagined future.

### *Organizing around Diversity*

In this chapter I have tried to recover and convey histories and perceptions of Silver Spring's built environment that have received too little recognition by the local historical society, published histories, and Montgomery County on its web sites and in other materials. Having first- or second-hand knowledge of long-standing patterns of exclusion clearly has had an effect on the types of associations residents of color have with specific buildings and on the built environment as a whole. As we have seen, it is less likely that those who have had such experiences will view the landscape nostalgically, which in turn means that they will be less prone to take measures to preserve it. A more pressing issue—one that was revealed not only in the exchanges with Roscoe Nix and others, but also in the discussion I had with IMPACT folks about Walter Gottlieb's documentary—tends to be the importance of maintaining social diversity. Fears that revitalization will lead to wide scale displacement are common. Displacement based on income, it is thought, will result in less diversity of several kinds and therefore the transformation of the community that

those I spoke with have fought to shape. This leads to calls for more affordable housing and measures to assist small business owners. The next chapter will explore how recognition of some of these aspects of Silver Spring's racial history, and the county's unrepresentative power structure, as well as perceptions of possible consequences of revitalization, have led to the priorities at IMPACT Silver Spring.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Erin Uy, "Anchors Aweigh for Wheaton Restaurant: Anchor Inn Owner Says Smoking Ban Sunk Business," *Gazette*, 18 August 2004, sec. A, p. 8; and Erin Uy, "Anchor Inn Reopens: New Owner Runs Kentlands Eatery," *Gazette*, 2 February 2005, sec. A, p. 8. The Anchor Inn closed after fifty years in business, the owner attributing his decision to the county's ban on smoking in all restaurants and bars, which has already had detrimental effects on his and many other businesses, including such popular Silver Spring third places as the Quarry House. It has now re-opened under new ownership.

<sup>2</sup> Roscoe Nix, interview by author, tape recording, Wheaton, MD, 18 June 2003. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this section are from this interview session.

<sup>3</sup> Alan L. Dessoll, "Discrimination Law Gets Teeth," *Washington Post*, 18 January 1962, sec. B, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial, "By Force," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 10 January 1962.

<sup>5</sup> Sue Ann Pressley, "Montgomery County's 'Conscience' Fights On: NAACP's Nix Pushes for Rights," *Washington Post*, 17 May 1988, sec. D, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 173-74.

<sup>9</sup> Montgomery County Council Commission on Human Relations, "Complaint No. 1," in "Second Annual Report of the Commission on Human Relations," 1 July 1963, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>10</sup> "Anti-Bias Law to Get First Test," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 5 July 1962, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Roger B. Farquhar, "Atmosphere Charged at 1<sup>st</sup> Hearing of County's Human Relations Unit," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 19 July 1962, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> "NAACP Joins CORE In Rights Unit Criticism," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 26 July 1962, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> "Restaurant Agrees to Equal Service," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 9 August 1962, sec. A, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Order Against Crivella Issued by Rights Unit," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 23 August 1962, sec. A, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> "Rights Case Aimed at Supreme Court," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, 29 November 1962, sec. A, p. 1.

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<sup>16</sup> Alderson Reporting Company, "Transcript of Proceedings, Montgomery County Council, In the Matter of: Repeal of Public Accommodations Ordinance," Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland, 24 April 1963, RG15.

<sup>17</sup> R.H. Melton, "Roscoe Nix: NAACP Head Prods with Anger," *Washington Post*, 27 November 1983, sec. C, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Bain, speech to the Oral History Committee of the Montgomery County League of Women Voters, 26 February 1969, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, Maryland, RG16.

<sup>19</sup> Editorial Staff, "Good Example," *Washington Post*, 22 January 1962, sec. A, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Scull developed a reputation as a champion of civil rights. He and wife Elizabeth, member of the politically prominent Lee family, were actively involved in ACCESS, the Action Coordinating Committee to End Segregation in the Suburbs. David is also remembered for having bucked his party in 1964 because of what he perceived to be its presidential candidate Barry Goldwater's racist appeal to backers of George Wallace. In 1966 he was elected to the Montgomery County Council, where he served until his death in 1968. Elizabeth Scull, who became a Republican because of her husband, served several terms as an appointed member of the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission. She rejoined the Democratic Party when the local Republican Party failed to support her candidacy to fill her husband's seat. From the Papers of Elizabeth and David Scull, the Maryland Room, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. On Howard Denis, see: "How Montgomery Votes," *Washington Post*, 21 April 2005, sec. ME, p. 7. "The council's lone Republican, Howard A. Denis, represents the affluent neighborhoods of Potomac, Bethesda, and Chevy Chase and is widely regarded as one of the most liberal Republican elected officials in Maryland."

<sup>21</sup> Green, *Secret City*, 235.

<sup>22</sup> Lubar, "Trolley Lines," 319.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Stan Smith (pseud.), interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 16 September 2003. All of the quotations in this section come from that interview session.

<sup>27</sup> Letter (name withheld) to Susan Velasquez, Chair, Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, 9 July 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Ruby Rubens, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 9 September 2003. All of the quotations in this section come from this interview session.

<sup>29</sup> See Wiese, *Places of Their Own*.

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<sup>30</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Census of Population (1930), Maryland*, microfilm publication, T-626, reels 876-7 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Record Administration, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Anne P. Taylor and Thomas C. Taylor, Rockville, testimony before the Montgomery County Commission on Human Relations, 6 June 1966, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>32</sup> Don Callaway, testimony before the Montgomery County Commission on Human Relations, 14 June 1966, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>33</sup> Parker J. Palmer, Silver Spring, letter to the Montgomery County Commission on Human Relations, Rockville, 24 June 1969, Montgomery County Archives, Rockville, MD, RG15.

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Mahoney, interview by author, tape recording, Washington, DC, 4 April 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Morris Milgram, *Good Neighborhood: The Challenge of Open Housing* (New York: Norton, 1977), 69.

<sup>36</sup> Virginia Mahoney, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 15 July 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Mahoney, interview, 4 April 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Mahoney, interview by author, tape recording, Washington, DC, 18 June 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Mahoney, interview, 15 July 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Mahoney, interview, 18 June 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Mahoney, interview, 15 July 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Mahoney, interview, 18 June 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>49</sup> Mahoney, interview, 15 July 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Mahoney, interview, 4 April 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Rubens interview, 9 September 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Mahoney, interview, 4 April 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Mahoney interview, 15 July 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Mahoney interview, 18 June 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Mahoney interview, 15 July 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Mahoney interviews, 18 June 2003, and 15 July 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Rubens interview, 9 September 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Rubens interview, 9 September 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew Mosk and Michael Cottman, "A Look at the Past, Present, and Future: New Issues Arise on the Long Road to Revitalization," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2003, sec. ME, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> "New Restaurant Anchors First Phase of Redevelopment," *Washington Business Journal* advertising supplement, May 2004, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Bart Eeckhout, "The 'Disneyfication' of Times Square: Back to the Future?" in *Critical Perspectives on Urban Redevelopment* 6, ed. Kevin Fox Gotham (New York: JAI, 2001), 379-428.

## CHAPTER 7:

### "ENVISIONING THE FUTURE, NOT LOOKING BACK": IMPACT SILVER SPRING

Leaving the noisy rush of traffic on Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road behind, I find myself walking beyond the boundaries of Silver Spring's central business district into the adjacent Woodside neighborhood early one evening. In this quieter, residential section of the community it seems a storybook December evening, the kind I remember from my Minnesota childhood. There is a light dusting of snow on the ground and the air is crisp, the temperatures mild. Lights and other ornaments decorating some of the homes and yards lend the turn of season a festive quality, signaling that the holidays are just around the corner. From time to time I catch the scent of logs burning in fireplaces. As my walk brings me closer to IMPACT Silver Spring director Frankie Blackburn's home, I wonder who will be joining us for a screening and discussion of the documentary *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*, which had aired for the first time on public television the previous evening.

By the tail end of 2002 I had met and worked with a number of people associated with the non-profit organization IMPACT Silver Spring, first on a Vietnamese immigrant outreach project, then a community-wide diversity conference, and later at the graduation ceremonies for groups of Community Empowerment Program (CEP) participants. While I recognized that this gathering would allow me to

meet many new people, it did not occur to me until later that it would bring into the same room the worldviews of IMPACT and the Silver Spring Historical Society, with its brand of historic preservation. The deeper I delved into my research, the clearer it was becoming that this was something that rarely happened.

In this chapter I will explore the backgrounds and meaning systems of people affiliated with IMPACT Silver Spring. In a concluding section I will recount the discussion that I facilitated that evening. As noted, IMPACT, like the Silver Spring Historical Society, sprang from citizens' concerns over the redevelopment process. A section of the "Origins" chapter reviewed IMPACT's programs and initiatives and illustrated some of the ways that the organization's vision has taken shape and continues to evolve. In this chapter it is the perceptions that people associated with IMPACT have of revitalization and historic preservation, and what they see as the interrelationship between the built and social environments of downtown Silver Spring, that are the main subjects.

Because the organization functions primarily as a provider of leadership training and support, those involved—mainly through CEP—come to it with a variety of issues, many of which fall outside the boundaries of this study. Therefore, in selecting people to interview, I examined IMPACT literature that describes the "passions" of the nearly ninety graduates of CEP to date. From doing this I learned that affordable housing, schools, and youth development have been subjects of greatest concern. Surprisingly few participants named anything having to do with revitalization's effects on the *commercial* landscape or its small businesses, although I do know that to be a secondary concern of many. Also, no one who has taken part in

the program to date has declared an interest in historic preservation or local history as a primary interest. This meant that the pool of obvious people to approach for this chapter was somewhat small. Two members of the 2005 class, which began after I completed my research, have expressed strong interest in exploring steps that might be taken to subsidize or in other ways assist what they see as indispensable small businesses.

Among the people who seemed most important to interview was Frankie Blackburn, executive director and guiding force behind IMPACT, I knew from conversations that Frankie was worried about how small businesses would fare as downtown revitalization moved forward. Another was Geoff Durham, who at the time worked for the Silver Spring Regional Center, the county agency that oversees revitalization, as its "Urban District Manager." Until the most recent class, Geoff was the only CEP participant over the years who had named small business as a "passion." However, I learned from Frankie that one other CEP participant with a clear interest in revitalization and the central business district's built environment was Mary Ann Zimmerman, who has served on several of the county's "citizen advisory panels," including the Silver Spring Urban District and Civic Center Building Advisory Committees. In terms of local history, Frankie recommended that I speak with Virginia Mahoney, because of her interest in starting a Lyttonsville oral history project, and Ruby Rubens, due to her long history in D.C. and Silver Spring. Virginia had graduated from the first CEP class and Ruby had assumed the role of mentor to participants. Much of the material that I gleaned from interviews with those two women ended up being included in the previous chapter.

On the matter of history, I also spoke with Manny Hidalgo, a graduate of the third CEP class. Manny, the son of Cuban immigrants, had been featured in the Silver Spring documentary and took part in our group discussion. I sought him out to hear about his experiences with the film and to learn more broadly about his perceptions of the community, past, present, and future. As former development director of CASA de Maryland, he has had direct contact with low-wage immigrant workers whose incomes prevent downtown Silver Spring from being an affordable option. In addition, I spoke with several people who were active in planning the community-wide diversity conference that IMPACT sponsored in March 2002, and interacted with many others, both in the planning and execution of projects, and at Lasting IMPACT meetings. Interview material with Jim Henkelman-Bahn, Mary Murphy, and Suton Thumprasert may be used for another project focused strictly on the conference.

Finally, this chapter will begin to explore the internal dynamics of IMPACT and its relationship to other members of the community—including elected officials, developers—as well as other civic organizations. This thread and others introduced in this chapter will be explored further in the conclusion, where comparisons with the Silver Spring Historical Society are developed more fully and suggestions are offered regarding what each group could learn from the other through communication and work on joint projects.

*"Not Looking Back": Frankie Blackburn and the "Corner in the Library"*

By the time I first interviewed Frankie Blackburn, executive director of IMPACT, for this project in July 2003, I had come to know her fairly well. We had

been introduced when I took part in an ethnographic study and report of Silver Spring's Vietnamese immigrant community. Through my participation on that project, Frankie began recruiting me for the CEP training, inviting me to attend and be involved in planning events. We met at Mayorga Coffee Factory and Kefa Café on a number of occasions in the summer of 2003 to talk about IMPACT, the revitalization project, and historic preservation issues. Two of the sessions were taped.



Fig. 84. Frankie Blackburn, far right, and Sutonta Thumprasert, second from right (Courtesy IMPACT Silver Spring)

Like many of IMPACT's participants, Frankie's background bears the influences of socially liberal religion and community activism. A native Floridian in her forties—"very much Floridian roots," she tells me—Frankie's father is a retired Methodist minister. Growing up, her family lived in Orlando and Jacksonville. When Frankie, who is white, left home for college, she chose to stay in the South, attending Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, where first she received an undergraduate degree in business and then a law degree. After practicing law for a

few years, she decided that what she really wanted to do was work on the non-profit side of community development. This led her to work on a redevelopment project in the Anacostia neighborhood of southeast D.C. and later with the Housing Opportunities Commission (H.O.C.) of Montgomery County, which at the time, she adds, was "a very progressive, forward-thinking agency," headed by an innovative director.<sup>1</sup>

Among many residents of Silver Spring, including members of the Silver Spring Historical Society, Frankie is still widely identified with the work she went on to do with area homeless people. Helping found Silver Spring Community Vision, a facility for the homeless, was an outgrowth of a number of positions she held, including with H.O.C. and with Montgomery Housing Partnership. As a result of her role in founding Community Vision, Frankie was named by County Executive Doug Duncan to the Silver Spring Redevelopment Task Force. It was there that she voiced the need for community leadership and participation that were more representative of the community. The end result was the Silver Spring Community Leadership Initiative (SSCLI) which she went on to help develop and head as its first and so far only executive director. It has since been re-named IMPACT Silver Spring.

Even less than Mary Ann Zimmerman, featured later in this chapter—and unlike Jerry and other SSHS members—Frankie recalls nothing romantic about the decision that she and her husband made to move to Silver Spring. She says that there was nothing about the built environment that charmed them. "Affordable housing, near a Metro stop. And I can't say anything more." Prior to making the move, Frankie and her husband had been living on Capitol Hill in D.C. She had accepted a job in

Montgomery County and wanted to live where she worked, but tells me she "had no clue" about where, specifically, to look. "The first house we put a contract on—and I have to cringe—was in Bethesda. Luckily, it fell through." The couple could not afford the small house in the pricey suburb, but found one in downtown Silver Spring on Pershing Drive, where they lived for ten years prior to moving to their current home. Responding to my observation that most people I interviewed chose Silver Spring because of affordability and its "urban feel," Frankie says that while affordability was a factor for them, nothing about the community's feel appealed to her. "It was, I mean, it was so ugly to me. I remember seeing the intersection of—when we went out with a realtor—Seminary and Georgia, and just thinking that, 'Wow, this is an ugly community.'"<sup>2</sup>

What Frankie mostly recalls about downtown Silver Spring in 1987 is that it was "drab, quiet, and declining." "I remember walking from my house when Hecht's was still open. J.C. Penney was still open then. I can remember going and thinking, 'you can't buy much here.'" Stores were poorly stocked, she says, something that other long-time residents have told me. She was "a big card buyer" at the time and was unable to find a place to purchase any. Without children then, both she and her husband's lives were devoted to their work, and most of the socializing they did continued to take place in the District. Having struck me as one of the most well connected people in Silver Spring, it surprises me to hear that there was a time when Frankie felt lonely in the community. Looking back, she says, "I associated loneliness a lot with Silver Spring in the early days. I hated it. I wanted to leave. I wanted to go back to North Carolina really bad."<sup>3</sup>

Comparing Silver Spring to communities she knew in Florida and then North Carolina, Frankie says, "I'd say [that they are] pretty different. For me, the biggest difference is the lack of a real sense of where your community is in identification." In more Southern cities, she observes, "You were either clearly a member of a church, and that was a very dominant presence, or you were identified based on which high school you went to....There was a lot of overlap between who went to your high school and who went to your church." Strikingly new in the more secular environment of the D.C. metropolitan area was the feeling Frankie had of being "a religious minority." Church, she says, "had always been such a close, nurturing environment," and it took time for her to adjust to the differences and to make connections with others sharing that aspect of her background. The Methodist Church that she joined has developed a reputation for being "progressive," among other things for having been one of the first in the United States to hire a black minister, which at the time split the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

Also a major influence on Frankie, something that she has always carried with her, was how she experienced race relations while growing up. For example, she recalls that while serving as student council president, there was also a black student council president. "It was still a segregated community, the whites on the north side of town, the blacks on the south side...." She adds: "Yes, there was overt racism, but on the other hand, we were still struggling with it, so it was an everyday topic." By comparison, racism in the D.C. metro area struck Frankie and still does as being much more covert. Central to her work as director of IMPACT has been to promote awareness and force discussion and ultimately change the racial dynamics of the

community. "We're trying to ask people to take risks and reexamine some things that are scary for people to do....It's real hard, extra hard, to get the white community to the table." Frankie goes on to observe that this is an especially challenging task in a county which has a population and political culture dominated by liberal, well-educated, professionals. "Those who are used to things being more clear-cut, black and white, regulated—that safe environment—to go from that to an area of introspection and openness to new ways of thinking—that takes some practice and it takes some risk-taking. Plus, if this way of being sort of serves your interest, then why change?"<sup>5</sup>

Frankie speculates that her husband's relationship to Silver Spring is more typical of its overall population than hers eventually came to be. His sense of community, she tells me, has always revolved around politics and Capitol Hill, leaving him with little interest in or time for local issues. This strong connection to the world of national politics is lifelong, she says, something that he experienced growing up in Bethesda. "So for him, this [Silver Spring] is just a housing location—just nice, convenient, comfortable, near a Metro station." Frankie says that she stands out from most people in the circles that they move in as a couple. "Suddenly I become the expert on Silver Spring," being pumped for information, mainly on where to eat or shop. The regularity of such exchanges provides further evidence, she says, that there are more people like her husband, than there are like her.<sup>6</sup>

While Frankie as much as anyone appears to have her finger on the pulse of present day Silver Spring, she admits to having only a vague sense of the community's history. Most of what she knows of its past is what she experienced with

her own eyes over the period of time that she has lived there. She notes that prior to seeing the Gottlieb documentary, she knew nothing about events preceding World War II. "So I feel a little bit more informed because of the movie." I ask her if, based on the film, she is able to plot a timeline of the community around its major historical chapters. She attempts to do so, labeling "pre-World War II" the first, and then moving quickly on to the second chapter, the boom surrounding "World War II," and the third, characterized by decline and rebirth. Based on the detail that she offers for chapters two and three it is clear that those two interest her most. Associated with the second phase in Frankie's mind are the G.I. Bill, houses being built, federal government workers moving to the area, and commercial vibrancy.

The third phase, of which she has greater firsthand knowledge, she describes in fuller detail. In her view it begins with the opening of the Wheaton Mall, which led to the decline of downtown Silver Spring. A brief respite occurred with activity tied to the opening of a Metro station, but that was followed by "a long, fifteen-year period of decline, and scraping, and trying to come together." Like many of the people I spoke with, Frankie identifies the American Dream project as a pivotal turning point in the process of debating what the identity of the community is. "I really think the American Dream in some ways was the wake up call that got the community...even if it wasn't in the right direction, at least it came together around something." This has led to the present chapter in Silver Spring's history, one in which people have been "basically waiting for something to happen, for the implementation of the project and all of the spin-offs."<sup>7</sup>

Given that Frankie and I agree that the documentary only hints at some of the cultural richness and complexity of the community's history, I asked her if she could tell me how, in her view, a local historical society should ideally function. What knowledge, I wondered, is being skirted or erased by those who have assumed the task of providing the community with historical narratives. Her response revealed an appreciation of residents having a sense of the past and how things have evolved, but in contrast to SSHS officers she contends that history is dynamic, at its core about change, and that change should not be feared, but embraced. The result is that Frankie envisions very different ways of conveying and displaying history than those most closely associated with SSHS, historic preservation not being among them. "Well, I think [the function should be] to help people understand a sense of the place, not to keep it that way, but just to appreciate it. Because even though change is good for communities—to constantly be looking at itself, and changing, and moving on—having a sense of history enriches the life."<sup>8</sup>

From this perspective, the director of IMPACT Silver Spring suggests that rather than privileging buildings and investing so much effort into preserving the look of the built environment as it has been, there might be an alternative. It is an alternative that most preservationists and some other residents would find troublesome. Frankie envisions something like this: "To have a corner in the library where you get to go and see what it [Silver Spring] was like [at various points in its history]. Or to be able to go hear a lecture about Silver Spring in 1944, to help to understand what the community was arguing with about itself." She says that such efforts would offer, "Just some sense that makes you feel that people preceded me

and people will follow me, but we're all part of this community, we all made it happen." She sums up: "So really, I think appreciation and connection would be the two words that come to mind for me, yet honoring change."<sup>9</sup>

Frankie's comments lead me to reflect on differences between Jerry McCoy's use of photography and her proposal for the corner in the library. Jerry, as we have seen—for example, in his desire to capture the "picture-perfect nostalgia" of the Tastee Diner—uses his craft to preserve images of those pieces of the physical or built environment that are disappearing or vulnerable. Photography, for him, becomes another form of preservation. The ideal would be to preserve the structures that he is photographing. Yet he exhibits a certain satisfaction in being able to hold on to and share some representation of those buildings through his and archival images. By contrast, Frankie's proposal values the substitution of image for the physical or material thing itself. I find myself wondering how satisfactory a solution that is. Removed from its context within a larger landscape and frozen in an image, the object is no longer something that users can form relationships with. Who would be drawn to these resources? What meaning would they take from them? How would meaning be sustained? Silver Spring Historical Society members who grieve an unending series of losses within the built environment would likely be pleased if such a corner did exist in the local library, but such a display to them would not have the value of saving the structures themselves.

Frankie's lengthy response to my question points to some fundamentally different ways of thinking about history and community identity, the past, present, and future than her counterparts at the Silver Spring Historical Society. "See for me,"

she says, "the relevance of history is to understand what happened so that I can be better informed to face the future, so I can be a better participant in forming whatever the next phase is." She also is fond of describing Silver Spring as an "incredible experiment, a mixed income, mixed race, and mixed culture community."<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the most active and vocal members of SSHS hold the view that the past is superior to the present and that given the direction things are moving the future appears even bleaker. When asked to name ways that the present is an improvement over the past, most respond that they cannot think of any. Judy Reardon, for example, envisioned things only getting worse: "People will go home at night and they'll be in their McMansions and order their pizza and sit in front of their TV and they won't have to go anywhere. And they'll be happy because they won't know any different. They won't have any Quarry House to go to. They'll be zombies and they'll be happy."<sup>11</sup> As I began asking Mary Reardon on a separate occasion if there is anything that she is excited about or sees as a positive change in downtown Silver Spring, she interrupted with laughter. "It's really depressing," she replied.<sup>12</sup>

With what I perceive to be some reluctance, Frankie acknowledges some appreciation for SSHS members' level of commitment to their work and even for some of the group's contributions. "I would rather have some group that's active, than no group at all," she tells me, adding that because SSHS exists, "I do get to see pictures, the corner in the library. There are places I can go and say, 'well, this was a little corner in the history of Silver Spring.'" Yet, Frankie mostly voices how upset she is by the organization's stance and the ways in which its members present themselves and interact with others in the community. The problem, she argues,

stems from zealousness and rigidity on the part of the group. "I guess the piece that's disturbing is that because of their behavior patterns and the way that they go about advocating for what they care most about, it has turned so many people off that I think it's furthered the lack of—an erosion of—their connection to the community. They could have been such facilitators and conveners and connectors." These roles could be developed if skills were sought. For Frankie—who is so well connected to players at all levels in the community—to know so few SSHS members, seems confirmation of her observations about the group's insularity. "I only know three people and it's because they basically have a reputation for being crazy at public hearings and that's about it." Her impression is that the organization attracts "like-minded, like-acting people," and in the process "has turned off lots of others."<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, if the historical society's nostalgia leads members to avoid addressing some of the less pleasant aspects of the community's history, IMPACT, for a different reason also largely elides much of the same history. This became clear when I asked Frankie to speculate on why it is that locally the historical society and preservation community has been and continues to be so homogeneous, dominated almost exclusively by whites. She responds that it quickly becomes apparent, for those who delve into it, that history is "not very nice." "We're trying to build up expectations and hopes and make our children understand that their life really can be better. It's about envisioning, rather than looking back." To this observation, she adds that people only have so much time that they can devote to their community. "I guess it's, you know, there are probably many choices about how you spend your precious,

little extracurricular time. . . . There's time that can be invested that produces something new, or good, and maybe we have less value in history still in America, right?"<sup>14</sup>

At this point in our first interview, I feel tension emerging, and assume that my interest in the Silver Spring Historical Society is the source. "Why are you focusing so much on the Silver Spring Historical Society?" Frankie wants to know. In reply, I attempt to describe two primary interests of mine, one concerning how different segments of the community respond to changes being made to the built environment, the other in how historical narratives about Silver Spring are shaped around the stories of its buildings. On both counts, I say, the historical society, because of its preservationist stance and its self-appointed role as conveyor of historical narratives, is central. I add that active members' resistance to change—what often seems like a desire to freeze history—is an important reaction to what is occurring in Silver Spring and to change in general. Furthermore, I explain: "I also think that even if they [SSHS members] themselves see themselves lacking power, that they do have some power in selectively conveying a certain story of Silver Spring's past." That this story is reproduced and recorded in the monthly community newspaper, in the frequently broadcast television documentary, on web sites, tours, and so forth is important, I tell her. Even if relatively few people look at some of those sources today, they are records that are being left behind, and few are offering alternative histories.

Frankie is unconvinced. "I think that they're largely irrelevant," she says. "They're not wielding much power [because of their insularity] and I don't see them as making a huge difference. I still don't understand the importance of focusing on

them so much." After defending my interest further, Frankie responds, "I guess where my interest is, is in the group of people who essentially really, really want this to be like Bethesda, but who are afraid to say that that's what they want. That's a much bigger group, an influential, a more powerful group, even though it's not formed in any one way."

By the time I next meet with Frankie, in early August, several events have transpired, including the removal of the Little Tavern hamburger stand and the public hearing about the historic status of the former bank building, now a part of Bethel World Outreach Church. Frankie was not present at the hearing in which commissioners made decisions about properties evaluated on the historic sites survey, but is interested in hearing about the participation of congregation members. I learned that in the past she has tried to develop a relationship with the church, but has yet to be successful. Frankie tells me that this has been her experience with other ethnic-based and smaller churches. "They're so very concerned with building what they're building, that anybody who seems like they're trying to shuck off any leadership or anybody else from their efforts, there's a little bit of wariness about that....It's so hard to hang on to your leadership; it's a community within a community." She expresses how impressed she is with the church's "huge membership" and by the fact that multiple services are offered for different segments of the community. "It's a very comprehensive approach." Unlike Silver Spring Historical Society members who were dismayed that the pastors were able to motivate so many parishioners to turn out for the hearing, Frankie is awed that they came out in force to a civic meeting. "Wow, that's a different setting," she says. "That is such a neat story." Even more

encouraging to her is that whether or not their presence had an effect on the outcome of the commission's vote, Bethel Outreach members likely left feeling that it had.

"They would now see that they have some power."<sup>15</sup>

To my surprise—given the way that we parted after our previous meeting—Frankie asks me if I saw the Curtis White quote in the *Washington Post*, in which the project supervisor of the dismantling of the Little Tavern charged the historical society with racism.<sup>16</sup> Because she is hazy on all of the details and did not see Jerry McCoy's response, I review the sequence and fill in some of the story that she missed. I tell her that I think Jerry made a compelling point in suggesting that to erase sites that exemplify racist practices impoverishes a community's understanding of its past. I go on to add that those who spin historical narratives, like Jerry, then must acknowledge those threads of history or be guilty of another form of erasure. Frankie replies, "Yeah, that's a good point." She goes on to say, "It would be so smart on their part [to acknowledge Silver Spring's multiple histories.]" Saving a structure like the Little Tavern that symbolizes Silver Spring's segregationist past to many in the community would allow it to serve, in her words, as a "teaching tool." Frankie proceeds to imagine how this might serve the community. "All of these African Americans who talk about their kids not understanding, [would] have a place to take their kids and say, 'Look, your granddad couldn't have gone in there and bought a hamburger.'" In the course of our conversation we come to some agreement that history is filled with conflict, Frankie saying, "And you want to capture that, not run from it."<sup>17</sup>

Because a significant percentage of the people who participate in IMPACT related activities are immigrants, our conversation then shifts to that segment of the community and their very different relationship to the built environment and local politics and history. My impression, primarily from conversations I have had with a Filipino friend and with Vietnamese immigrants, is that their transnational experience leaves them largely disconnected from *local* community. Frankie, however, sees this as being a common denominator in Silver Spring, contending that most residents have connections elsewhere that are more important than the ones they have with the local community. As examples she brings up her husband again and then Agnes, an immigrant from Kenya who went through the CEP training. "Neither of them has a relationship with the community....So it's funny, I don't really distinguish their lack of connection to community. It just feels like *everybody* has a lack of connection to community in this area."<sup>18</sup>

Frankie acknowledges that there are significant distinctions to be made. "It is harder to start convincing someone who has got their foot in another country, to start putting in a lot of time locally. That's harder." She recalls recognizing this prior to launching the Community Empowerment Program. "I can remember in the pilot session, we had three Ethiopians, two, they were part of a threesome, and they would come to the sessions and they would be late because they were on the Internet trying to read what the latest development in Ethiopia was. And then to try to get them to come in and practice listening to one another about Silver Spring, it was like an absurdity." She adds, "I've had lots of those experiences."<sup>19</sup> This makes me recall high school student Dung describing how much time he and his family devote to

keeping up with news about Vietnam via the Internet and cable channels, while having little interaction with the community outside their front door. Dung's father, for instance, had lived in the community for seven years, but had yet to see the University of Maryland campus, where he hoped to send his children, even though it was less than two miles down the street.

For Frankie, who fears that downtown revitalization may result in Silver Spring becoming an exclusive community based on income, ethnic restaurants and similar gathering places are vital, particularly in terms of how they function as third places, including for those who live a transnational life. Small, hole-in-the-wall settings that are easily overlooked by passers-by and willingly sacrificed by those who think only in terms of optimum rents are often catalysts that lead residents to feel connected to their local community. But Frankie observes that the futures of some categories of these small businesses are more promising than others because their appeal tends to be broader. "I think the people who will survive will be, some with the best chance, will be some of the ethnic restaurants, because they'll be valued by both [the existing community and newcomers]. The Negil, Thai Derm, La Bomba, people like that probably can survive."<sup>20</sup> She draws a distinction here, as she often does, between places that she identifies as "new" and "old" Silver Spring. When I ask about the Quarry House's struggles due to the county smoking ban, she replies, "That's Old Silver Spring. I associate that with the car repair places."

As an outgrowth of Frankie's concern over the future of Silver Spring's small businesses, IMPACT has worked with council member Tom Perez on several projects. To date, Perez, a freshman councilman and the only non-white member of

the County Council, is the one person in that body who is raising questions about revitalization's effects on small businesses. Along with IMPACT, his office co-sponsored a town forum one stormy fall evening. Present were small business owners who are accustomed to working in isolation but who that night had an opportunity to share their stories with Perez and the array of others present, and then to strategize about possible steps to take to bolster their chances for survival. Helping facilitate such connections is something that Frankie values and regularly tries to nurture.



Fig. 85. Thai Market on Thayer Ave.

# Downtown Silver Spring Small Businesses Community Dialogue

Sponsored by Councilmember Tom Perez & Lasting IMPACT

**Monday October 27, 2003**

6:15pm Reception | 6:30-8:00pm Dialogue

**First Baptist Church  
8415 Fenton Street –Fellowship Hall  
Silver Spring, MD 20910**

Revitalization :

- How does it affect your business?
- How will it affect your business?
- What can be done to help your business?



Councilmember  
Tom Perez  
District 5

For more information, please call  
Councilmember Perez's Office  
240-777-7966 or IMPACT Silver  
Spring 301-495-3336  
Please visit the Montgomery County Council  
Website: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov)



Lasting IMPACT

Fig. 86. Flyer advertising small business community dialogue  
(Courtesy Council Member Tom Perez's Office and IMPACT)

IMPACT has also been intimately involved with a face-to-face survey of small business owners in downtown Silver Spring that Perez's office was responsible for designing and organizing. The survey allowed Perez and others to assess the experiences and needs of those proprietors. It placed members of the community who have long been concerned about small businesses in contact with dozens of people who are struggling in the "New Silver Spring." On several Friday mornings, I joined four of his staff members, Frankie, David Fogel of Gateway, and others going door-to-door, street-by-street with questionnaires. Based partially on our findings, Perez has prompted the County Council to provide assistance to businesses that have been adversely impacted by the revitalization project.

As Hodge and Feagin explain, “Ownership of small businesses is a major avenue of social and economic mobility for immigrant Americans and for Americans in historically oppressed groups.”<sup>21</sup> And the University of Maryland study on revitalization contends that the loss of such businesses is a tremendous detriment to local communities:

The loss of small businesses is by no means merely a sentimental problem. Small businesses, especially those that have existed in a community for a number of years, are valuable resources. They may provide goods and services that are not generally available from larger retailers and establishments and the local character and personality of a small business add much to the surrounding community....Small businesses create diversity and stability in the local economy.<sup>22</sup>

Aligning the organization with others in Silver Spring and the surrounding area who work on similar issues is one of Frankie's goals. So, for example, when IMPACT produced a study of the Vietnamese immigrant community, it reached out to the Maryland Vietnamese Mutual Association and its allies, as well as the county's school district and council. When IMPACT decided to hold an open space diversity conference in downtown Silver Spring, it did so in collaboration with Bowie State University and Montgomery College and brought in others to plan and sponsor and facilitate.

Opportunities to work on those projects, as well as to attend meetings of Lasting IMPACT, have given me an insider's view of how the group operates and what the core values and perspectives of active participants are. Stemming from the organization's openness and its commitment to diversity, those involved with IMPACT have a less easily defined worldview than do core members of the Historical Society. They bring with them a wider range of cultures, work experiences,

and religious beliefs, and they vary more dramatically in age, nationality, race, and ethnicity. Some, like Virginia, introduced in the last chapter, have much greater interest in recovering stories of Silver Spring's past than do others. She, like Manny Hidalgo, is also more inclined to be intrigued, not upset, by the efforts of historic preservationists. If there is one realm in which participants in this study overlap it is in the value they place on, and their wish to preserve, the community's small businesses.

*"Tear Some Crap Down": Mary Ann Zimmerman's Hard Line on Preservation*

One morning in early December 2002, a few days before the screening of *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*, I trekked over to Kefa Café to meet Mary Ann Zimmerman. At that point, Mary Ann and I had spoken on the phone and exchanged email messages but had not met face-to-face. She told me that she would likely be the only person at the cafe that morning wearing a bright purple hooded jacket with yellow trim, and she was right. Given the intimate size of Kefa it was not hard to spot her when she arrived. Even though Mary Ann knew that she would be unable to attend the upcoming IMPACT event, she had said over the phone that she was happy to help with its planning, and that was our task that morning. While this would be our focus, the two of us covered a fair amount of ground during what turned out to be a rather lengthy first meeting. Not only did I learn which people she thought it important to include in any discussion of revitalization, I also gained a sense of her personality and background, as well as her priorities (and non-priorities) for downtown Silver Spring.



*SSCLI Pilot Study Circle Group. From left to right: Chris Seubert, Carole Seubert, Stan Botts, Mary Ann Zimmerman, Maxine Howard, Jon Lourie and Yvonne Martinez Vega.*

Fig. 87. Mary Ann Zimmerman, front center (Courtesy IMPACT Silver Spring)

A native of Michigan, who went to school in Indiana and then worked in Chicago and Indiana before moving to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, Mary Ann, in her late fifties and white, is plain-spoken, sometimes blunt. Rarely did I find myself guessing where she stood on an issue or what she thought about various players in the revitalization process.

Unlike Joyce of Cunieform Records, whose bitterness over the demolition of the Armory and other county redevelopment decisions have led to drastic diminishment in her civic involvement, Mary Ann continues to serve on citizen advisory committees, even though she shares with Eva's former Bonifant Street neighbor a skepticism over their value. For example, during our first informal meeting she speculated, as Joyce had done, that the formation of those various committees is simply a way of keeping "potential troublemakers" (i.e. activists like her) appeased and so preoccupied that they are without the time they previously had

to be vocal and active. And yet, Mary Ann finds value in continuing to be one of a small, but very involved minority of residents.

During several encounters I have had with Mary Ann, it became clear that there are two primary frames of reference that have had significant effects on why she remains so active and how she thinks about the built environment of downtown Silver Spring. First, as a single person, trying to support herself financially as a consultant, affordability has always been an issue. Like virtually everyone I interviewed, Mary Ann says that Silver Spring was the one place that she could afford to live when she found herself searching for housing in the area. "The location was great and the price was affordable, so that's what got me here." Now she finds herself feeling vulnerable as rents in downtown complexes like hers continue to climb. Second, as a progressive Catholic with a family history of community activism and Democratic politics, Mary Ann is guided by a commitment to the "common good," which means that her personal concern with affordability extends outward to others. She acknowledges having no attachment to the community's older buildings and relatively little interest in its past. Instead, what she *is* attached to is the idea that downtown Silver Spring, as it undergoes revitalization, somehow remain an affordable place to live and run a business for a diversity of people.<sup>23</sup>

As with many of those I spoke with for this project, Mary Ann is white, yet drawn to urban settings with multiracial and multicultural populations. She enjoys telling about a cousin from St. Louis with children who stayed in her apartment in Blair House—a high rise complex on East-West Highway near Colesville Road—while she was working overseas. "They're from St. Louis and they commented on the

aromas from cooking that they smelled as they walked through the hallways. It was sort of fun for them. There's a foreignness to Silver Spring, stemming from its ethnic diversity that makes it sort of neat to those who are visiting here from the Midwest." Mary Ann can also provide a detailed demographic and biographical description of neighbors in her building and on her floor. "There are a lot of older blacks and some whites who have been there almost as long as the building's been there [forty years]. On my floor there are three or four Ethiopian families. One man worked for the Ethiopian embassy and then became a taxi driver." In addition, on her floor alone, there are two French-speaking black families, a Malaysian couple, and an Indian family from Guyana, but no natives of Spanish-speaking countries, as there are on other floors. It is clear from what she knows about her neighbors that Mary Ann does not shy away from visiting with them.<sup>24</sup>

Connected to the value Mary Ann places on diversity and the "common good," is an understanding of how important leadership is. Increasingly, as she became aware of various imbalances in leadership that exist in Montgomery County and Silver Spring, she began to seek ways to affect change in that arena, which ultimately led her to IMPACT Silver Spring.

As a child growing up in Michigan, Mary Ann was influenced by a father and especially a mother "who were very involved in community activities." In elementary school, she found herself attending the state's Democratic conventions, and in the 1960s, serving as a page at a national convention in Atlantic City. In the 1950s her mother had been elected an alternate delegate to one of those national Democratic conventions, but Mary Ann was forced to stay at home because of the polio epidemic.

Looking back, she says that her father's relationship with labor unions was also a key influence. "At one point, he was asked by one of the major trade unions to work for them. And to me, somebody who was in management [in construction] to be so highly thought of by unions is a good example of the kind of atmosphere I was brought up in." Another key influence stands out in Mary Ann's mind today. From the time she entered high school, her family hosted four or five exchange students. This contributed to what she calls "a general world interest" which meshed with a broader concern in equality and human rights, or as she also puts it, "in making the world a better place." Specifically, these concerns included "issues around economic kinds of problems, certainly civil rights issues of all sorts." Along with her mother, she became very involved in the fight for an Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>25</sup>

After working in international development for several years, Mary Ann came to Silver Spring where she soon decided that she wanted to have an impact on her local community. "I had made the decision when I got back from Senegal, which was about 1993, 1994, that I wanted to make Silver Spring my home. So I made a very conscious decision to try to get involved and to know the community better." On one level, she says, she has participated in "what I would call the more official groups, some of the advisory committees." For six years she served as a member of the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee. Then, experiencing growing frustration over the fact that Silver Spring was unincorporated—and therefore lacking a direct governing body or explicit boundaries—she says: "I got off of that a year or two ago.... That was when I found out that Silver Spring doesn't exist. Before that, I thought it was a city." From there Mary Ann has gone on to serve on Montgomery

County's Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee, as well as the Silver Spring Town Center Advisory Committee. Positions on advisory committees are appointed by the County Executive's office, but a person must apply. In 1998 when she learned about what was then the Silver Spring Community Leadership Initiative (SSCLI), she decided she needed to apply for its training program. Since then, she has also graduated from Leadership Montgomery, which has a very different orientation, catering mainly to established leaders.<sup>26</sup>

One of the lessons Mary Ann has learned from all of her civic participation is that, "Montgomery County groups do a very limited job of getting any ethnic diversity and probably much economic diversity." The Town Center/Civic Building Committee, she says, has been "the most diverse committee that I've been associated with," adding: "You have to really plan how you're going to get your inclusion and work on it." It was prior to serving on that committee—through her service on two subcommittees of the Urban District Advisory Committee—that Mary Ann began hearing about a proposal for SSCLI/IMPACT. Though aware of and concerned about the problems SSCLI was designed to address, she recalls her initial skepticism. "I was...concerned about what was going to get proposed because the way it was described—the way I HEARD it described—was much more, 'We who are always the committee know what should be done and we should try to find ways to train others to do what we do.'" Her apprehensiveness about such an approach to leadership prompted her to meet with Frankie Blackburn. She recounts what transpired in their exchange. "I very specifically said, I was nice about it, because Frankie and I are friends, but sort of 'show me.' And 'who are your facilitators?' 'It's a good game to talk

about our dealing with diversity, but how are you?' And she could provide good responses. So I said, 'O.K., this is something I need to try.' I believed in it in the way it was proposed, and I think it's the way it's turned out. What that is, is that IMPACT is a diverse group dealing with diverse issues...." And that is exactly what Mary Ann claims she was seeking. "It did for me what I had hoped it would do, which was provide contacts and a way to get to know people that were not in any of the groups that I was dealing with."<sup>27</sup>

Whereas core members of the Silver Spring Historical Society speak most fondly only about the community they once knew (or in some cases are able to imagine), Mary Ann, like other IMPACT participants, finds much in the present that she appreciates, but worries about the future. When asked what she values about Silver Spring, Mary Ann responds: "I think there are three pieces, maybe. One is it's urban....And I like urban areas where I can get to things easily, where I can walk, and where there's a diverse set of things that are easily available. Secondly, I find that I really do enjoy the fact that there's a diversity of people and that we aren't all the same. I find that valuable. It helps in the diversity of the buildings that are around and just in the mix of the people and what goes on. And the third piece is that right now I can afford it. And I hope that that piece stays along with the other two."<sup>28</sup>

Shifting our conversation to what she fears may be lost in the midst of revitalization, it becomes clear that here, too, Mary Ann's perceptions and central concerns differ significantly from core SSHS members. While loss to the historical society is primarily discussed in terms of older buildings that have been demolished and a simpler way of life that has disappeared, Mary Ann replies to my question

about perceived loss in these terms: "It's probably economic. And there's a strong link between economic diversity and ethnic diversity, though not total by any means."<sup>29</sup>

Given that Mary Ann discounts having formed any attachment to Silver Spring's older buildings, it is somewhat surprising that some of the things she says echo concerns of SSHS members, albeit with a different emphasis. Continuing our discussion of loss, Mary Ann goes on to say that: "With redevelopment, so much of it comes out looking the same." Lost, in the effort to "make everything look perfect," is the "visual diversity" of the community. "Real places, urban places, aren't perfect," she observes. "There's sort of a mixture of little messes and some good things and some not and I hope that some of that can remain." Influenced by Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Mary Ann notes that, "I like the diversity of moderately priced restaurants. Some of them will get lost because the buildings they are in are raggedy." In the end, what she repeatedly stresses she wants to see maintained is a mixture. "The question, then, is how do you get economically viable and not make it mean upper class, and not so homogenized?"<sup>30</sup>

Fenton Street, part of which falls within the boundaries of the redeveloping core and another part of which consists of a diverse mix of independently owned-small businesses falling outside it, illustrates to Mary Ann the dilemma. Pleased to see what in her view is much needed revitalization of the downtown's core, Mary Ann points to places like the portion of Fenton Street beyond the core, as necessary components of the commercial landscape that are now vulnerable. "Even though I don't use Fenton Street very often, there still is a different kind of life that could be fostered, I think, without having to make it fake or tripling the prices." Of the new

retail buildings on Fenton within the core, Mary Ann says: "It's not as bad as over by the NOAA buildings...but they still get facades that are exactly the same. There's that cookie cutter... That just doesn't do anything for me. Then you can't tell where you are."<sup>31</sup> More serious than such aesthetic questions, she argues, is that developers tend to be motivated only by a drive for maximum profit, which in turn limits their imaginations and prevents them from taking risks. This means that developers will be tempted, if success in the chain-dominated, architecturally uninspired center continues, to replicate what they have done in the core on other streets.

At this point, Mary Ann referred to the *Washington Post* article about the developers of Bethesda Row—the popular retail and entertainment strip in the neighboring, wealthier suburb—who were quoted as saying that they would not work on similar projects in the future. Mary Ann says, "The way I read it really was, 'We want to make maximum profits instantly. Anything that takes a second longer is not worth doing.'" The result, she says, is "cookie cutter stuff" and an outreach to corporate chains, not small businesses.<sup>32</sup>

As I listened to Mary Ann voice these views on downtown Silver Spring's built environment, I began getting the impression that she might be more supportive of historic preservation than I had guessed, or than some of her cohorts with IMPACT would prove to be at the screening of Walter Gottlieb's documentary. But that impression was quickly dispelled.

Drawing parallels between her work in international development and preservationists, Mary Ann expresses impatience with people who tell other people what they need. "What becomes difficult in working with developing countries is

when people say things like, 'Yeah, can you get them to *not* have cars like we do?' And there's so much of 'we,' after we've got what we want is not working, then we're going to impose our values on those people who don't have it and want to improve their lot.... We want them to remain pure and simple." Similarly, while a non-smoker herself, she is upset by the County's decision to institute a smoking ban in all public buildings, including restaurants and bars. She sees some of the same elements at play among those who are prone to "remembering fondly the good old days and wanting to keep things like that, while forgetting the bad parts."<sup>33</sup> As for how all of this relates to Silver Spring, Mary Ann contends that the community is "changing—it's not going to remain static," and she resents those who want to impose their narrow views on the landscape. "There's a lot of crap down there," she says. "There's a lot of crap all over."

In a subsequent interview I learn how strongly Mary Ann feels about historic preservationists in Silver Spring and some of the structures that members of that segment of the community profess to be most attached to. Because of the nature of the advisory groups she has served on, Mary Ann has interacted with SSHS members from time to time. Most recently this occurred in her work with the Town Square or Civic Building group. "They [two preservationists] came until we agreed to say that we were all for recommending to have a wood floor and then they haven't shown up again. That was their only interest. They stopped coming that day." The two who had lobbied for that feature were devastated over the loss of the Armory's wood dance floor, which led them to participate in meetings about the new building.<sup>34</sup> While SSHS members like Joyce and the Reardon sisters remain so angry over the

demolition of the Armory that they want nothing to do with its replacement, these SSSH members, as they are known for doing, fought earnestly for what they wanted.

Having been part of such interactions, Mary Ann has concluded that local historic preservationists look at what she perceives as dynamic, culturally rich Silver Spring through far too narrow a lens, and because of that they have been obstructionists. "My extreme impression is that they want to save everything. I'm aware that this is not where most of them are, but they have in fact, I think, been very effective at stopping stuff. In some cases it's led to something that's getting re-done, like the Coca Cola thing I guess is [she meant Canada Dry bottling plant]." While the solution for the Canada Dry plant—preserving its rounded entrance and lobby as part of a new condominium development—is deemed one of their successes by the preservationists, the value of doing such a thing is a mystery to Mary Ann. "It had been agreed to tear it down and then all of a sudden it popped up again. To save the outside and put something else inside it. I don't see it worth any of that, but that's my opinion and my opinion doesn't prevail. And my money, well my money, is going into that because I pay taxes."<sup>35</sup>

Such statements of Mary Ann's make me wonder if there are *any* specific older or historic buildings that she is pleased to see remain a part of the landscape. When asked, the train station is the only one that she comes up with. "It looks like they've done a nice job with it. It's probably a little bit too bad that it couldn't have been at one level kept as a train station, since there is a train that stops here." Like novelist George Pelecanos's characters, and demonstrating her pragmatism, she adds, "I hope it's made useful."<sup>36</sup> When I ask about buildings that she is happy were *not*

saved, Mary Ann immediately names the Armory. The Armory, I learned time and again, continues to be a controversial structure long after its disappearance from the landscape. Responding to that building both as a resident and as an active citizen who regularly attended meetings there, Mary Ann says that she was "happy" to see it go. "I liked the outside of the Armory. I thought it was neat. I liked what they had done with the space. It worked well. I walked by it a lot. But they needed to tear up the walls to replace the wiring—the electricity. Downstairs smelled because the plumbing didn't work. So to me it was a dump, and that's why I was very glad when all of a sudden it was gone. If it hadn't disappeared, we'd still be fighting it." The new civic building, she contends, will probably fulfill many of the needs filled by the Armory, "and a bunch of other ones and better."<sup>37</sup>

The demise of the Armory strikes such an emotional chord among historic preservationists that many have difficulty talking about the future civic building and refuse to go anywhere near it or to use the parking garage that sits on the site of the demolished Armory. Some people associated with IMPACT, I discovered, find it equally challenging to talk about preservationists. When asked about the active role that the latter group plays in the community, Mary Ann says, "They're very vocal." But then she adds that because of the way they present themselves, "They've gotten me to be less preservationist than I used to be. Tear down a few things. Crap is crap." Asked to speculate on why it might be important for some in the community to save buildings like the Canada Dry plant, she responds: "I have no idea. It's not a thing that interests me, so I ignore them because they make me angry. Because they want to save everything, and I don't understand it, and I don't care to, so I ignore it."<sup>38</sup>

If historic preservationists fall on one end of a spectrum, Mary Ann falls on the other, asserting that she feels no attachment to any building, not even the Art Deco structures that today nearly everyone hails as important contributions to the identity and character of the suburb. "I don't care one way or another about a little Art Deco shopping center. I mean they had one in Cleveland Park [where she lived briefly before moving to Silver Spring] that they kept too and then renovated all of it and it doesn't look, it looks just like any other little shopping center in the world." Perhaps recognizing that it might be unusual for her *not* to have formed any such attachments, she adds, "I have no idea why, but it doesn't mean anything to me."<sup>39</sup>

Even though the temporary absence of a community meeting space means that Mary Ann often finds her civic meetings being held in third places, she does not share the affection that some of her fellow residents have for them either. In part reflecting her pragmatic approach to things, she views them mainly as settings that can be made to serve a function, rather than as places she is likely to go alone to meet and mingle with others. "Most of the places I go to I go to in a context. So I don't know how they function when I'm not in them in that context. I don't come here [Kefa] unless I'm meeting somebody." She also expresses no special love for the Tastee Diner. "I don't like the food at the Tastee Diner. I know it's an institution. It's sort of cute. But...it's always been the place for meetings, and now they've got an awful lot more space, so you know, when you're going to meet somebody, normally it would be at the Tastee Diner, and that's as easy as any place for me to get to, so fine."<sup>40</sup> As we will see, meeting space is one of the key functions that third places have for other people affiliated with IMPACT.

While third places like the Tastee and the Quarry House are not places that she is likely to seek out on her own, Mary Ann does say that she understands and appreciates the value that they have for others in the community. This is consistent with her worldview and values. As opposed to the physical facades valued by preservationists, these are settings that bring people together, that play a vital social role in the community. She laughs that the Quarry House, which she refers to as "another dump," "is another place that may collapse on itself because the physical structure is probably questionable." Yet, she goes on to observe that, "to have something like that, I do think is important," and "what it provides in terms of atmosphere and other things is nice." This fits with her overall perspective on the built environment: "I think that to have a livable downtown—and again we go back to Jane Jacobs—you do have to have some things that attract people of various kinds. And that's probably why places like this get used."<sup>41</sup>

When asked to comment on how her perspective compares with the local preservationists, Mary Ann says: "A few things have dragged on for a few extra years that my own bias says is not worth it. They [Silver Spring's preservationists] have probably played a useful role in getting people thinking to don't plow everything down. And in this part of downtown, I think we equate things with structures, but it's what's in them, that's what we [she and her allies] are really trying to preserve." Rather than caring about what goes on inside buildings, she contends that the community's preservationists appear intent on "preserving a feeling, but feelings change over time."<sup>42</sup>

*"I have always walked past a Starbucks to get to a Kefa...":  
Geoff Durham and Community "Soul"*

Geoff Durham, a graduate of CEP class number three, and at the time I interviewed him a staff member of the Silver Spring Regional Center, views himself as an outsider in a number of ways. As a result, even though he acknowledges the many ways that his involvement with IMPACT has contributed to his personal growth, his relationship to the organization often appears more complicated and less comfortable than it is for others I spoke with. Among other things, Geoff, in his thirties, is a Virginian. Geographically this sets him apart from most participants. It also separates him to some degree culturally from those Maryland and District residents who carry with them strong associations about the more conservative southern state. Geoff's parents are both Virginia natives, and he grew up in the Washington suburbs of Northern Virginia, before attending college at Randolph Macon, where he majored in horticulture and landscape design. Geoff now lives in Fairfax, where he is raising a family, and had been working at the Silver Spring Regional Center for three years when I began my series of interviews with him in February 2003. He laughed that people at work made fun of him for being a Virginian and that his neighbors said that they could not understand how he could work in Maryland, but that he appreciates qualities of both states. Also contributing to Geoff's sense of being on the margins was that he is white and male in a program that mainly draws people of color and more women than men. In addition, while respectful of people of faith and/or those with strong church ties, he himself lacks such affiliations, something that he told me he mostly kept to himself.



Fig. 88. Geoff Durham

One other factor distinguishes Geoff from most other CEP participants. In the midst of a group that generally casts a critical eye on institutions—including local government—for how they traditionally operate, Geoff found himself employed by Montgomery County as Urban District Manager for the Silver Spring Regional Center, the agency in charge of overseeing the revitalization project. As such, he followed in the footsteps of his boss, Gary Stith, who also graduated from the CEP training and recommended that he do the same.

Having had virtually no contact with Silver Spring prior to accepting his position, Geoff was a relative newcomer to the community, whose perceptions of its downtown bore certain similarities to Jerry McCoy's, both saying that in their minds it resembles a well-known fictional North Carolina town. Yet he, like other IMPACT

people, was less concerned than Jerry about the revitalization project's effects on historic buildings than he was with what may happen to the unique, small businesses that many of those structures hold.

When I asked Geoff about first impressions of Silver Spring, and what if anything surprised him, he replied without hesitation. "That's easy. It was like a Mayberry, with a small town sense of community."<sup>43</sup> This association with the small town setting of the vintage television series *The Andy Griffith Show* is the same one that the historical society president often makes. Elaborating, Geoff recounted how after starting a job which puts him in charge of the downtown streetscapes, "making sure that they look inviting," he began walking the streets and introducing himself to shop owners. He recalled being amazed at the warm reception he received. "Kefa was my first real taste of the small town feel," he said, noting that encounters of the kind he had there countered his assumption that downtown Silver Spring would be like its trendier, more upscale neighbor, Bethesda. And yet while the "small town feel" was appealing, Geoff said that he also appreciated the ways that Silver Spring defied common definitions. One thing he soon came to recognize is that Silver Spring is "not the stereotypical suburb," and that for all of its "small town" character, its downtown is simultaneously a "quasi-urban center," something that Jerry also professes to appreciate.<sup>44</sup>

Like nearly everyone I spoke with, Geoff voiced concern about what kinds of effects revitalization might have on the complex character of the community. "New buildings and the businesses they house may be the skeleton of Silver Spring," he told me, "but small businesses are the heart. They truly represent the community." Early in

our initial taped exchange, he offered that, "Discovery [the media conglomerate] does not represent Silver Spring, not its soul. It's the smaller businesses that give it its identity." What he said he did not want to see downtown become is another piece of "generica," a place like anyplace else with the same stores that one can find anywhere across the country. "It's fine to have a Borders to pull people in," he said, "but then get them to discover what else is here."

Bonifant was the example Geoff gave of a street that houses many of the community's unique offerings. "I think Bonifant is the coolest street," he exclaimed because it houses so many small businesses. Talking about that street led him to describe the pleasures he has long received from urban exploration, again an example of white male privilege. "I have always walked past a Starbucks to get to a Kefa, a Subway to get to a Da Marco's. If there's a logo or a name I don't recognize, I will go toward it."<sup>45</sup> Travel for him, Geoff said, piques his "desire to explore, to discover the less well-known places." As an example, he reminisced about how, while on a trip to Tampa, he found it necessary to experience a regional spicy potpie with cornbread. "To my wife's dismay, I drove out of my way to try one of these things, and it was a hot day on top of it."

Asked about favorite places in Silver Spring, nearly every setting Geoff listed was a restaurant and/or a third place. Bombay Gaylord, Thai Derm, Cubano's, Women Who Dare (a bookstore), Da Marco's, Quarry House ("I like hanging out in cool bars"), and the Half Moon. Asked about Taste, Geoff replied, "I can't believe I haven't mentioned it; it would be first and foremost." Most of the places on his list, he noted, are places that commuters like he will be drawn to, and therefore his list was

not as broad as most residents' would be.<sup>46</sup> He speculated that residents would be more apt to form relationships with proprietors of many of the service-oriented shops, the dry cleaners, barbershops, and hardware stores.

Coming to IMPACT's CEP training with this background, it should not be too surprising that Geoff chose to focus his attention on small businesses. However, when he and Frankie Blackburn sat down at the outset of the program to talk about potential projects, Geoff had been entertaining other ideas, including working with youth. As Silver Spring's Urban District Manager, part of his job was supervising crews of young men, mostly African American, whose main jobs include upkeep of sidewalks and other public spaces. They also serve as liaisons between the county government and the public. Talking with Frankie, though, it became clear that "I was more entrenched with small business, that I could affect change in that realm, and that that was where I've been and am going." Geoff found that "people [in his CEP group] identified with my project in a way that I couldn't always identify with theirs." What distinguished his, he suggested, was that "everybody shared that experience" of having formed a relationship with the commercial landscape, restaurants, and shops of downtown Silver Spring. Some participants, he recalled, had friends who owned small businesses in the community. Others, like Manny Hidalgo, were considering opening one.<sup>47</sup>

While Geoff's personal enthusiasm for small businesses and third places appears genuine, his profession placed him in the position of towing the Regional Center's official line when talking about the future of downtown Silver Spring. One component of that line is that "the core will provide economic stability and lead to

new opportunities." In other words, what happens in the core will affect the periphery in any of a number of ways. Another is that "the market will decide who goes and what makes it" in the new Silver Spring. Geoff periodically voiced these sentiments in our conversations, and Gary Stith and Mel Tull, also of the Regional Center, do the same when addressing the public. In addition, he, like Stith and Tull, was prone to talking about those types of businesses "that send a signal." Some of the shops he named as conveying "the wrong message" about downtown Silver Spring are the ones that come up in dialogue amongst novelist George Pelecanos's characters: the hair salons, pawnshops, nail parlors, the gun shop, and tattoo parlors.<sup>48</sup> One frequent response of small business owners outside the core and in City Place when surveyed about revitalization's effects on their shops was that no one from the County, including Regional Center staff members, ever talks with them. Based on that experience, it was difficult for them not to conclude that the County views them as expendable.

For his part, Geoff said he would like to see fewer of the kinds of businesses that comprise the current mix and "more ethnic groceries and an intriguing bookstore." Playing up the downtown's "arts and entertainment" designation, he also offered that Silver Spring would benefit from having more studio space to offer, including for recording. "A movie memorabilia store near AFI would be a great addition," he added. And in our last two meetings, he expressed his enthusiasm for a proposed set of "arts alleys," saying that he envisioned them being like Richmond, Virginia's "Art Walk."<sup>49</sup>

Geoff's two scenarios for what he hoped would *not* transpire in downtown Silver Spring illustrate his mix of pragmatism and idealism. "You don't want it [downtown] to become simply rows of national chains, with no room for anything else. On the other hand, you don't want an inverted black hole, where the core thrives, but that's it. If success is limited to only a small circle, that would be a failure." Overall, he expressed satisfaction in the course that revitalization has taken, and gave much of the credit to the primary developer, Bryant Foulger, and County Executive Doug Duncan.<sup>50</sup> While listening to him talk glowingly about these two figures and the progress they have made, part of me wondered how much of this was a practiced public relations pitch, but I began to think that it was genuine. For example, early in our first taped meeting, Geoff told me: "What's neat about Foulger-Pratt's development plan is that they're trying not to make Silver Spring just a destination, but a community with things for people who live there." In our second taped session he spoke of a "shared vision" among those working for the County on Silver Spring's revitalization. Asked about its source, he said, "When I say it starts from the top, I'd imagine that it starts with the County Executive, since he [Duncan] got Gary as director and it gets passed down." The Urban District Manager was especially intrigued by what this may mean for the sections of Silver Spring outside the core, those parts of the downtown that most others see as especially vulnerable. "People identify their community with its downtown," he told me. However, in Silver Spring, as in many cities and towns, "the outer edges are still moldable clay."<sup>51</sup>

Geoff would face little disagreement from others I spoke with about the merits of "Downtown Silver Spring" versus the "American Dream" project. "The easiest

thing would have been to do that Mall of American thing. Flatten out everything, build something new, and then be done with it. I think it [the American Dream project] would have brought a lot of folks here, but it doesn't match the community." Geoff, like Frankie and many others, credit the American Dream proposal for bringing people together. "I think you almost have to have something so ludicrous that if nothing else it created a common enemy for the entire community. So that while a lot of people may not have shared a vision necessarily, they all knew that they hated that. So if nothing else, it probably ignited them in a way, brought them together, unified them. And I think they kind of got on the same page there." By contrast, he viewed the solution that was ultimately chosen as being much more complex and atypical. "You see how long it's taken to piece something together that actually means something, that involves everybody. It's harder. It's more difficult. And I think that's what you've got."<sup>52</sup>

Geoff admitted that he arrived on the scene after most of the fiercest controversies and tensions had been settled. "I'm coming in a little bit late," he said. "Like I said, I've been here for a little over three years, so I wasn't here for a lot of the fighting. I've been here for the revitalization, the actually seeing, 'Oh, look!' I was here when the Tastee Diner moved. I kind of, I saw the beginning of this happen. So I've been here for this transition, but I wasn't necessarily here for the fight." Although he missed those earlier chapters, Geoff said that he sensed that the activism that was stirred up in the mid- to late-1980s and early 1990s continues to be felt as plans unfold. "I think that if you've had that much invested in it, your name, your blood, your toil, I think you're going to make sure that this goes all the way through. I think

that's what you're seeing here. And I think that's why the community is so involved. Or actually, probably, maybe that's the tail wagging the dog. I think that all these people have all this effort put into it because the community is so involved. And I think that's how it should go."<sup>53</sup>

In the midst of the recent swirl of changes, ambivalence was mostly what Geoff expressed when the conversation switched to local historic preservationists. Since taking his job, he said he had had limited contact with members of the historical society, noting that while he appreciated some of their contributions, he was also well aware of their reputation in the community.

When I first raised the topic of historic preservation, his response was this: "I think that the preservation of some of these historical buildings...is important mainly because of what we've talked about. You used the phrase 'McDonaldization' and I used the catchphrase 'generica.' If you're going to flatten everything and start anew, then what exactly are you doing? You're just popping up another one of these strip malls, one of these soul-less suburbs, and if that's what you're going to do, then go ahead and say you're going to do it, but don't tie it under the phrase 'we're revitalizing Silver Spring,' because you're not revitalizing anything. You're flattening and building new and that's a different deal altogether." As a result, Geoff was glad, for example, that the Silver Theater had been refurbished, because it maintains "some level of identity here." He recounted, "If you've walked in that Silver Theater and you've talked to some of the ushers who were asked to come back for the opening, that theater means a lot to a lot of people. People remember it as a kid, [like] people remember the little Gifford's [Ice Cream]." Like the local preservationists, "the look"

is something that Geoff values. "Now, maybe it will end up being a Panera [the bakery/café chain] or something like that, but it will still kind of look the same [as it did when opened in the 1930s]." In the end, the mix possesses "charm," he said.<sup>54</sup>

Geoff noted that incorporating new buildings within the mix of a "revitalized" downtown is something he considers necessary, and he interjected the word "compromise" often. Geoff cited the relocation and transformation of the Tastee Diner as one of the successful compromises wrought by the revitalization project. "When I saw it with all the new, the addition and all of that, it sort of struck me as unusual.... While the façade, the shape of it, might have changed a little bit, what's inside of it hasn't. People are still going there and there are more of them, so I think to an extent that's successful." There are other structures that Geoff said may not strike him or other residents of Silver Spring as being so historically significant, and whether in the end they are saved, altered, or demolished depends on similar processes of public input and compromise. "Ultimately you let those things shake themselves out and you end up with a compromise."<sup>55</sup>

Geoff quickly volunteered that what he thought about any of these development- and preservation-related matters had little impact on what transpired in downtown Silver Spring. "I can voice an opinion but quite honestly, no one cares. They think, 'fantastic for you, buddy, now go pick the streets free of litter please.'" He continued, "I mean I'll sit and listen and I'm very attuned to what they're saying. And I hear their causes and concerns and so forth and then I listen to the other folks either rebut or comply or whatever it might be. So I'm involved in the process, but as far as being able to impact it, I don't."<sup>56</sup>

While claiming that no one in his office spoke harshly about the Silver Spring Historical Society, Geoff admitted that at times he was in contact with people who view that group unfavorably. "Sometimes there's an element of, you know, it's almost as if, 'don't they have other things to do?' 'Are they doing this just for the sake of being difficult?' With his background in horticulture, Geoff allowed that he, too, had struggled with some of the targets of SSHS members' activism. In particular, he was upset by the group's response to Montgomery College's plans for Jessup Blair Park, which revolved around the building of a pedestrian bridge linking the campus to the park. He explained that many of the trees that were tagged for removal to make way for an overpass, were white pines, planted as "filler trees." "They're just used to take up space and create a bit of an environment, but they're hardly historic, they're not grand redwoods or oaks." He faulted those who actively opposed the plan. "I'm like, if they even saw the plans, if they took the time to read them, they're taking down those three trees and planting thirty in their place." To Geoff, it is these types of actions that lead others to say, "'they're at it again,' with their eyes rolling."<sup>57</sup>

However, from the perspective of people like Jerry, Marcie and George, the trees were part of the legacy of the Blair family. In an article in the *Silver Spring Voice*, George French called the plan for the park "a cement monstrosity," emphasizing that it would destroy the trees that Violet Blair Janin had bequeathed. By contrast, others quoted for the piece, including heirs of Violet Blair Janin, expressed their support for the plan which would link the campus to downtown Silver Spring. "In a letter to the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission, family

member Bruce Lee said, 'we are adamant in our belief that [Violet Blair Janin] would have been thrilled to give her consent to the college...."<sup>58</sup>

In considering why the Silver Spring Historical Society is often deemed an annoyance or obstructionist by other segments of the community, Geoff offered two explanations. In terms of the larger system that local preservationists work within, he observed that it does not always lead to the type of "give and take" or "compromise" that he values. "I get a sense that there is an 'us' and a 'them' type of approach to those things [public hearings]...I mean you'd like to see folks be able to talk and be able to make concessions," but that is often not the reality. "Everyone wants to score a victory," he said, "not tie." When community members engage with others in the civic arena it is nearly always in hearings in which they are permitted an allotted number of minutes to make a persuasive argument. There is no opportunity for dialogue, no room for compromise. Instead, either up or down votes are cast by commissioners after each person testifying has made her or his case. The atmosphere and relationships that result are adversarial.<sup>59</sup>

Internally, if an organization's membership is homogeneous, members' desires to have it their way or no way is heightened, Geoff contended. He talked about a "fanaticism" among the most visible and vocal that has them "believing in things one-hundred percent." Geoff added that this closed-mindedness is detrimental especially with a developer like Bryant Foulger. "The developer in the case of Silver Spring doesn't fit the stereotype." Therefore, those who "hold a stereotype of what a developer is and refuse to let go of ideas that they've held on to for years...that no longer serves them well." "New blood" and "new ideas," he told me, are necessary for

the health of an organization. "Have you seen anybody new in this preservation society? When was the last time?"<sup>60</sup>

Geoff volunteered that one of the areas where new and more diverse membership could have a positive effect on the historical society, in particular, is in recognizing that there are multiple histories attached to buildings. "I wonder...if it would change what [SSHS members] would identify as worthy of [their] attention. I wonder because when you bring in folks from different backgrounds and with different histories, buildings are going to take on different meanings." Absent such diversity, it is far easier to remain unaware of divergent perceptions and to maintain the dominant culture's narrative about the community's history. To illustrate, he recounted a conversation with an African American co-worker at National Airport when he was a college student that "totally shook up" his worldview. The co-worker, a student at the University of Maryland, asked Geoff what he thought of the 1950s. Geoff, from his white middle-class perspective, and carrying with him a plethora of popular culture images, voiced a positive opinion. When he was done, the young man turned to Geoff and said, "Do you realize that in the 1950s my family couldn't have lived in the community that your family did?" "It's a lesson I've always carried with me," he told me.<sup>61</sup>

As a result of such experiences, Geoff went on to say that whenever he hears white people in Silver Spring talking fondly about things like Giffords Ice Cream, he notices that "if you look deeper you won't see any folks of color associated with that." "What you see are white folks, girls in poodle skirts, things like that." When I asked why such images remain so popular with so many people, at least whites, Geoff

responded that there is something "reassuring about the stability, the defined roles, the nurturing and caring parents and teachers," but added that it "now seems creepy" to him. Looking at his own family, he said he realizes that things were not that "rosy," that "lots of stuff was repressed."<sup>62</sup>

While admitting to a lack of detailed knowledge of Silver Spring's past, Geoff voiced an awareness of the importance of its history. "I would imagine that anybody who wouldn't care about the history [of the community] is either new to the area or just looking at it for other reasons." Part of what makes the revitalization project interesting, he said, is that decisions were made to preserve some, though not all, of the historic buildings. "We lost a few and kept a few....So like, well yeah, we kept the Tastee Diner, but it sort of lost a little something....Or obviously the Armory. Or we could have taken care of this whole project a whole lot faster without having to save this old shopping center, but it was important. Why? Because it was the first [of its kind in the area.]"<sup>63</sup> And now, he concluded, Silver Spring is in the midst of the most recent chapter of its history. "Here we are now with this renaissance period, which is challenging, but I hope is a mixture of the needs, and the history, and the people who live here, the community."

*Silver Spring as a New Model of Development: Manny Hidalgo on Preservation and Small Businesses*

Manny Hidalgo, who came to know Geoff when the two participated in IMPACT's CEP training finds it encouraging that there are people like Geoff at the Regional Center. "I mean the fact that he [Geoff] works for government, that's a good sign." At the time that we spoke, Manny was development director for CASA de

Maryland, which he described as a multi-services agency that started out in a church basement, organized mainly by left-leaning North Americans who wanted to provide sanctuary to people escaping the civil war in El Salvador. CASA went from there to developing numerous programs, the cornerstone being a day labor center, providing temporary jobs. It also offers educational programs, social services, health, housing, and legal assistance. Manny left CASA shortly after our last meeting, and is now Operations and Development Director for the Spanish Catholic Center in D.C.

I met with Manny, a large and gregarious man in his thirties, for two lengthy conversations, one at Savory Café in Takoma Park, the other at Mayorga.<sup>64</sup> Like Geoff, Manny says that he has always been drawn to "ma and pa stores" and to communities where they and other small businesses thrive. The son of Cuban immigrants, he grew up in Miami, but explains that he has family roots in Silver Spring and other parts of the D.C. metropolitan area. When his mother's family came to the United States, they first lived in Hyattsville, Maryland and then in McLean, Virginia, while his grandfather taught engineering at Catholic University in D.C. His mother's sister, Manny's aunt Theresa, eventually settled in Silver Spring. "They have ten kids, so all ten of my cousins in that family, the Bernardos, grew up in Silver Spring. All went to high school in Silver Spring. So I've had that connection since I can remember of coming to Silver Spring."

Those roots grew deeper in the late 1980s when Manny chose to attend Catholic University before transferring to Georgetown, where he graduated in 1991. After brief periods in Louisville, Kentucky and then Miami, he and his wife moved to Silver Spring, something that he says he had long wanted to do.

# Working Together

IMPACT Silver Spring

Summer 2002



CEIP III Participants and Facilitators: Left to Right, Seated: Nora Lobos, Anibal Quijada, Myriam Torrico, Tsedale Yigeru, Jackie Bahn-Henkelman, Frankie Blackburn, Maria Bezerra; Middle Row: David Vega, Michael Pauls, Nancy Navarro, Ray Moreno, Geoff Durham, Jim Henkelman-Bahn, Raj Chawla, Enona Williams, Bess Howard; Back Row: Daisy Brown Herndon, Pierre Colombel, Susan Worten Eroraha, Manny Hidalgo.

## CEIP Participants 2001-2002

Maria Bezerra  
Raj Chawla  
Don Downing  
Geoff Durham  
Susan Worten Eroraha  
Daisy Brown Herndon  
Manny Hidalgo  
Ray Moreno  
Nancy Navarro  
Minnie Muchai  
Michael Pauls  
Anibal Quijada  
Myriam Torrico  
Enona Williams  
David Vega  
Tsedale Yigeru

## Diversity Conference Draws Over 320 Silver Spring Citizens

pedestrian fatalities and deterring crime, to encouraging ethnic diversity in political leadership; from sharing and publishing stories about peoples' diverse backgrounds, to eradicating illiteracy and strengthening neighborhood associations.

This wasn't the typical conference format. There were no inspiring keynote addresses, no pep-talks from political leaders, no fact-filled panels of experts. This was a day for citizens to bring their own expertise, or curiosity and questions, to the table. A day for all kinds of people who live and work in Silver Spring to create their own agendas, and engage in impassioned discussions, with suggestions for next-steps or potential collaborative projects.

These were not always easy conversations. In one corner of a room a widening circle of 40-50 confronted the complexity of problems around school achievement disparities. Ordinary citizens self-managed discussions fraught with stereotypes and assumptions to get to new understandings and a shared commitment to make schools work better for all children and youth.

....continued on page 6

All day "the buzz" in the meeting rooms at the Hilton in Silver Spring on Saturday, March 9, was palpable. Over 300 people had brought their passions and concerns to a one-day conference, called "Building a Diverse Community." The free event was initiated by IMPACT Silver Spring and used inclusive planning and organizing that eventually brought in over 50 grass-roots organizations and community institutions as co-sponsors.

Even on a rainy day, people seemed drawn to the citizen participation format, the broad vision of a healthy and empowered Silver Spring, the desire to see all kinds of diversity as community assets, and the generous lunch in a comfortable setting close to mass transit. After several introductory presentations and some getting-to-know-you activities, they generated conversation groups with their own priorities—from installing better street lighting to preventing



Participants at the Diversity Conference listen intently to a fellow participant at one of forty-two small group discussions held through out the day as a result of the Open Space Meeting Design. This group met around the topic: REAL Relationships Cross Culturally.

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Fig. 89. Top photo, Manny Hidalgo, top row, center (Courtesy IMPACT Silver Spring)

The family connection was not the sole reason that the young couple chose to locate in Silver Spring. The first that Manny mentions was more practical. "We could

afford it. It [the Four Corners neighborhood] was one of the few areas that we could afford." In addition, there were social and political factors. "I knew I wanted to be in Maryland and not Virginia....The politics of Virginia kind of disturbed me, whereas in Maryland it jibed with me more." But family memories and a desire for a diverse neighborhood were also important factors. "To be honest, the fact that I've always had good thoughts about Silver Spring since I was a kid, from my cousins living here," played a part in the decision.

Elaborating, Manny explains that even as a child he was struck by differences between Miami and Silver Spring. "One of the things I liked about their [his cousins'] neighborhood was that it was a lot more diverse than the one I grew up in. The neighborhood I grew up in, in Miami was like ninety-nine percent Cuban, Catholic. Whereas they had a fair share of African Americans, kids going to school with Jewish kids, Asian kids. Now they all had in common being fairly middle, upper class, but at least it was ethnically diverse."

There was one other thing that drew Manny and his wife to Silver Spring, he tells me, and it had more to do with its aesthetic or physical appeal. "Part of Silver Spring's allure, for us, is its de-emphasis on strip malls and on prefabricated commercial districts. Something that we saw a lot of, not only in Miami but in Louisville, was just massive development on a scale that one has to wonder if there was any broad discussion whatsoever. Just entire farm areas, acres and acres of green, converted to concrete almost over night. And then the sprawl problems that that has brought on, I think is something that now they are having to confront."

By contrast, Manny praises some of the choices made for Silver Spring. "I think Silver Spring has done a really good job of developing sensibly," something that he would like to see taken further, ensuring that development proceeds in a more organized way and around certain principles. "I think as long as we have people in government and in the private sector demanding and emphasizing smaller businesses, and maybe even just go ahead and write into law that a percentage of these commercial districts must go towards the non-national chains, you can retain a lot of economic activity for the folks that live here, as well as the aesthetic value of this area." He suggests that Silver Spring could serve as "a model for that type of development," a sentiment that I have heard echoed in conversations with more recent CEP participants.

Becoming a model of this kind, Manny admits, would require major changes in how things are done in Montgomery County, but at the same time would have significant payoffs for residents of the community, he contends. "We don't have to go the traditional model of development route. It doesn't have to go to the highest bidder. They can really develop a plan...and I hope they do have plenty of set-asides for the smaller businesses." One of the aspects of Gottlieb's documentary that Manny did appreciate was that it conveyed how important such enterprises are. "I think that something the film did that was good was that it emphasized the benefits of having a smaller community environment in the sense that you walk in the hardware store and they know your name. People really miss those days when there was a closer connection to merchants and there was not this total disconnect between the commercial sector and the residential sector."

In the midst of this part of our conversation, Manny volunteers how important neighborhood gathering places have been for him and the vitality of communities he has lived in. "You know where I live the corner pub has been there forever and it seems like it really is like a 'Cheers.' I've heard the same is true of this pub where Richard [Jaeggi] hangs out....If you want to find Richard, go to the Quarry House. We need more places like that." But as much as Manny values such places, he, like Geoff, accepts that a more economically viable Silver Spring will require a mix of chain and independent businesses. "I'm fine with a Borders coming in here. I mean I wish there was a great independent bookstore, but there isn't, not that I know of anyway. And I'm fine with Austin Grill, as long as there's also...a lot of non-chain restaurants there too." Overall, he says, he sides with a slow growth approach to development.

The use of the phrase "slow growth" surprises me coming from someone outside of the historic preservation community. When I ask Manny about his perceptions of that group I learn that even though he knows little about it, his inclination is to support such efforts. "I don't know enough about them, unfortunately. My gut instinct is that because I'm in favor of slow growth that it [historic preservationist] would be a good group to be leading the charge." As an example of something that has impressed him about local preservationists, he points to the Silver Spring Shopping Center. "I think even the fact that they retained the façade of that very first strip mall—even though they're going to change everything behind it—was a good idea. I'm all into that." He cites what he has observed in Miami with the preservation of its Art Deco section as a foundation of his beliefs.

When asked what value there is in such efforts, specifically in Silver Spring, he responds in part, "I think it's important for people who grew up here to come back here and recognize where they grew up." When pressed to explain why historic preservation should matter to more recent residents, he answers in greater detail: "I think there are many ways to contribute to the identity of a community without building new buildings. And I think if a community has a rich history, then I think that there should be efforts made to preserve it. And sure, it changes, it's going to change just demographically, but structurally I don't think it needs to change all that much. And I'm happy with the slow pace of the changes. So I guess I would tend to side with the preservationists."

How successfully Manny's aesthetic concerns intersect with what he expresses as one of his other chief concerns, that Silver Spring do more to preserve and enhance economic diversity, remains an open question. Like Geoff Durham, Manny is young, upwardly mobile and admits to having a taste for good food in pleasant surroundings. He even admits to enjoying the offerings of upscale Bethesda, something that others I spoke with in Silver Spring would find unthinkable. From his work at CASA, however, he knows that most of that organization's immigrant, day labor clients can no longer afford to rent or buy in Silver Spring. "I think it [Silver Spring] is still seen as desirable, but it's very often not attainable because of the high cost." Actions could be taken to alter the situation, he adds, but to date have not, meaning that much of the working-class immigrant population must look elsewhere. "More would have to be done to subsidize their ability to purchase in the area. Rentals are still super-high and that's a constant battle. So we are losing a lot of lower-income residents to Prince

George's [County]. The rentals are cheaper. Even the houses are cheaper. We [he and his wife] could get twice the size of the house we've got in Silver Spring, over in Hyattsville."

Because outside of Jerry McCoy, Manny was the only person I interviewed who was featured in Walter Gottlieb's documentary, I was curious to know more about his experience with that project. Overall he voiced disappointment that it skirted difficult issues that he expected would be its focus, most notably diversity and the legacy of segregation. "A couple of things that they seemed, the people filming it, seemed very interested in, had to do with the specifics, they asked me a lot about the diversity question. So that's why I thought that was going to be a big part of the film, which it ended up being a very small part." He had recounted to the person who interviewed him a story about neighbors of his, a former priest and his black wife. "It's funny because they said, 'you said a priest, that doesn't mean he's not black.' You're right, sorry, could be. Priest from Notre Dame, Irish Catholic, white guy....It's funny because they called me on that. So that's why I thought this was going to be really pushing the envelope on race issues."

The very brief excerpt of the conversation the filmmaker did use, Manny recounts, was taken out of context. "The part of the film where they quoted me was when I said, and it must sound ridiculous to a lot of people who hear it: 'When people think diversity, they think New York, L.A., Miami, you know, you don't think of Silver Spring.'" He had gone on to explain that unlike those more widely recognized multicultural cities, "Einstein High School, percentage-wise, is supposedly the most diverse in the United States, in the entire country. It's got the percentages equal to the

United States, and that wasn't even by any social engineering, it just happened. So I said, so Silver Spring is diverse, culturally very diverse. What we're lacking is economic diversity. What we're lacking is a working-class that one would find in New York and other cities" This distinction is of central importance to Manny, something that he talks about frequently. But, he adds, "All of that was cut out, because that obviously wasn't part of the film. Or wasn't a desire, I guess, of the filmmakers, to get into issues of economic diversity."

By his guess, cultural diversity was the subject of thirty seconds of the documentary. While he credits director Gottlieb with having "accomplished a lot," he is unable to hide his dismay at what was not covered, and again how it failed to meet his expectations. "It totally glossed over segregation," he remarks. He laughs at how quickly that entire chapter is dealt with in the film, as if once *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided everything was magically transformed. He concludes that it would be worthwhile for someone else to do a project that was "less of a Chamber of Commerce piece."

*"History Lite": Watching "Silver Spring, Story of an American Suburb"*

As intended, I was the first to arrive at Frankie's home that December evening. That gave me time to help with refreshments and for the two of us to visit briefly about what I had planned. This was my first time inside her house and I was surprised to see how spacious it was. I realized that evening that even though we had worked together closely on the Vietnamese Outreach and Diversity Conference projects, Frankie and I had talked little about our personal lives. I knew that she had a family, but nothing about her children or husband. That evening, Frankie introduced me to

her kids, who struck me as outgoing, bright and polite, and later to her husband, a political correspondent and commentator for several national and local media outlets.

Soon, others began arriving. As expected, there were several familiar faces, but a number of others that were new to me. In contrast with SSHS meetings I had attended, the energy grew as more people arrived. People seemed genuinely happy to see one another, creating a "buzz" in the room very different from the more demure preservationist gatherings. By the time everyone had gotten beverages and snacks, and assembled themselves on couches and chairs in the living room, there were thirteen of us, a fair turnout given the pre-holiday season. Reflecting the diversity of IMPACT Silver Spring, there were four African American women, two of whom were middle-aged and two younger; two young Asian men, in their twenties; one young Cuban American male, in his thirties; three Caucasian women, and three Caucasian men, including myself.

Having experienced the agony of teaching unresponsive undergraduate classes, part of me was concerned that this group would have little to say after we finished watching the video, that they might find it dull, or that they might want to talk about something else. To help guide the conversation, and also to provide me with something to study after we parted, I distributed sheets with three questions. The first, to be answered prior to the film, was "What do you expect a film about Silver Spring and its history to cover?" The other two, to be answered after our viewing, were: "How was this subject matter dealt with in the documentary?" and "What do you think this [treatment] says about the film and its portrayal of Silver Spring's

history?" Having presented the group with their assignment, we began watching the 90-minute video.

While director Walter Gottlieb is not an active member of the Silver Spring Historical Society, he did rely heavily on that group's president, Jerry McCoy, for his information and much of the narrative of his film. As mentioned, Jerry is listed in the credits as "chief historical consultant." A description of the project conveys the nostalgic tone of the film, something I have been told the local Public Broadcasting System station insisted upon, because it wanted to air the film during membership pledge weeks. The language used in this synopsis captures the tone:

Take a 160-year trip through the history of one of Washington, DC's oldest and most fascinating suburbs... Silver Spring, MD in this dynamic 90-minute documentary. It's all here - from the fateful horseback ride that led to Silver Spring's founding in 1840... to the community's boom time as a bustling retail center in the 1940's and 50's... to its eventual decline and ultimate re-birth. Enjoy the fun and nostalgic stops along the way... Giffords Ice Cream, The Tastee Diner, the Silver Theater, Hunter Brothers Hardware, The Hot Shoppes, Blair High School, the B&O Railroad Station, and many more. Discover how world and national events... from the Civil War... to the coming of the railroad and streetcars... to the New Deal to Post War Prosperity... shaped it into a unique and historic suburb. Re-live the past through the emotional memories of everyday residents... and celebrities Goldie Hawn, Ben Stein, Nora Roberts, Dominique Dawes, and others. No matter where you live now, "Silver Spring" will find a place next to your photo albums and scrapbooks... and close to your heart.<sup>65</sup>

A series of "Do you remember" and "Do you know" questions featured on the Silver Spring Historical Society web site's promotion of the video echo this light, nostalgic tone. Examples: "Do you know that Presidents Eisenhower, Roosevelt, Truman, and others stopped at the Silver Spring train station on out of town trips?" "Do you know that a tornado once struck downtown Silver Spring?" "Do you

remember...the Old Seco Theater? Gifford's Ice Cream? Holiday parades? Shopping at Hecht's and Penney's? The Hot Shoppes on Georgia Avenue?"<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, although contemporary Silver Spring is described in Gottlieb's documentary proposal as "an exciting, multi-cultural community," at no point in promotional materials or on web site pages is any mention made of past racial segregation. Nor is the phrase about present cultural diversity elaborated on. A "timeline of Silver Spring's history," featured on Gottlieb's web site, omits any mention of the community's desegregation as an important historical event. In fact, no events are listed for the 1960s at all.<sup>67</sup> When the filmmaker appeared on local National Public Radio station WAMU's "Kojo Nnamdi Show," it became apparent that he came to the project with no awareness of the community's racial history and remained unclear of its details. He stated that there was segregation in Silver Spring until the 1950s.<sup>68</sup>

In preparation for the screening at Frankie's, I had watched the documentary twice. The first was at a special gala premier Gottlieb had invited me to attend at the Jewish Community Center in Rockville, along with people involved with development like Gus Bauman, as well as some members of the Silver Spring Historical Society. Jerry was there as were Judy and Mary Reardon. I sat between Mary Murphy, a graduate of my American Studies program and long active in IMPACT (I had invited her), and Mary Reardon from SSHS. My second viewing of the program was its initial airing on PBS's WETA the evening before the screening at Frankie's. Because the show was part of a pledge drive campaign, one of the selling points to entice people to wait a night was to tell them that the version they would see

would have the pleas for money deleted. At Frankie's urging I drafted a letter introducing myself and extended an invitation that she then emailed to a large group of IMPACT supporters, including past CEP participants, elected officials, developers, and planners.

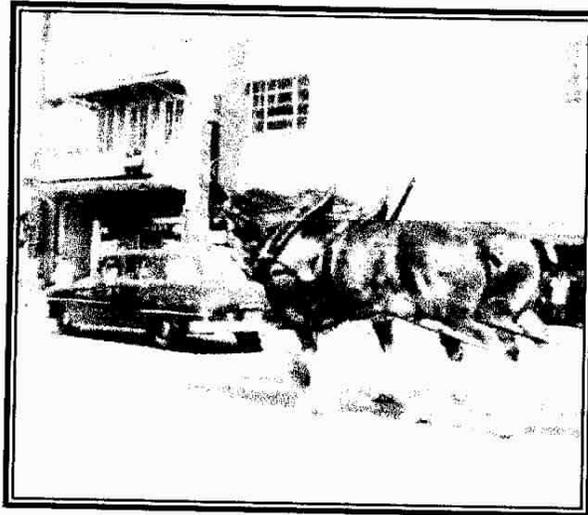
Those who attended the screening at Frankie's watched the video quietly, at times jotting down notes on the sheets they had been given. When the video was over they spent a few minutes responding to the second and third questions, but were eager to begin talking. As it turned out, people had plenty to say; the conversation was loud and lively and lasted late into the evening. It was much like other IMPACT events that I would participate in. Frankie prides herself on providing a space for people in the community to exert leadership and organize meetings and forums on issues of interest to them. Participants are given opportunities to air their views and to be listened to. The more diversity of experiences and ideas brought to the table, the livelier and more productive the session. From what I had observed, everyone leaves such events with respect toward others. Would that be true, I wondered, had residents who represent "old Silver Spring" been present?

The first thread of the conversation concerned what participants viewed as the film's misrepresentation of the community's demographics. One of the viewers, an African American woman, noted that to those who did not know better it would appear that Silver Spring is ninety-five percent white. One of the Asian American men in the group pointed out that there are no Asian voices in the documentary. Nor, he added, were immigrants of other backgrounds featured.

We proudly announce the upcoming broadcast of our documentary on the history of downtown Silver Spring...

# **SILVER SPRING**

Story of an American Suburb



**ON  
WETA TV 26**

**Sunday, December 8, 2002 7:00pm  
&  
Wednesday, December 11, 2002 8:30pm**

**Written, Produced & Directed by  
Walter J. Gottlieb**

**Edited by  
Mike Gehman**

**Narrated by  
Naomi Eobin**

**...in cooperation with the Silver Spring Historical Society**

**FINAL CUT  
PRODUCTIONS**

**SILVER SPRING  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Fig. 90. Flyer, *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb* (Courtesy Walter Gottlieb)

These distortions and omissions prompted another viewer, a long-time resident, to note that clearly the film was telling the story of Silver Spring "through the lens of preservationists." Historic preservationists, she added, "are only interested in buildings, not in the social structure of the community." Seeking to find the overarching message of the film, one of the white male viewers remarked that "the moral of the story would seem to be that the marriage of developers and preservation has worked in Silver Spring," something that Silver Spring Historical Society members would largely discount. This prompted one of the white women to pronounce that to her, preservationists often seem "crazy, extreme," and that they do not work well with any group, including developers.

Because of the perceived historic preservationist bias, the woman who had remarked on the documentary's slant observed that the filmmaker missed the story of Silver Spring's evolution into a diverse, multicultural community. This, to many in the room, is the major story to be told about Silver Spring and was one of several areas in which the documentary was lacking. Some suggested the need for a sequel, while others expressed a desire for another director to undertake a similar project that would focus on present day Silver Spring.

Many in the group said that they were bothered by the nostalgic tone of the documentary. An African American woman called it a "feel good" movie, one that would appeal mainly to residents, particularly older people, who had moved away from the area. A white woman referred to it as "history lite." One of the white male participants, who also found the film marred by nostalgia, noted that its nostalgia prevented discussion of land developers and the exclusionary zoning laws that have

had "a disparate impact on minorities." This led one of the white women to add that "everything is hidden, is a subtext here in terms of race." She noted that this was not unique to the film, but was symptomatic of the overall racial climate in Silver Spring and people's reluctance to talk about race directly. If the film had a target audience, she and others sensed, it was what many in IMPACT think of as "old Silver Spring," comprised largely of older white homeowners, who often appear to be in denial of all that has transpired demographically. Proportionately, the largest amount of space in the documentary is devoted to happy memories of older white residents, including some, like Goldie Hawn and Ben Stein, who have gone on to become celebrities.

While director Gottlieb deserves credit for including the voices of older African American residents recalling their experience with segregation, some of the people I interviewed said that they had forgotten or failed to notice that those stories had been featured. Given the proportion of time devoted to racial history in the film, it is not too surprising that that would be the case. The first of two segments, which tells of real estate covenants, a segregated downtown, and black enclaves, is less than ninety seconds long and is sandwiched between a segment on the restoration of the Silver Theater and one characterizing the community in the 1940s as "sleepy old Silver Spring." The second, which describes the treatment African Americans received at the hands of white store clerks, as well as race-based exclusions at downtown movie theaters and restaurants, lasts under two minutes and is inserted between segments on Gifford's Ice Cream and the demolition of the Silver Spring mansion. Allison Claggett, Nina Honemond Clarke, and Charlotte Annieperry Coffield recount their experiences and the need to seek entertainment in Washington.

An African American woman in our group that night noted that many who watched the film would fail to come away with an understanding that because segregation is so recent a part of Silver Spring's history, that "a lot of anger" lingers. The "heritage of racism," she added, "needed to be in this film." But instead, as Manny observed, the false impression is given that after the schools integrated there were no longer any problems.

In addition to voicing criticism of the film's nostalgia and the amount of attention it devotes to buildings rather than to social relations, some members of the group were troubled by the filmmaker's dominant interest in downtown, something that was also viewed as stemming from a preservationist bias. By focusing mainly on downtown, one of the long-time residents in the group said, Gottlieb omitted showing that "neighborhoods have maintained a sense of community" that has long been lacking in the central business district. Other neighborhood activists in the group agreed, one African American woman pointing out that a more accurate portrayal would have shown that "Silver Spring is a *set* of communities." To this, one of the white men observed that the documentary gave no attention to the difficulty in defining what Silver Spring, as an unincorporated entity, is, something that has long been a source of conflict and tension.

The sheets that I had distributed revealed that people shared similar expectations before viewing the film. A common desire was to learn something about the origins of Silver Spring, which, it seems, few had prior knowledge of. Here, the response to Gottlieb's project was mixed, although generally positive. Typical was this reaction: "This [origins] was rather well covered; a little romantic." Another

wrote that in terms of the "creation and founding of Silver Spring," the documentary was "fairly detailed." Still, another stated that even on this front the documentary was, "Very shallow. Were there other people here before? Black? Who? Why? Lifestyle?" This viewer concluded that by not addressing such questions about its early history the film "is one-dimensional." Another agreed, noting that its focus on white residents left viewers with "mostly one side—not much of the whole picture of Silver Spring." Finally, one member of our group who had expected "factual information of Silver Spring's history," said that while the film had provided "many facts," they appeared "exaggerated" at times, making it "hard to trust" the film overall.

As in the discussion, one of the hopes frequently cited on the sheets of paper was that Gottlieb's project would address the changing demographics of Silver Spring. On this count, viewers expressed disappointment. One wrote: "Much emphasis was placed on celebrities from Silver Spring; not much attention to communities." The writer of this comment remarked that he had also expected to see attention given to tensions resulting from rapidly changing demographics. "Only a touch of the tensions" was conveyed, he noted. "Most emphasis was on the decaying building stock." Another person, whose comments on the film were generally positive, was dissatisfied with its coverage of "the importance of diversity in Silver Spring." She noted that diversity "wasn't really mentioned." Nor was she left with a clear impression of the role diversity would play in the future as revitalization proceeded, something that she was looking for. Still another woman in the group had expected the documentary to capture "the international flavor of the residents." Her

review on how well it succeeded was mixed. "Yes it did discuss its diversity," she wrote, but only "a little."

Some members of the group voiced the expectation that the film would cover "race relations and [their] impact on development," and reveal the legacy of segregation. One viewer—who wrote that "minorities have been disproportionately impacted by development"—came away displeased that this did not come across. "If the film was about buildings, then OK. If not, it misses the point." The writer added that in terms of Silver Spring's past, "The film portrayed the community as racially diverse and harmonious, which isn't the case. Serious confrontations occurred with desegregation." Finally, another was disappointed that "lots of emphasis" was given Silver Spring's "heyday," while not nearly as much was paid to its segregated past or changing demographics. This person wrote that a "sense of nostalgia" came through, but that "complex social issues [seemed] beyond the scope of this work." "Little focus was given how significant the changes are for TODAY."

While no Silver Spring Historical Society members were present that night—they had not been invited—those I spoke with about the documentary voiced similar reservations about its tone, although generally finding fault with different omissions of content and interpretations of events. Judy Reardon, in an interview, said that she was disappointed that the history of Silver Spring was not placed in broader context. Had she made the video, she said, she would have made "Silver Spring a typical, but not typical American, suburb. But instead it was really a lot of nostalgia." Its light, nostalgic tone, she noted, has its benefits because "it really makes people sit up and watch." However, she feared that the purpose was to leave viewers with "a warm and

fuzzy feeling," not to educate about what can be learned from Silver Spring about suburbia in general, nor to confront contentious issues the community has faced in deciding what parts of the built environment merit preservation.<sup>69</sup>

Suzanne Copping, a graduate of the University of Maryland's Historic Preservation Program and an active member of Historic Takoma, agrees with Judy. In an e-mail exchange she wrote: "The approach to the film could have been different...to acknowledge that Silver Spring is a town like lots of other towns...and that's okay. But also, that it is very special to the people who live in and near it...and that pride comes from knowing your history, and seeing your place rise and fall and rise again." She also found it "romantic" and "melodramatic."<sup>70</sup>

Mary Reardon voiced disappointment, particularly in terms of the ways the film sidestepped conflict. "Oh, the big thing was that there's no story of struggle. I mean, this was a struggle and still is a struggle, to have an identity for Silver Spring. And people have different ideas of what the identity of Silver Spring is trying to be....There wasn't a lot of conflict in it [the film]." Referring to the "preservation wars" which sprung from the various redevelopment proposals, she added: "This is not the Silver Spring I know. It was almost like, 'and we all lived happily ever after.'" Just as one person in the IMPACT group had observed, Mary offered that the impression one is left with is that the community is unified and pleased with the changes that have been wrought by revitalization. She contends that this would have been different had more recognition been given what she calls "the civic community."<sup>71</sup> However, rather than turning to citizens who had been on the frontline of redevelopment battles, the filmmaker mainly featured celebrities and older

residents with fond memories of a quieter era. As a result the tone is softer than it might have been had Gottlieb focused on people like Mary Reardon, Virginia Mahoney, Mary Ann Zimmerman, or Ruby Rubens, all long-time civic activists with very different points of view.

### *Taking Your Vision Public*

Describing some of her formative experiences with activists in Silver Spring, Frankie Blackburn observes a number of qualities that repelled her, including the absence of humor and a lack of respect for other points of view. "...I could get really feeling, not inferior, but intimidated by that, that unfriendliness. That can really bring me down." When she presented before groups of civic activists that disagreed with her, Frankie was most distressed by their demeanor. She recalls, "They had this demeanor that was so nasty, that I needed to give myself speeches about how to stay positive." That this was a common occurrence, something that carried over across civic groups, was something Frankie now finds intriguing. "That just fits with the theory that they're victimized, angry with the world. They're just not the most loving, sweet, generous people in the world. Which is kind of counter-intuitive to what you think about volunteer citizens, preserving community."

In general, Frankie finds that "same attracts same," which ultimately fuels problems when groups need to interact with other groups having alternative priorities in the public sphere. "It's comfort. You seek out people who are just like you....You're not depending on it for income, so that when you find some group that has stuck together, they clearly want to be together, because they can so easily walk away. And I think that's even more indicative of what a common bond they have."

IMPACT, because it is as diverse as it is, has a built-in advantage. "IMPACT's not a comfortable place often." That those who participate in its programs and events regularly confront discomforts stemming from interactions with people of a range of backgrounds, and with diverse ideas—and typically do so in the presence of trained facilitators—means that they are better prepared to confront differences in the public sphere.<sup>72</sup>

In the next chapter we will observe that the structures which civic activists are often forced to work within create additional barriers to bridging divides, which, as we have seen, is one of the main goals of IMPACT Silver Spring.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Frankie Blackburn, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 16 July 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mosk and Cottman, "A Look at the Past, Present and Future."

<sup>11</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 11 November 2002.

<sup>12</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 31 July 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Blackburn, interview, 16 July 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Frankie Blackburn, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 5 August 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Burke, "At Former Tavern, History Is Saved."

<sup>17</sup> Blackburn, interview, 5 August 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Hodge and Joe R. Feagin, "African American Entrepreneurship and Racial Discrimination: A Southern Metropolitan Case," in *The Bubbling Cauldron: Race, Ethnicity, and the Urban Crisis*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Joe R. Feagin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 101.

<sup>22</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, "Minimizing Small Business Displacement," 2.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 10 January 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 16 January 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Zimmerman, interview, 10 January 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Zimmerman, interview, 16 January 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Neil Irwin, "For Urban Developers, A Hard Row to Hoe—Bethesda Row Is a Hit, But Many Builders Say that for the Effort Required, They'll Stick with Strip Malls," *Washington Post*, 13 January 2003, sec. E, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Zimmerman, interview, 16 January 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Ann Zimmerman, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 23 January 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Geoff Durham, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 26 February 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Geoff Durham, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 14 March 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Durham, interview, 26 February 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Durham, interview, 14 March 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Amy Marcus, "Planting for the Future?: The Debate Over the Montgomery College Expansion," *Takoma Voice*, March 2003, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Durham, interview, 14 March 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Geoff Durham, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 13 May 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>64</sup> Manny Hidalgo, interviewed by author, tape recording, Takoma Park, MD, 28 January 2003. All of the quotations in this section come from that interview session.

<sup>65</sup> Silver Spring Story of an American Suburb, <<http://www.silverspringfilm.org/aboutdoc.html>> (4 December 2005)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Walter Gottlieb, interview by Kojo Nnamdi, WAMU Radio's *The Kojo Nnambi Show*, 4 December 2002.

<sup>69</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 3 June 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Suzanne Copping, e-mail message to Bruce Johansen, 19 December 2002.

<sup>71</sup> M. Reardon, interview, 5 June 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Blackburn, interview, 5 August 2003.

CHAPTER 8:  
"BELIEVERS AND FOOLS":  
TRACING THE ROOTS OF ANATAGONISM

The only significant barrier to Fenton Street's economic improvement is the long-standing deeply rooted animosity and poor communication that exists between public and private sector groups and agencies in Silver Spring and Montgomery County. This is such a significant barrier that the assessment team concluded that the success or failure of the district—and the entire downtown—ultimately hinges almost entirely on the ability of groups, agencies, and individuals to put past animosity behind them, agree to work collaboratively, and strengthen partnerships within the community....Solid, productive partnerships are essential to any successful economic venture. The revitalization of a commercial district is no exception.

Silver Spring has been a reactionary rather than a visionary community. A long history of failed and controversial projects has created an acrimonious atmosphere in all sectors of the community, public and private alike. The community is accustomed to reacting to issues and projects rather than working collaboratively to create a vision.

Organizationally, Silver Spring is in disarray. The community groups have little trust for each other or for the county government. Even government agencies do not get along well. The assessment team's members have rarely seen such severe organizational conflicts in their work with literally thousands of communities around the country.

Excerpts from the National Main Street Center's "Assessment Report for Silver Spring, Maryland's Fenton Street Commercial District"<sup>1</sup>

Cultural differences help to explain the tensions and conflicts that persist to this day in Silver Spring, but political structures contribute as well. During the preliminary research phase of this project, my interest grew in what I was finding

were distinct and varied social constructions of place that existed among people. These, in turn, led to recurring clashes among those most active in civic discussions and decision-making. Considering the amounts of time that individuals I encountered devoted to local affairs in Silver Spring, it seemed clear that these were among the people who cared most passionately about the community. And yet, the concepts they used and the perspectives that they had formed about Silver Spring's identity, as well as what they hoped to preserve of it in the midst of revitalization, were so often at odds that deep divisions had been created. I wanted to come to some understanding of the wedges that existed. Through hours spent at public hearings, it became clear that those who volunteered to articulate their values and their vision within the public sphere did so within settings that heightened existing antagonisms, rather than providing opportunities for people to come to some understanding and appreciation of differences.

This brief chapter is based on conversations I had with Cynthia Rubenstein and Richard Jaeggi, two civic activists who were not as closely allied as others with the two organizations profiled in this study. I spoke with them because they had demonstrated their interest in the built environment, and had proven themselves to be thoughtful and articulate citizens of the community. I wanted to get from them some sense of how the divisiveness that persists in Silver Spring might be traced to political structures that accentuate antagonisms. As in previous chapters I will profile both of these individuals in a way that suggests the full scope of their interests.

*“Who's Hearing Who? ”: On the Problems with Public Hearings*

Because notions of what truly constitutes Silver Spring or its past are contested, there is often tension and conflict among members of the community about issues related to preservation and development. These tensions and conflicts are heightened because members of the community with different worldviews too rarely engage in dialogue and listen to one another, hearing each other's stories. One result, as Kenneth Gergen writes so often happens, is that:

Various social groups possess preferred vocabularies, or ways of putting things, and these vocabularies reflect or defend their values, politics, and ways of life. For participants in such groups, these forms of talking (or writing) take on a local reality. They seem totally convincing. Yet their very 'reality' is their danger, for each renders the believer heroic and the nonbeliever a fool.<sup>2</sup>

In Silver Spring a divide between believers and non-believers, heroes and fools, clearly exists. As we have seen, historic preservationists have operated with one kind of vocabulary reflecting a certain, specific set of experiences, values and worldview. They see themselves as "right" and others as "wrong," as one of the historical society members put it. This positions them in their minds as heroes, battling against the forces of "evil," e.g. the developers and the fools who do not better, to save the community's history and identity. Meanwhile, many IMPACT participants and other civic activists—operating with different vocabularies, reflecting other experiences, values and worldviews—think of themselves as community heroes for actions that they regularly take in the name of fairness and justice. Members of the Silver Spring Historical Society are viewed by these activists as something akin to fools for being so invested in preserving remnants of a past that was not inclusive, and in caring so much about facades of old buildings. The more

one observes of the community the clearer it becomes that there exists a lengthy list of additional "believers" and "fools."

One of the only regularly occurring forums that bring citizens of different points of view together, in the same room, is the public hearing. But, as shown, it is based in adversarial relationships and does nothing to promote the kinds of sharing of stories and listening that could educate residents about the sources of points of view that are different than their own. Consequently, such hearings serve little or no value in helping people and groups find common ground. This is something that I witnessed time and again in hearings dealing with the historic sites survey and a special session on the Little Tavern.

Daniel Kemmis, author of *Community and the Politics of Place*, points to the public hearing as a prime example of how local political structures tend to worsen situations. "Next to the courtroom, the public hearing room is our society's favorite arena for the blocking of one another's initiatives."<sup>3</sup> "Public hearing," he says is the one element that is most glaringly absent at such meetings. "A visitor from another planet might reasonably expect that at a public hearing there would be a public, not only speaking to itself but also hearing itself. Public hearing, in this sense, would be part of an honest conversation which the public holds with itself. But that almost never happens."<sup>4</sup>

This matter of how to make civic discussion more diverse and representative of the entire community, more effective and truly democratic, is a major concern of people like Cynthia Rubenstein and Richard Jaeggi, both transplants to the area who invest significant amounts of time into work involving Silver Spring.

*"Public hearing are like weddings": Cynthia Rubenstein on Problems in the Culture and the System*

In 1981 Cynthia Rubenstein traded rural Iowa for Alexandria, Virginia, and two years later, Silver Spring. "There were 1600 people in my town 47 years ago, and it's still 1600 today," she told a local reporter. "The guy who owned the local hardware store was the mayor. One of the farmers was head of the school board."<sup>5</sup> Like Frankie, Cynthia was not impressed with Silver Spring at first. "I had wanted to live in a more urban environment," she recalls during a conversation with me in February 2003. But Silver Spring "looked like a run-down suburban community." Over time, however, what Cynthia, who is white, discovered she liked about the area was its diversity. "I really liked the fact that when you walked out the door you didn't necessarily hear English all the time, and there were lots and lots of businesses that were springing up that were international, and I liked that. I still like that."<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 91. Cynthia Rubenstein (Courtesy *Silver Spring Voice*)

In time, Cynthia noticed a diminishing interest in her career, working for residential interior design firms, while her civic involvement continued to grow. "It became clear in the last three or four years that I was really much more interested in

doing community work and building community than I was in being a stellar professional."<sup>7</sup> Over the course of the past ten years, she has served on boards of community associations, the Long Branch (neighborhood) Community Center, the Silver Spring Redevelopment Steering Committee, as president of the Allied Civic Association, and run for County Council, among other things. With this background and her range of interests, Cynthia strikes me as the kind of person who is capable of serving as a bridge between groups that are often at odds with one another.

Like many residents of Silver Spring and the vicinity, Cynthia cares about what revitalization does to the look and feel of Silver Spring, as well as what businesses it houses, but that does not lead her to come out strongly for or against preservation or revitalization. On the one hand, she says, "I hope we don't get many more concrete boxes with what we call 'ribbon windows,'" referring to some of the new additions to the commercial landscape. "I don't think they add a lot to a distinctive visual landscape." But on the other hand she does not think that all older buildings, even some of those that have been sacred cows to preservationists, merit saving.<sup>8</sup> Personally, she says, she was "never that fond of the Armory," nor did she find it "important architecturally" because it had been altered so much over time. She speculates that it was mostly important to those who wanted its façade to remain a part of downtown Silver Spring or who found meaning in it because they were veterans. But for those, like her, who attended meetings regularly there, "it was a dump." By contrast, Cynthia is pleased that at least portions of the Canada Dry plant, theater, and shopping center have been saved. Using some of the vocabulary of Silver Spring Historical Society members, she says that all are buildings that she finds

"important to the fabric of downtown Silver Spring," concluding, "I would say it's important to keep a sense of place of Silver Spring."<sup>9</sup>

After referring to Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as "almost a Bible to me," Cynthia says that she has always been interested in, "not only the built environment of architecture, but how it affects people's behavior and vice versa."<sup>10</sup> With these as frames of reference, she adds: "I don't want Silver Spring to look like everywhere else. You know, to have the same chains all over. It's ok to have them within the core, for me, my opinion it's ok to have them within the core. Like Panera. Fine....But I don't want Silver Spring to be another chain city or franchise city. I want it to reflect its community." Again, Cynthia's statement echoes what Jerry, Judy, Mary, and others from the historical society have voiced to me a number of times. To her, businesses like Kefa Café, Silver Spring Books, Roadhouse Oldies, the Quarry House, and Bombay Gaylord are "quintessential Silver Spring," but at the mercy of property owners, many of whom have been waiting to sell or to raise rents. One of the things that worries her, she says, is that so far she has yet to see anyone step up to advocate for the proprietors. "I haven't heard anybody express a real concern or dedication to being a champion for this."<sup>11</sup> She notes that this is especially curious to her because she hears so much talk about small businesses at the "grassroots level." A problem may be, she concludes, that it takes effort for people of like minds to come together around an issue.

Based on years of civic participation, Cynthia points to a number of factors that restrict healthy dialogue and effective action around issues where there appears to be common ground. One, she says, is that only around two- to five-percent of the

citizens in Silver Spring are "really involved, aware, informed, and active." And they tend to be, "the usual suspects over and over and over." They can only stretch themselves so thin. Another is that residents have trouble making sense of the "governance structure." "When I was knocking on doors while I was campaigning, people would ask me the most basic questions about Montgomery County government. Like, 'what's the difference between my delegate and my council member.' 'Who is my delegate?' 'Who is my council member?' 'Who does what?' 'Who picks up the trash?' 'Oh, that's the County.' 'Well who takes care of Georgia Avenue?' 'Well, that's the State.' Oh, my god! It's so complex that people glaze over." That prevents most people from even attempting involvement. And so in working with community associations and umbrella organizations like Allied Civic Group all that Cynthia said she saw were "the usual suspects," "only those folks who have some sick (laughs) desire in wanting to figure it out."<sup>12</sup>

Like Frankie, Cynthia also notes that it tends to be certain personality types who are drawn to what is set up to be a very adversarial system. "We have plenty of examples of that [adversarial structures] in Montgomery County, the whole council hearing structure or planning board hearing structure is adversarial....When you go to a County hearing on a school budget or on anything, it's people talking at each other. And you don't get new information. You don't get, there's no cross-fertilization of ideas, no dialogue."<sup>13</sup>

Attentive to the physical layout of hearing rooms, Cynthia observes two things. The first is that, "Public hearing are like weddings. You have to be careful which side of the aisle you sit on." This was something that I learned early on in my

fieldwork. Generally people who attend do so because they are passionately for or against a proposal and are there to testify or to lend support to one side or the other. Few, it seems, come for the purpose of being educated or informed on an issue. Therefore when one enters, he or she first looks for others known to be supportive of the same position. The second is that the rooms are set up in such a way as to emphasize power imbalances. "Even the fact that the citizens sit down here and the elected officials are up on a dais looking down. All of that plays into the futility." Besides, she adds, it quickly becomes apparent that "nine times out of ten, they [the council or planning board members] have already made up their minds. The hearing is just a formality."<sup>14</sup>

Authors like Debra Tannen (*The Argument Culture*) and John Powers (*Sore Winners*) have written on the depth of adversarial strains in U.S. culture.<sup>15</sup> While some people seem to take it for granted, and enjoy what Cynthia calls the "game" of public hearings, others like her question whether it is possible to change our structures. "I'm not a proponent of everything being nice," she says. "I believe in the opportunity that tensions can bring and that critical dialogue can bring. It just has to be done in a way that's not argumentative, that's open and enlightened." Often times, however, she says she finds that those who are most vocal in civic matters are the "purists," explaining, "Because that's how politics tend to play out. You get the most passionate individuals on any side of an issue."<sup>16</sup> While she credits local preservationists for having saved the shopping center, theater, and façade of Canada Dry, Cynthia contends that the purist approach falls right into the established adversarial system, which in the end is detrimental to a group's cause. By comparison,

in order for the wider community to appreciate the value of saving a building, she says, there has to be proven "economic viability" and, most importantly, the structure has to have meaning for people. She points to the Tastee Diner:

People like Rose Crenca [former Council Member and President], who nobody, by any stretch of the imagination would call a historic preservationist, but for that place was definitely on board to save it. That place had meaning for people. Some of these other places have been empty and haven't really had a community purpose. They're not embedded in people.

The old Tastee was, "like sitting in an old Lazy Boy. You feel guilty, but you like it," she said.<sup>17</sup>

There are other factors that contribute to some local organizations' isolation, according to Cynthia. One is "a perception that there's no give there, that there's no negotiation...no consideration of another point of view." While she notes that Mary Reardon is a friend, someone who she finds "very reasonable," the public face and the popular story that circulates about preservationists, is that they are "strident" and "obstructionist." Her impression is that preservationists are aware that this is their reputation, "but it's such a crusade, such a mission, and they're so definite about their rightness, that they become righteous." The same, she points out, can be true on the other side, as it was with the rhetoric and actions of Silver Triangle developer Lloyd Moore and the Ghermazians with their American Dream plan. To be really a part of a community, she advises, civic organizations need to do "something positive, not just shouting, voicing their opposition, but pointing up the positives to what they profess and what they do."<sup>18</sup>

Also, it is detrimental, in her view, to speak from a single point of view. To grow in numbers, diversity, and strength, coalitions must be formed, but that takes

developing a broader vision of the community and respecting points of view and experiences that may be at least partially different from a group's members.

Consequently, she foresees continued isolation and little change in the reputations of civic organizations that do not take some of those steps.<sup>19</sup> In their research on civic associations, Stolle and Rochon have concluded that, "...the least diverse associations are less likely to have memberships with high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity."<sup>20</sup>

*"The Way of the Cool Town": Hanging Out with Richard at the Quarry*

Richard Jaeggi moved from Florida to Northeast Washington, D.C. in 1986 and to Silver Spring six years later. He looks at Silver Spring from several frames of reference, including: as a former Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, parent, Quarry House regular, and active member of a progressive church. He is also someone who has worked with inner city youth of diverse racial backgrounds in D.C. on computer skills, is a promoter of public spectacles in downtown Silver Spring, and serves as a newspaper columnist for the *Silver Spring Voice*. He has degrees in literature and religion and has been actively involved in planning committees for the new civic building. After our interview sessions Richard enrolled in IMPACT's CEP and will graduate from that program in December 2005.

What has long been attractive to Richard about Silver Spring is its character, its "quirkiness," its small businesses, and diversity. All of these elements, he decides, add up to an aesthetic. "Maybe it's aesthetics, what brings us here. And so I love the little quirky garages. It's dirty. So what? I don't care about that." What he sees coming into the landscape, though, is "just the opposite" and "it bores me to tears." Bryant

Foulger, the developer, "likes the monolithic, the clean, the kind of gentrification that all of it's there because it was chosen to be there and not because [it was allowed to become] itself."<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 92. Richard Jaeggi, Silver Spring Day 2005

Richard understands that with huge, expensive developments like the one in downtown Silver Spring, developers have to be conservative. "So you kind of go with known quantities," meaning chain businesses. While he says he is not an advocate of the idea of state socialism with its centralized planning, he also does not like that large companies and corporations under capitalism are recipients of sizable subsidies, while small businesses have to fend for themselves. "You have to subsidize for anything to happen. But it [the current way of operating] skews the balance so unless

you do some sort of support for the little places, you've just set in motion a situation where the little guys have no chance at all." This, he says, is largely a matter of fairness, but such subsidies also have major consequences for the quality of life and identity of a community. To maintain a sense of place requires that Silver Spring and other cities, towns, and suburbs take steps to preserve and assist pieces of local culture.<sup>22</sup>

This is a favorite theme of Richard's and is reflected in one of his earliest "Big Acorn" columns, where he explains that part of "the way of the cool town" is through subtly differentiating itself from others, in part by assisting small businesses. His "Rule 3" is "Don't homogenize, differentiate."

We live in a world determined to obliterate all traces of local differentiation. Every mall in America has the same exact stores with the exact same goods as every other mall in America. But cool is different. Not different for the sake of difference, but because this is where authenticity lies. Cool is taking a gift, a talent, or maybe just a quirk and specializing in it, developing it into something the world has never seen before.

And "Rule 4" is: "Fertilize the grassroots."

The current practice of offering huge subsidies to large businesses and developers is very unhealthy....A self-determined, and much cooler, approach would be for a town like Silver Spring to focus its energies on developing its inherent capacities; its existing grassroots. Subsidize small startups, empower craftsmen to start micro-businesses, create incentives for small shops to buy their own buildings, develop a regional outdoor market, promote Fenton Village, accentuate local color and tradition....<sup>23</sup>

Sources of local color and character for Richard are not so much buildings or streets, but the activities that take place in them and the relationships that form in them. When I ask him about "sacred structures" the sites he lists are not the same ones that historic preservationists do. "This [the Quarry House] would definitely be one of them....It's because it is a third place, it's a meeting place, it's a constant. Since

I've been here, it's been here....The acorn [gazebo] because of its quirkiness....I think the Kefa Café is a sacred place for me." He also describes an empty space, the site of the demolished Armory, that he and a group of like-minded people did something akin to "happenings," silly, spontaneous activities such as "Battle of Silver Spring," a giant water balloon fight with catapults, the "Working Stiffs Olympics," and croquet matches.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the places that come to mind when I ask Richard about "sacred structures," he says, have a social component. As an example of something that he says he fails to appreciate is the preservation of Hechts department store's wall and its incorporation into City Place. "Nobody even knows that. It doesn't make any difference to anybody....It's the spirit of the place that you're trying to preserve." To explain, he recounts stories he has heard of the Quarry House's near closure. "People were up in arms. You could tear down the fucking Armory, but you were not going to move the Quarry House....There was not the emotional attachment to the Armory [among most people]....It was basically, 'alright, if we're going to have a good Silver Spring, I'll trade the Armory for something else.'"<sup>25</sup> Still, Richard mentioned more than once that the Armory, while "not a particularly loveable building," was "an important link to the past." He went on to say, "It does bother me that we so easily demolish all the links to the past," even in the cases of buildings that are not especially "likeable" or those that are "ugly."<sup>26</sup>

Richard traces his growing frustration in how county government functions to his involvement with committees making decisions about the Civic Building that will replace the Armory. Part of what bothers him is that the County has so much power

over unincorporated Silver Spring. To him, the system resembles a "benevolent dictatorship," with its hand in everything, including the liquor board. But, he says, "What's really amazed me is that the civic activists who will sometimes contest that power are just as un-democratic." Richard tells me that his impression is that many activists want a "meritocracy," which makes me think back to comments that Judy and Mary Reardon had made. He adds, "The notion of trying to appeal to some kind of popular, Midwestern populism, doesn't even occur to anyone....And of course they're all good liberals....It's sort of, 'We know what's best, and they don't. And besides, they'll never bother to come out to the meeting anyway, so let's just....'"<sup>27</sup> What Richard envisions when he talks about democracy is very different from this and from another feature of the current system, the public hearing.

"In a democracy, people of different points of view come into a meeting, hash it out, argue, and then come to [say that] 'we all gave up something to come to common ground.'" According to him, the initial Town Center Working Group, predecessor to the County-appointed Civic Building Working Group, functioned in this way. Having served on both committees, Richard voices a strong preference for the workings of the initial body. The first was self-selected, comprised of twelve to fifteen members. "The strong part of the group is that a lot of people came with different interests," and they talked and debated and they came up with recommendations. When the group discovered that it had exceeded the maximum footage for the project, its members decided to hold firm in what they were asking for. This, he says, turned out to be their downfall. "We decided, 'No, we're not going to do priorities,' because that's divide and conquer. We're going to say, 'This is what it

needs. You chose to put the Roundhouse Theater in here without raising the budget, so you figure out how you're going to do it.' And they hated that."<sup>28</sup>

When the first group was then replaced by a second, officially sanctioned and appointed one, it became something very different altogether, from Richard's perspective. "The first group, the self-selected group, that one really gelled. They came together pretty powerfully, which the second group has never done...." From his standpoint, the latter group functions the way the County wants such bodies to: the County Executive makes the appointments and then the advisory committee "advises" him. "It's still very medieval to me, the Count of the County, you know....It's like if the President could appoint the Congress. They might have some independence but it's not exactly like a democracy."<sup>29</sup>

Attempting to make the new group function more democratically than it is set up to be, Richard has tried to test its limits. But he finds himself isolated whenever he puts out a call to, "Let's get a bunch of people here and see what they think." It is this messiness that Richard thrives on, seeing it as an essential element both of the built environments he wants to live in and of democracy. "Democracy is messy, not efficient," he tells me. It requires that people have to listen and have to give up something. Without this kind of dialogue, he says, "it becomes a bunch of lobbyists who are sort of pure points of view who never have to compromise." However, whenever he suggests anything that will bring more people into the process, the "prevailing mentality is that 'we don't want to lose control.'" He continues, "I feel like I'm from some other planet," because others are content with this new "smoke-filled

room without the smoke." It's one of a number of ways that smart, influential people work behind the scenes to make things happen, he says.<sup>30</sup>

If such citizen groups and committees are problematic, so are public hearings, in Richard's experience, for many of the reasons Cynthia cited. "It's all about winning instead of trying to come up with a solution that everyone can live with." But he sees another element in play. The parties who tend to testify at hearings, and who are most emotionally invested in their causes, often come from the margins. "It's kind of the nature of weakness," he suggests. "A people that is not powerful kind of turns on itself." The result, he theorizes, is that defeating someone becomes more important than what is actually won.<sup>31</sup>

This attitude can, at times, be repellant to people who share the same basic point of view, says Richard. "People who articulate pretty much my view, and yet the way they do it, I want to go against them because they drive me crazy." One of the most vocal historic preservationists, he observes, "is a person who can be completely right and still make people want to go the other way." Contrasting her with developer Bryant Foulger, who is "somebody who can be almost entirely wrong" and convince people to support him, this preservationist "is kind of the archetype of what everybody hates, so focused and persistent, though never rude or nasty." One problem is that people normally find themselves in contact with her only in public hearings where focus and persistence are what the structure demands. However, because she takes her task so seriously, is so committed to the cause, she becomes a caricature, someone who is not taken seriously, a "fanatic."<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Richard recognizes that the system as it functions now is far from representative of the diverse community it supposedly serves. "Part of the challenge is that a lot of the quest for Silver Spring's identity comes first from the European Americans, second from the African Americans, and only way down the line do you get the immigrant Americans, because they're not thinking about Silver Spring. Silver Spring is very small on their radar....They're thinking about their families and more basic stuff. I don't think you're going to talk to many immigrants who've spent a whole lot of time thinking about what Silver Spring is."<sup>33</sup>

In the liberal political culture of Silver Spring, many groups are aware of the importance of diversifying and therefore do outreach to these populations. One barrier, Cynthia explains, is that while these are typically well meaning people, like the members of the original Town Center Working Group, they tend to do things backwards:

Rather than trying to draw people into the debate or dialogue—'Come to *our* meeting'—you have to do some intelligence work, and find out where folks do gather. What are the community gathering places for the part of our population that's not as involved as all of us middle class white folks?...It's a matter of figuring out where people are gathering and what's important to them first.<sup>34</sup>

Another challenge, notes Cynthia, is that, "Within the African American community, Silver Spring is not seen as a beacon of welcome and tolerance and civil rights. I mean there is a significant portion of the Silver Spring's history that was very anti-African American and very segregationist....For some people there's nostalgia, but for some people it's a very bitter piece of history."<sup>35</sup>

## *Coming to a Close*

In the final chapter, I will review and try to make sense of the various threads introduced so far. The closing section will suggest that there are some avenues that activists might pursue to address observations made by the authors of the Main Street Report, as well as Cynthia Rubenstein and Richard Jaeggi.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ochoa, "Assessment Report," 6, 13, and 16.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (Basic Books, Harper Collins, 1991), 119.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Janice Park, "Cynthia Rubenstein: Chronic Community Activist," *Silver Spring Voice*, 23 August 2003, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Rubenstein, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 28 February 2003.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Rubenstein, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 4 March 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Rubenstein, 28 February 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (NY: Random House, 1998); and John Powers, *Sore Winners (And the Rest of Us) in George Bush's America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004). Other resources offering advice on alternative forms of discourse include: Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, John Wiley & Sons, 2004); Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002); and Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Rubenstein, interview, 28 February 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Rubenstein, interview 4 March 2003.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Dietland Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, "Are All Associations Alike?: Membership Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Cultural Capital," in *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Bob Edwards, Michael W. Foley, and Mario Diani (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, for Tufts University), 155.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Jaeggi, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, MD, 11 February 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Jaeggi, "The Way of the Cool Town," *Silver Spring Voice*, July 2002, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Jaeggi, interview, 11 February 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Jaeggi, interview by author, tape recording, Silver Spring, 23 July 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Jaeggi, interview, 11 February 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jaeggi, interview, 23 July 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rubenstein, 4 March 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

### *Revisiting Downtown Silver Spring*

There are several places from which a person might usefully contemplate the past, present, and future of downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. One is from its elevated, outdoor Metrorail stop. To one side of the Metro platform you would face NOAA's office towers, structures frequently cited for their generic design and insularity from the rest of downtown. IMPACT Silver Spring is located in the ground floor of one of these buildings. Off to the side you would see high-rise condominiums and apartment complexes, other additions to the landscape that accompanied the opening of the Metrorail station.

Casting your glance in the opposite direction and peering into the distance you would notice the flashing yellow marquee and red lights of the American Film Institute (AFI) Silver Theater sign. Beginning in 1984, area historic preservationists fought to save these buildings. That was when owners of the complex began destroying pieces of the theater's façade. The media, planners, and other members of the community paid attention and destruction was halted. In 1986, after developer Lloyd Moore revealed that he had sought permits for demolition, preservationists galvanized once again and planners saw to it that significant portions of the buildings were protected and incorporated into development projects. Some of these

preservationists went on to become founding members of the Silver Spring Historical Society. While their actions earned them a reputation for being “obstructionists” particularly among those who were most eager to see redevelopment plans move forward, today the restored Art Deco buildings are frequently touted as the crown jewels of the Downtown Silver Spring project.



Fig. 93. Discovery Communications headquarters

Closer to the Metro station, at street level below, you would see Starbucks Coffee and Einstein Bagel outlets, signs of commercial growth and the growing presence of chain businesses in this downtown. Developers, elected officials, and staff members of the Silver Spring Regional Center often cite such enterprises as key components of “revitalization.” Others in the community—including local columnist Richard Jaeggi, IMPACT CEP graduate Virginia Mahoney, and SSHS president Jerry

McCoy—think that their dominant presence in the CBD's core has added to the vulnerability of independently owned businesses, making their futures uncertain. The authors of the University of Maryland revitalization study concur and outline several recommendations to correct the situation.<sup>1</sup>

On the Metro platform itself you would find yourself amidst people of a vast range of races, ethnicities, and nationalities, another sign of how this aging inner-ring D.C. suburb, like much of lower Montgomery County, has changed in recent decades. In conjunction with those who formed and served on commissions devoted to addressing violations of civil rights, African American trailblazers like Roscoe Nix and Ruby Rubens helped pave the way for a more diverse and inclusive community. They and others stepped forward to publicly document and protest the unjust treatment that they, their neighbors, and co-workers had experienced. They refused to be denied service at restaurants or the opportunity to purchase homes in suburban Montgomery County neighborhoods. Out of recognition that many residents of color continue to be disenfranchised, IMPACT Silver Spring has begun making strides in diversifying civic participation and leadership through its training programs and community forums.

On the ground you might choose to view and contemplate Silver Spring's past, present, and future in Acorn Park, located just outside the downtown core, a few blocks from the Metro station. In this bit of green space amidst a sea of concrete you would find an historic marker recounting the story of Francis Preston Blair's discovery of the spring that led to the construction of an estate called "Silver Spring." You would see the now dried-up spring and the acorn-shaped gazebo that Blair had

built for his wife. Much of this history would be familiar to you, because for the last seven years, this small park has been one of the first stops of Jerry McCoy's, now Karen Kali's, monthly walking tours of the south section of downtown Silver Spring. Captured on film in Walter Gottlieb's *Silver Spring: Story of an American Suburb*, this stop offers tour participants and viewers of the documentary a story of the community's origins, helping to link the present with the past. The story that Jerry and Karen tell is enhanced by the large, brightly colored panels on the building at the edge of the park that illustrate historic Silver Spring scenes: of the original train station, Blair's estate, the Silver Spring Shopping Center, a Civil War battle, and the first armory. Without Jerry's commitment to informing the public about local history, it is unlikely that these narratives, partial as they are, would have circulated so widely.



Fig. 94. Karen Kali next to dried up spring, Acorn Park

In the location where Blair's mansion once stood, and then a post office, you would spot new condominium construction, one of many projects being built within

walking distance of Silver Spring's Metro station. Looking in the opposite direction you would see that part of the façade of the old Canada Dry bottling plant, saved through efforts by citizen activists like Mary Reardon and approval by regional and county planning commissioners, is being incorporated into new condominiums. Just beyond it stands a new high-rise.

Along with downtown's new commercial offerings, these buildings are intended to attract young, upwardly mobile professionals to Silver Spring. A diverse array of residents, including civil rights activist Nix, neighborhood and housing activist Virginia Mahoney, and preservationist Reardon, all fear that this signifies a growing shift in Montgomery County's priorities away from affordable housing. Frankie Blackburn of IMPACT, a longtime affordable housing advocate, along with many of IMPACT's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) participants and graduates, have made this issue central to their work. Collectively, affordable housing in Silver Spring was the issue that the 2004 CEP group tackled. At the same time, the issue has become a central concern of Silver Spring Historical Society members, particularly as they watch affordable garden apartment developments be denied historic status, clearing the way for their demolition and replacement by more expensive units in high-rise structures. Mary Reardon's sister, Judy, was diligently working on these matters at the time of her death. In part because a mix of local activists have pressed the issue, Montgomery County Council and Planning Board members are turning their attention to affordable housing issues once again.

You might also choose to view and contemplate Silver Spring's past, present, and future from inside the Tastee Diner. Walking up Cameron Street, past Cameron

Hills, a new townhouse development, you would catch sight of a much larger, cleaned up version of the local hang-out that was forced to move from its prime piece of real estate five years ago. It needed to do so to make way for Discovery Communications headquarters. The somewhat disheveled diner had been at the corner of Georgia and Wayne for over fifty years, so it is still a bit jarring to find it here. Stepping inside you would enter the original dining car, manufactured and shipped from Jerry O'Mahony's company in New Jersey to Silver Spring in 1946. You would recall how the diner might well have disappeared had diner employees, customers, and others in the community not challenged developer Lloyd Moore's proposal for its demolition. After nearly 9,000 people signed petitions and hundreds attended public hearings, the diner was saved and ceremoniously moved to its new location where it was attached to a new structure financed in part by the state and county. Ultimately, the decision to protect the diner was sanctioned by an array of elected officials and planning commissioners.

Once inside you will notice that the diner's counter is still intact but that the wooden booths have been removed. Now nearly all of the patrons have moved to the more spacious and private seating options in dining rooms on either side of the original structure. While Eunice is still on staff—she has been working at the Tastee for nearly the entire time it has been in business—most of the enlarged wait staff is unfamiliar and more diverse than it once was. You will notice too that the clientele has changed. For much of its history the Tastee was an especially appealing gathering place for working-class white men. Now, the historically segregated diner seems just as popular with women as with men, with younger people as with middle-aged and

older, with families and professionals as with singles and laborers, and with people of color as with whites. In fact, you notice that most of the people working and eating at the diner this day are African Americans. Had it not been for Roscoe Nix and other African Americans, locally and nationally, fighting for civil rights, places like the Tastee Diner and Crisfield's might have remained segregated for much longer than they did. Also in part because of those actions, there are now new third places like Kefa Café and Mayorga Coffee Factory where diverse groups congregate.



Fig. 95. Original dining car counter, now on Cameron Street



Fig. 96. Regular customer Jean Lanxner, middle, new Tastee dining room

## *My Findings*

In this study, I have explored ways in which three sets of active citizens have felt, thought, and acted in response to the revitalization process occurring in a major section of one community, downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. As we have seen, all three sets value and display a deep commitment to their community, its third places and small businesses. While recognizing that others in the region hold ultimate power over what decisions are made about the built environment, we can still conclude that the shape of downtown Silver Spring would be significantly different without that level of commitment and their engagement.

Through their activism, each of the three sets of residents has raised awareness among planners, developers, elected officials, and fellow residents of issues that are of major concern to them. Because of historic preservationists' vocal campaigns, those in power better understand the value structures like the train station and Art Deco shopping center have for some members of the community. As a result, those buildings and others have been incorporated into the current revitalization project. Furthermore, as a consequence of SSS members' interest in local history, many residents today have greater knowledge than they otherwise would of earlier chapters of Silver Spring's history. Because of actions on the part of civil rights activists, in tandem with events occurring throughout the region and nation, commissions were formed, ordinances written, and policies enacted that forbade discrimination in places of public accommodation, including restaurants, stores, and recreation sites. And due to the efforts of participants in IMPACT Silver Spring, a growing number of citizens more truly representative of this increasingly diverse

community are becoming involved in conversations and actions surrounding revitalization and its effects on housing, small businesses, and other matters. From all of this it is fair to say that if any one of these sets of residents were missing as an active component of conversations about downtown Silver Spring, the commercial landscape would not be what it is today.

This leads me to conclude that an adequate understanding of a changing cultural landscape requires attention be given not just to the actions of planners, elected officials, and developers, but also to those of active citizens. For as Judy Reardon said, they are guided by the question of who is going to have control over the community. "Who's going to say what shape the community takes? Should it be a developer who's motivated by the bottom line? Or should it be the people who live in the community?"<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, my research demonstrates that citizen activists are not guided by one worldview. The people I spent time with approach the built and social environments of their community with diverse orientations, which in turn leads to use of different tactics and actions. This is most evident in the contrast between how local historic preservationists perceive, prioritize, and act in response to revitalization and how those aligned with the other two sets have done so.

Making things more complicated and contentious is that not only do these three sets of individuals have very different orientations; in many cases they are ignorant of, indifferent to, or hostile towards those associated with other segments of the activist community. This has had implications for the dynamics of the relationships that these sets of residents have had with each other.

At the same time, often unbeknownst to them, all three sets of residents do share common values and concerns. The effects of gentrification on the community is a mutual concern, specifically the question of what impact the changes associated with revitalization will have on affordable housing and retail space, the diversity of the population, the future of small businesses and third places, and Silver Spring's sense of place.

From my ethnographic encounters I have concluded that if the three sets examined were to come together it could have a number of positive effects. First, it could deepen each set's understanding of local history. Second, it could allow a variety of stories to become part of a more nuanced heritage narrative. Third, an appreciation might develop on the part of each set of the value of preserving and offering new interpretations of historic structures that hold unpleasant memories or associations for specific groups. Fourth, each set might come to see the merits of each others' contributions to the community and appreciate the attachments to Silver Spring's built environment from which they originate. Fifth, such encounters might lead to sharing information about the community and the teaching of new skills. Finally, if they were to become aware of areas of common concern, the various groups of citizen activists would likely be more effective working together as revitalization proceeds than they have been in the past working separately.

### *Seeking Common Ground*

In the midst of ongoing conversations at the national level about a cultural divide, a separation between "red states" and "blue states," and cities versus suburbs and small towns, one thing distinguishing Silver Spring and Montgomery County is

that the vast majority of citizens identify with the political left. This does not mean that there are not cultural divides among the different activist groups I examined, but it does point out that there is likely more common ground than often imagined.

During our interviews Judy Reardon, a preservationist, often made reference to her New Left roots. And members of all three sets at various points expressed contempt for the policies of Republican President George W. Bush and his administration. Silver Spring Historical Society members were as likely to participate in public protests of the administration's policies as were those identified with the other two sets, and at least two of the African American activists I spoke with volunteered that they were members and regular listeners of WPFW, the Pacifica radio network outlet in the Washington, D.C. area.

Recognizing common political beliefs and concerns, it might be possible for IMPACT participants and African American activists to view Silver Spring Historical Society members' affection for the past in a more measured way. Some of the values that they identify with the past and which they find absent in the present are commendable ones. Imagining a society that was simpler, moved at a slower pace, was more neighborly and less competitive and consumption-oriented, is, as some social critics have pointed out—Jackson Lears and George Ritzer, among them—not such a bad thing.<sup>3</sup> Underlying such values is a humaneness that is reflected in a built environment that is built to a smaller scale, that preserves material connections to the past, and that values face-to-face relationships forming between proprietors of small shops and their customers. This is something that IMPACT participants profess to be of importance, especially for new communities of immigrants. And they, like SSSHS

members, are also vocal about not wanting Silver Spring's commercial built environment to become homogeneous and lacking in a sense of place, even if they may not see eye-to-eye on what constitutes present-day Silver Spring's character. Each person interviewed values third places, either as a connection to the community's past, a source of community identity or character, a place to mingle with other residents, a venue for conducting business meetings, or because of their function as gateways for new immigrants.

Third places have played and continue to play a significant part in an ongoing quest for rootedness and belonging. Witness Jerry's anguish over the Little Tavern, his and other members' efforts to save it, and the fondness with which he speaks about and collects material on places like the Tastee Diner and the Quarry House. Recall Roscoe Nix's choice of meeting place, the Anchor Inn, a formerly segregated restaurant, off limits to African Americans, now a place where he is welcome. And notice how IMPACT Silver Spring's meetings often occur in third place settings like Kefa Café, the Tastee Diner, or Mayorga Coffee Factory. When Frankie Blackburn and others took to the street to survey small business owners and invited them to participate in community forums, they did so in part because they realize that the small businesses lining downtown Silver Spring's streets, even unexpected ones like Eva's Alterations, function in important social ways. Like Eva's, many of the new small businesses outside of the core are owned and operated by immigrants. They provide an entry point into the society for those shop owners, as well as a place where other immigrants may gather.

People belonging to each of the sets also voiced concerns about affordable housing and gentrification. Roscoe Nix and Ruby Rubens went on at some length about their fears that groups that are already marginalized in multiple ways will be displaced by downtown Silver Spring's revitalization project. IMPACT CEP classes have taken on affordable housing, long a key interest of Frankie Blackburn's, in their work. And Silver Spring Historical Society members worry about two possible scenarios: wealthy people coming to the community and demolishing older homes, replacing them with "McMansions," and owners of affordable garden style apartment complexes razing them and substituting them with luxury high rises.

Unfortunately people from the three sets have not come together around issues of common concern to learn from one another through collaborative efforts. There are nagging differences in history, experience, and perception that remain. Silver Spring Historical Society members do a disservice to themselves and the larger community by narrowing their knowledge of local history primarily to stories that subscribe to a mostly nostalgic sense of the past. This is something that carries over into heritage narratives and campaigns to preserve buildings without accounting for the different meanings they have had. Conversations about structures like the Little Tavern and the former bank building, now part of Bethel World Outreach Ministries, have provided openings for its members to learn from long-time African American residents and from some of the people affiliated with IMPACT Silver Spring. Knowing that Jerry McCoy has expressed an interest in learning more about racial aspects of the community's history it would seem to be an opportune time for the various segments of the activist community to reach out to one another.

As we have seen, there are occasions when active residents who typically perceive Silver Spring as being composed of a series of “us vs. them” relationships, recognize that their commitment to the community is shared by those who have different agendas. This is an awareness that needs to be built upon if people are to come together. An example of this occurred when Judy Reardon discussed what she labeled “the East Silver Spring people,” whom she described as “anti-preservationist people” in the debates over the Silver Triangle. “But you know,” she reflected, “the thing is that they really care about the community, these people, and they work really hard for the community, and they care about the quality of life here.”<sup>4</sup>

If local activists were to begin with a heightened awareness of these three things it could serve as the basis of dialogue and learning. 1) Recognition of a common desire for rootedness/sense of belonging; 2) an appreciation of the level of commitment that others have; 3) an awareness that those who they view antagonistically also value independently-owned businesses, third places, and affordable housing,

Essential for broaching such encounters and dialogue are individuals who might serve as “ambassadors” willing to serve as a bridge between two or more groups and projects that could bring members of the different sets together. People like Manny Hidalgo and Virginia Mahoney who have been active in IMPACT and who voice an appreciation for historic preservation and local history could be valuable additions to the Silver Spring Historical Society. This would require first that they join the organization, or in Virginia's case maintain their membership, and become active members. It would also require that SSHS officers be receptive to

input from newcomers and willing to engage with narratives that depart in significant ways from their own.

Likewise, new SSSH member Karen Kali, with her background as an urban planner, is interested in downtown Silver Spring from multiple vantage points, not exclusively a preservationist one. Younger than most SSSH members and one of the organization's only members of color, she was drawn to Silver Spring because of its diversity and the richness of its commercial landscape. In other words, it appealed to her largely based on what it is today, rather than on what it was in the past. Together she and I have begun a conversation with Frankie Blackburn on how we might develop a project that would address gaps in the existing historical narratives of Silver Spring. And she has taken leadership on the multicultural mural project described earlier.

Also serving as a possible bridge from the historic preservation community is Wayne Goldstein, a civic activist who is a member or officer of several local and county organizations. Wayne also takes a broader view of the community and has voiced his concern about persisting tensions among different segments and the reasons for them. Because the scope of his interests is so broad he has developed an appreciation for other people's values and has nurtured skills for reaching out to them

An additional option is to encourage residents of the community whose main passion may not be historic preservation, but who could add to the diversity of the SSSH in some way, to become members and begin working on projects that might move the group in new directions. Oral histories are something that Jerry has long voiced an interest in gathering, but because of the organization's primary focus on

preservation and the small size of its active membership, has never launched. Given the interest in small businesses that SSHS members share with others in the community, a small business history project could be initiated. If SSHS were receptive to taking new paths, people like Virginia, eager to tell the story of historically black enclaves like Lyttonsville, might find others to work with and be supported by. Immigrants to the community could do similar work on oral histories of residents who have contributed to the cultural diversity of this chapter of Silver Spring's history, helping to expand the definition of what constitutes history from what is "old" into something that is dynamic and ongoing.

Conversely, if areas of common ground were found, participants in IMPACT could benefit from exchanges that would help them to understand why knowledge of local history and the built environment matters to some residents. In settings designed to dispel conflicts, the potential might exist for people to have calmer dialogues around what their community means to them. This is something espoused and practiced by contributors to the volume *Multicultural Planning*.<sup>5</sup> IMPACT's open space diversity conference and town hall forums have been encouraging attempts. Also a useful model was the recent project co-sponsored by IMPACT and Round House Theater, a live oral history production where diverse members of the community shared their stories of Silver Spring with the public. Members of all three sets had the opportunity to contribute to that project—Jerry McCoy was one of the people interviewed—and were present the evening that it was performed. Other creative avenues might involve joint filmmaking ventures to expand on the groundwork that Walter Gottlieb laid with his endeavor.

Also important to continue pursuing is work that will grow and diversify the overall level of civic participation within existing political and civic structures, as imperfect as they are. This means taking new steps to attract wider publics to hearings dealing with decisions that concern the built environment. "I think there's a broader group out there and there are people who are leaders...that haven't been recognized by the system that need to be involved," says Cynthia Rubenstein. As we saw, Cynthia pointed out that a key first step to drawing more diverse members of the community in is to meet on their ground, in the places that are important to them, instead of expecting that they will appear at forums organized by those who are already active.<sup>6</sup>

### *I Would Rather Be at the Quarry House...Or on the "Frontlines"*

Making sense of a cultural landscape in flux and as complex as the vast central business district of downtown Silver Spring is demanding, and as noted above I am not confident that I was as well-prepared as I would have liked. Thinking about my study these past many months, one of the most enjoyable aspects has been to return through memory to the places and people and events that took me out into the world. Not only in Silver Spring, but Minneapolis, St. Paul, Chicago, and other places not mentioned, including Laramie, Wyoming. Christopher Salter writes: "This is the bottom line. Each of us has in our souls some link to place, some identification with geography." There is no better starting point to the process of uncovering this, he concludes, "than to discover our own sense of place."<sup>7</sup>

I leave this study with a deep sense of appreciation of the very human endeavor that all of the people I engaged with are participating in to find and develop

connection to place. At the culmination of this process, part of me yearns to return to just being a guy hanging out at third places as a way of continuing my discovery process. However, another part desires to be involved in seeing that some of the steps outlined come to fruition. Having come to recognize the value of the work being done by different segments of one community, as well as some of the common underlying wishes that motivate people, I conclude that what is most needed are opportunities like the ones I had. In other words, I have come to see that people must be brought together from across cultural divides and in each other's presence talk about their experiences and what they value about their communities. Through such conversations they might coalesce to work together on expanding the narratives of Silver Spring's history. This could lead them to begin taking steps to more effectively organize to protect the aspects of the community that each set of people cares about. Ultimately, they must develop new tactics for articulating and conveying their messages to those who hold power. And most crucial of all, they need to make sure that those messages are heard and heeded. For as June Manning Thomas writes, "Planning for a better city should be an inclusionary process, based on meaningful participation, and it is even more commendable if it springs from successful grassroots action."<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Urban Studies and Planning Program, "Minimizing Small Business Displacement," 16-33.

<sup>2</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 4 November 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson Lears, "Looking Backward: In Defense of Nostalgia," *Lingua Franca* (December/January 1998), 59-66; and George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications, 1999), 42.

<sup>4</sup> J. Reardon, interview, 4 November 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Burayidi (ed.), *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Rubenstein, interview, 4 March 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher L. Salter, "Cultural Geography as Discovery," in *Re-Reading Cultural Geography*, ed. Kenneth E. Foote, et. al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 429-36.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 225.

APPENDIX A:

SILVER SPRING BROCHURES



(Courtesy Silver Spring Regional Center)

## APPENDIX B:

### SILVER SPRING DEMOGRAPHICS

**Demographic Statistics presented by six individuals at the Diversity Conference, March 9, 2002**

**Sources include: Census 2000 data and 1997 Census Update as compiled by the Research and Technology Center at MNCPPC and the Brookings Institute.**

- Over the last decade, the greater Silver Spring community has significantly changed.
- The number of non-Hispanic whites living here has dropped from 62.2% to 45.5%.
- The non-Hispanic white population for the entire County also decreased from 72.4% to 59.5% of the total population in 2000.
- It is clear we are moving towards having no one dominant group in Silver Spring.
- We are 24.8% Black, 16.5% Hispanic, and 10.5% Asian.
- These three groups sum to 51.8%---when we include the "Other" and multi-racial categories the total come to 54.5%.
- Our community's Black population grew by 38.4% across the decade.
- The greater Silver Spring area is one of the most popular destination for new immigrants throughout the region and country.
- Two of the top ten immigrant destinations in the Washington region, as identified by the Brookings Institute, are in Silver Spring: zip codes 20904 and 20906.
- Hispanics and Latinos are the fastest growing group in our community.
- The Takoma Park area has the highest percentage of Hispanic population in the County.
- Recent immigrants to the greater Silver Spring area are highly diverse.
- The top ten countries of origin in the zip codes studies by Brookings are: El Salvador, China, Ethiopia, Peru, Vietnam, Philippines, Iran, India, South Korea, and Pakistan.
- Persons from El Salvador represent 10% of new immigrants in the 20904 zip code---the largest grouping by country of origin.
- In the 20906 zip code, persons from India represent the largest number at 8%.
- The Washington area as a whole attracts the largest proportionate flow of Africans of any major metropolitan area in the United States.
- Different immigrant subgroups have different settlement patterns.
- Asian immigrants are more likely to move to the outer suburbs, while Latin American and African immigrants tend to live within the Beltway.
- In striking contrast to the other Asian immigrants, two out of three Vietnamese immigrants reside inside the Beltway.
- In the greater Silver Spring area, 10.5% of the 2000 population are Asian and are actually underrepresented as compared to the total percentage of Asians in the County, which is 11.5%.
- While Silver Spring is less wealthy than the County as a whole, we are home to households representing a wide range of economic levels.
- New census data on income is not yet available, but the 1997 Census Update Survey shows that 31% of households in Silver Spring earn more than \$70,000 in annual income; 20% earn less than \$30,000 and 49% earn between \$30,000 and \$70,000.
- The 1997 Census Update survey also estimated that approximately 7000 households earn less than \$15,000.

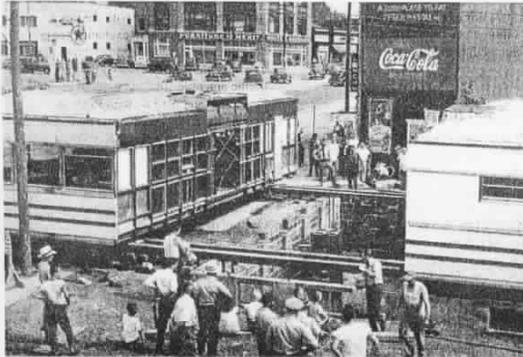
(Courtesy IMPACT Silver Spring)

# APPENDIX C:

## TASTEE DINER ARTICLE BY AUTHOR

SILVER SPRING: THEN AND AGAIN • JERRY A. MCCOY

### A Tastee slice of history



The Tastee Diner moves into Silver Spring in the summer of 1946.



Having been moved again in 2000, the Tastee Diner continues to serve the community.

It's hard to believe but this month marks the 5th anniversary of the relocation of Silver Spring's beloved Tastee Diner to its current (and hopefully final) home at 8601 Cameron Street. To honor the anniversary I have asked SSSH member Bruce Johansen to share some of his research on Tastee that is prominently featured in his doctoral dissertation, "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland."

Bruce has also recently authored *Roadsides: Images of the American Landscape*, featuring stunning photographs (but unfortunately not of Tastee) by Kelly Povo (Plymouth, MN: Crotalus Publishing, 2005).

BY BRUCE JOHANSEN

Although the forecast called for heat, humidity, and rain—a typical D.C. area summer day—crowds gathered early on Saturday morning, June 17, 2000. After over fifty years at the intersection of Georgia and Wayne, this was moving day for the Tastee Diner, and people were eager to witness history in the making.

Purchased by Eddie Warner from the Jerry O'Mahoney Company in Elizabeth, New Jersey, the 25-foot, prefabricated art deco/moderne structure was installed at its original site in August 1946. Long-time staff and patrons remember the hustle and bustle of those post-War years. The Silver Spring Shopping Center, and then major department stores, including Hecht's and J.C. Penney, drew customers to the area. So did Covington Buick, Hawn's Jewelry, and the Buzz Inn, businesses surrounding the

diner. But things would change beginning in the 1960s as retail in the central business district struggled to compete with more modern shopping options elsewhere. Tastee's and neighboring shops' futures were threatened, including by proposals for redevelopment.

Displayed at Tastee's original location were newspaper clippings, letters, and other memorabilia, most from the 1980s, illustrating the ensuing clash of ideas and emotions. In one article, developer Lloyd Moore described the 80-seat diner as "a disgrace" and "not a nice place," an impediment to the "Silver Triangle" project he intended to build on that and an adjoining site. An editorial cartoon featured a salivating Moore biting into his sandwich, which consisted of two slices of bread surrounding Tastee. By contrast, patrons' words reflected sadness over the diner's impending closure. One regular told a reporter, "This shouldn't be perceived as a museum but as a social and communal gathering spot...if it closes, it will be like a close friend died. I will suffer a loss." Another wrote to the Montgomery Planning Board: "Nothing about Tastee seems fancy, or franchised, or fake. It is

wonderful because it is real. Please save it for us."

Bob Traynor, a cook and manager who had purchased Tastee from Eddie Warner in 1968, chose not to fight. This prompted Dee Payne, Eva May Tomack, and Eunice Ramsey to mobilize their co-workers and patrons. The political

novices gathered nearly 9,000 signatures on petitions, packed public hearings, and approached current owner Gene Wilkes about purchasing the diner, which he did in 1988. Under pressure, Moore agreed to seek a solution allowing Tastee to remain in downtown Silver Spring, and in 1994 it was designated an historic site by Montgomery County. Three years later former Governor Parris Glendening presented the county with a grant to assist with its relocation.

While many residents have a soft spot for Tastee, affection hasn't been universal. As with most diners, working-class white men have historically been Tastee's primary clientele. Over time the diner has welcomed the homeless and others who might be turned away elsewhere. As it aged, some white-collar residents came to view Tastee as "seedy" and unsuitable for children. When its new location was announced, at least one future neighbor voiced concern about its patrons. Also, like most of downtown Silver Spring, the diner was segregated until a public accommodations ordinance was instituted in Montgomery County in 1962. Previously, employees were instructed to tell black patrons that they could pick up orders from the back door, but would not be served inside, a legacy remembered by many African Americans. When asked about Tastee, one septuagenarian, who prefers to remain anonymous, responded: "Yeah, yeah. You'd go around back. You'd put your order in around back and then you didn't get it until everybody up front was served...that was routine." Similarly, with Little Tavern he says: "We had a joke. The guys (behind the counter) would say, 'We don't serve colored people.' And the answer was, 'Good, we don't eat them. Give me a hotdog.'" Having witnessed Tastee's transformation into an integrated place it has become one of this man's favorite local hangouts.

Others, including Jerry McCoy, have long-standing affection for Tastee. McCoy says that the idea of living within walking distance of a 24-hour diner was one of Silver Spring's initial attractions. Before Tastee moved, he remarked: "I look at the step when you come in here, how it's worn off, and that just amazes me. That's half a century of people coming into this building, twenty-four hours a day."

Sujewa Ekanayake, a young regular who commuted daily by Metro to the old site, developed a 'zine and film based on encounters there. "Time slows down," he told me, and there are other qualities harder to name, "its strange mix of Keronac, punk

continued on next page

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**OPEN HOUSE**  
**TUESDAY**  
**AUGUST 27, 1946**  
 8:00 A. M. — 8:00 P. M.

*You are cordially invited to attend the opening of the Tastee Diner. This is a special event and you are invited to bring a plate of your favorite food to the picnic which will be held at the diner.*  
 Ed Warner

Open for business...  
**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28th**

**TASTEE DINERS**  
 8506 GEORGIA AVENUE  
 SILVER SPRING, MD.

COURTESY SILVER SPRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## History and art in the vegetable aisle



Murals of Silver Spring Scenes by Chelsea Grose, for Trader Joe's

PHOTOS COURTESY JERRY A. MCCOY

Prospects for young artists are generally considered bleak. But as Chelsea Grose was preparing to graduate from the Maryland Institute College of Design in Baltimore, she was hired to create murals for the new Trader Joe's on Colesville Road in Silver Spring. According to Grose, Trader Joe's has always hired artists for their stores, but in

the past they just repeated the Trader Joe's tropical themes. Recently they have chosen to incorporate local history into their designs.

Chelsea chose as her subjects the Acorn Park, the Art Deco style Castelberg's Jewelers, and The Old Post Office on Georgia Ave. To get their inspiration, she and the other artists, Nick Mayer and Leah

Cooperson started at the Big Acorn on East-West Highway, which led them to the waterfall in Sligo Creek and on to other historic locations around Silver Spring, taking pictures as they went to use as models for their paintings.

The artists generally used the aisles of the as-yet-unopened Trader Joe's store as their studio. But as the aisles were filled

with products being stowed on the shelves. They would retreat to the back parking lot and lean their canvases against the wall to continue working.

Chelsea was hired three weeks before the store opening and will stay on as a designer of displays and signs for the store. Who says artists have to starve?

—Cheryl Brand

### Tastee Diner

Silver Spring: Then and Again, continued



PHOTO COURTESY JERRY A. MCCOY

Tastee Diner was buried—but still open—on January 9, 1996, when 17 inches of snow had fallen in the previous three days.



PHOTO COURTESY JERRY A. MCCOY

On June 17, 2000, Tastee Diner made its big move from Georgia Avenue to its present location on Cameron Street.

rock, ice cream and apple pie."

That Tastee's former site has been filled by the international headquarters of media conglomerate Discovery Communications is one of the more dramatic signs of how downtown Silver Spring is changing. Once so visible at Georgia and Wayne, the diner has moved to the edge of the central business district, while chain restaurants and stores fill the core.

Unique to prefabricated diners is that they are built to be transported, and in turn can be relocated. Five years ago, the curious and Tastee's diehard fans gathered to watch as the humble structure was lifted from its moorings. In the morning there were performances by a Dixieland band

comprised of older white men, and by a multiracial group of tap dancing teens. Politicians offered brief remarks, while reporters sought quotes from employees and patrons.

As two hours stretched into three, four, six, and finally eight hours, and as sunny skies turned cloudy and rain bit, the crowds dwindled, but they reappeared that evening as the local landmark slowly and carefully wound its way up Georgia. With cameras and umbrellas, a brigade followed Tastee to its new home at Cameron and Ramsey. The move inspired a "Zippy the Pinhead" comic strip.

See [www.zippythepinhead.com/pages/aadinerarticle2.html](http://www.zippythepinhead.com/pages/aadinerarticle2.html).

Today the original dining car serves primarily as a lobby for a 5,500 square foot space accommodating close to 300 patrons. The counter remains, but the original wooden booths disappeared. Now a hostess greets customers, ushering them to larger, more private seating options. No longer are rubbing elbows at the counter, eavesdropping and joining in on conversations so commonplace.

Looking around, though, it's clear that staff and customers mirror a new, more multicultural Silver Spring, one that has gone from being majority to minority white since 1990. And as the diner has become more polished, it is now a place regularly patronized by women, professionals, and

families, along with much of its old clientele. In that way and others, Tastee Diner is a reflection of Silver Spring's unfolding history.

*If you can share with the Silver Spring Historical Society photographs or memorabilia of downtown Silver Spring from ANY years for a future book, please contact the SSHS at [sshistory@yahoo.com](mailto:sshistory@yahoo.com) or write PO Box 1160, Silver Spring, MD, 20910-1160. Our web site is [www.sshistory.org](http://www.sshistory.org).*

(Courtesy Silver Spring Voice)

APPENDIX D:

SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY



Montgomery County Council

*From the office of Councilmember Tom Perez*

SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY Summer 2004

Thank you for completing this survey. The purpose of this survey is to help us to help you and your business by getting a better sense of how the redevelopment activities in downtown Silver Spring are affecting your business. We want to learn more about what you like about the redevelopment process, what concerns you have, and how county government can help you. Thank you for taking the time to fill this out.

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Owner/Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Type: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long has your business been in Silver Spring? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you own or do you rent your space? \_\_\_\_\_

If you rent your space, how has the redevelopment affected your rent?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How have the redevelopment activities in downtown Silver Spring affected your business? (e.g. Is your business increasing, decreasing, about the same? Are there new opportunities or challenges that have emerged)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Is there a particular project (e.g. construction or demolition of a parking garage, re-routing of traffic, etc) that has had a particular effect on your business?

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5. Have you had any conversations with any representative of Montgomery County government regarding your concerns or needs as a small business owner? If so, with whom have you spoken?

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6. What can county government do to help ensure that your business remains in downtown Silver Spring?

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Additional Comments

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**Please return to Councilmember Tom Perez, Montgomery County Council, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850**

**Thank you for helping us to help you!**

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(Courtesy Montgomery County Councilmember Tom Perez)

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