In summer 2015, fifteen students and two faculty from Western Kentucky University took Honors 251 on the road to Washington, D.C. This is the first time that Citizen and Self—the core course for the Honors College at WKU—has been offered as a summer study away class, and this report represents the culmination of our journey.

We are used to thinking of citizenship as a series of civic duties such as voting, paying taxes, and serving your country. Citizen and Self expands this definition to include collaborative engagement with social issues facing local communities.

In D.C., this meant looking beyond monuments on the National Mall to learn about the city’s diverse and changing neighborhoods. We lived in Columbia Heights, an area where property values have skyrocketed over the past decade. This required us to critically examine our own role as outsiders in a place shaken by the displacement of many long-time residents.

Overall, the experience was both illuminating and fun. We grew close by living, cooking, and working together. We were soaked by a storm during our citywide scavenger hunt and inspired by a poetry reading at Busboys & Poets. In the words of WKU alum Chris Obermeyer, we learned to view the city through new friends, not just guidebooks. We hope you enjoy reading about our experience!

A Different Side of Citizenship in D.C.

A Whirlwind of Public Journalism

The core assignments for the class included a photo essay and a public journalism feature story. In pairs, students examined seven social issues facing Washington, D.C., as a city—past, present, and future. They carried out interviews and archival research in addition to group activities. The following pages offer a glimpse of the impressive work carried out by students on this trip. Through the students’ photography, you can also see some of the extraordinary people and places we encountered.
Our Trip in Pictures

On the National Mall at night.

Senator Mitch McConnell speaks with our class at the Capitol.

Lunch at Ben’s Chili Bowl, a local D.C. landmark.

Discussing a mural painted by local schoolchildren on a basketball court in Columbia Heights.

Research day at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., where students examined historic maps and city directories.

Chris Obermeyer, an alumnus of the Honors College at WKU, visits with the students at our house in Columbia Heights.
Honors 251: Citizen and Self in Washington, D.C., students at the Signers of the Declaration of Independence Memorial.
Combating Street Harassment in D.C.

By: Anna Durham and Sarah Stackhouse

“I was on a run and realized my shoe was untied, so I bent over to tie it while I was waiting to cross the street. Some guys in a car rolled up to the light and started yelling out the window, thanking me for bending over, because they loved the view and then whistled as they drove off. I felt offended more than anything because they shouldn’t be able to talk to me like that,” explains Kelsie Bickett, a D.C. intern in Senator Perdue’s office and a victim of street harassment.

According to StopStreetHarassment.org, a D.C. based activism organization, there is no standardized definition of the term street harassment, but the organization defines it as “unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a stranger in a public place without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Street harassment includes unwanted whistling, leering, sexist, homophobia, transphobic slurs, persistent requests for someone’s name, number or destination after they’ve said no, sexual names, comments and demands, following, flashing, public masturbation, groping, sexual assault, and rape.” (“What Is Street Harassment?”)

In 2014, the Stop Street Harassment staff dedicated themselves to conducting a national survey regarding public harassment in order to express the severity of the issue; SSH found that of the 2,000 U.S. participants surveyed, 65% of women and 25% of men reported having experienced street harassment. The survey also noted a heavy discrimination towards the LGBT community with 70% reporting having experienced street harassment by the age of seventeen compared to 49% of heterosexuals (“Statistics”). One of the more notable observations that SSH founder Holly Kearl makes in the National Street Harassment Report is that “across all ages, races, income levels, sexual orientations, and geographic locations, most women experience street harassment,” stressing the intensity and frequency of the issue (“National Street Harassment Report”).

Activism efforts in D.C. date back to the early 1920s as exemplified by a Washington-based Anti-Flirting Club, a group of women whose intentions included advising women against conniving motorists and “mashers,” the original term used for harassers. These women advised others that the motorists “don’t all tender their invitations to save the girls a walk.” The club held the first and only Anti-Flirt Week, an early exemplification of events put on by activist groups today (Coe). Endeavors continued throughout the years, and in 1985, D.C. community organizations such as the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and D.C. Men Against Sexual Violence sought to transfigure the District into a “hassle-free zone.” The movement’s efforts included public speeches, posters and flyers, and an annual Take Back the Night March, which later resulted in a public campaign supported by the City Council (McEwan).

We spoke with Holly Kearl about her observations at SSH since beginning in 2008, and she was quick to note the increase in public awareness, specifically of the term street harassment, and governmental involvement. “Media recognition and general recognition is a problem that has changed a lot. I got on Twitter in 2008, and I was the first person that I know of to use the hashtag ‘street harassment,’ and now tons of people use it every day” (Kearl). However, the organization’s website states, “it’s hard to say if it is inspiring or disheartening to realize that groups have been fighting...for generations.”

Why does the fight matter? The answer lies in the motives of many, if not most, harassers. “The act is often done with the intent to frighten or dominate the targeted individual,” afirmas Laura Beth Nielsen, a sociologist (Santhanam). In her 2009 psychology dissertation, Tracy Lynn Lord, further uncovers the underlying social and sexist motives behind street harassment. Lord discusses several theories of what motivates street harassment, including male bonding, seeking potential rape victims, social structure, and social control. Lord discusses the limitations and detrimental motivations, street harassment is much more than a snide comment made in passing, but a manifestation of overarching social injustice.

SSH states that one of the hardest aspects of street harassment is getting people to recognize its severity. “There’s always the people who say ‘Oh, it’s a compliment, it’s no big deal, find something more serious to complain about,’ and there’s plenty of people who will blame persons who are harassed for causing it because of what they’re wearing,” Kearl says of the varied perceptions regarding the issue of street harassment. This is exemplified on a blog post by Louise Melling, the Deputy Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union. Melling describes her experiences with street harassment and its

Stop Street Harassment collaborated with the Metro and CASS to post these advertisements throughout the Washington D.C. Metro system to raise awareness and hopefully prevent future harassment. The organizations plan to survey the posters’ effectiveness. (Photo taken by Anna Durham.)
impacts on her life; directly underneath her piece is a hateful comment claiming that she “must be insecure” and her harasser’s statements are merely “a greeting and a compliment” (Melling).

The D.C. Metro system took several years to be convinced of the importance of prevention. “We’ve been trying to work with them for awhile to get them to address it before 2012, and they weren’t responsive,” Kearl says. In an interview with Washington Post, SSH board member Patrick McNeil acknowledged another common perspective. “It’s not just a compliment or the price you pay for being a woman or for being gay” (McEwan).

The organization also combats companies and media that make light of the issue such as a Snickers commercial instilling the stereotype of girls in short skirts walking past construction sites, a Noxzema advertisement claiming that women are only pretending to be annoyed by harassment, and Burt’s Bees packaging glorifying cat-calling (“Campaigns Against Companies”). The organization recognizes that with such negative messages reiterated throughout our media, it’s increasingly difficult to portray the issue as consequential and severe.

Perhaps the most important thing to note about sexual harassment is its lasting impact on those who are victimized. Kearl states, “I think [people] should know that it is a problem that affects most women and some men at a young age, and it limits their access to public spaces, making it a human rights violation.” A 2008 survey of 811 women showed that at least monthly 50% take other routes, 45% avoid being out after dark, and 40% avoid being out alone because they feel unsafe due to street harassment. Even more drastic, 19% moved neighborhoods and 8% changed jobs because of harassers along the commute (“Why Stopping Street Harassment Matters”). The survey serves as a representation of the limitations to public transportation and spaces placed on victims and the violation of their rights as citizens of D.C. and the nation overall. Because street harassment can cause such extreme life-altering decisions among its victims, it highlights the heavy presence of sexism, repression, and discrimination in today’s society.

While street harassment is an issue that weighs heavy on D.C.‘s society, efforts are being made to address this problem. Workshops put on by Collective Action for Safe Spaces, another D.C. based organization, provide a safe environment for women to discuss their experiences. The workshops cover “a variety of harassment-related topics, including: street harassment 101, assertive responses to street harassment, bystander intervention, trainings for youth, and innovative ways to engage in anti-harassment activities” (“Trainings and Workshops”).

One event that happens around the world is International Anti-Street Harassment Week. Street harassment is viewed and treated differently in every community; events are determined based on location and what will best raise awareness in regards to specific communities. “We don’t tell anyone what to do because, locally, we know they’re going to know the best way to respond to and interact with their community on the issue,” says Kearl.

This year, organizations in D.C. participated by handing out fliers, running photo campaigns, bringing in speakers, offering self-defense classes for young girls, and chalk ing the sidewalk with information advocating for safe public spaces. Examples of other events range from information tables in New Mexico, a rally in Manhattan, free designs from Cats Against Cat Calls on clothing in Ohio, theatre events in Philadelphia, and writing experiences on white boards to post on social media in Colorado (Kearl).

Problems come into play when trying to legally enforce the issue; there is often disagreement about whether certain actions or comments are flirting or harassing. Activist Marty Langelan, in an interview with NPR, encourages people to trust their gut, “If it feels creepy to you, it is creepy. The context makes a difference. My husband says to me, ‘hey, baby, you look sexy’, I’m going to smile. Some guy on the street says it in that tone of voice that makes the hair stand up on the back of your head, you know you’ve got a situation” (Langelan and Vargas). It is in these situations that the victim has to quickly decide what type of harasser this is. Is he just trying to annoy? Is he trying to show power, or is he really going to attack?

Due to the wide range of types of harassment, law enforcement must handle each case differently. Law enforcement recommends varying techniques based on the situation. Some of these include calling out the harasser, asking him to repeat himself louder, or saying “don’t harass women” loud enough for others to hear. They encourage getting as many witnesses as possible and then calling the police as soon as possible after the event (Langelan and Vargas).

Another way law enforcement is starting to act involves an online reporting form victims can fill out to vent about what experience they had with a harasser. Once submitted, they will get a response within 24 hours, and if the report seems worthy of a crime, they have the option to report to police. Whether or not the report is considered crime-worthy, this form allows metro police to look for pat-
terns to further address offenders.

As mentioned before, SSH faced an immense challenge getting the Metro on board with their efforts. When first trying to address this with Metro in 2012, Kearl says they were unresponsive which led organizations to testify before the D.C. City Council during the Metro’s annual performance review. They finally responded with “Harassment isn’t a problem on our system. One person’s flirting is another person’s harassment.” Included in the hearing was the now current mayor, Muriel Bowser whose response was, “Well, as a woman, I feel differently, and you need to do something.” Kearl says, “I don’t know that we would be where we are today without her having said that and that she understood the issues.”

“No matter where we are, the ultimate goal is to get people to acknowledge that street harassment is a real problem and is one that deserves to be addressed, that needs to be addressed,” Kearl says. People deserve to go to work or travel on public transportation without feeling unsafe, and this is the overarching goal of not only her organization, but also others like hers. Washington D.C. has come a long way from the beginning when Holly Kearl was one of the first people to use the hashtag “street harassment” in 2009. Since then, there has been more awareness and media recognition, not only in D.C., but also around the nation and the world. SSH considered it a success when Metro began addressing the issue and putting up advertisements that read, “If it’s unwanted, its harassment.”

Advocates against street harassment are working towards this goal by finding more ways to involve the community. Briefly mentioned earlier, social media has helped to increase awareness and has become a tool for victims to share stories. Men are starting to become more involved in the issue, which is exemplified by Men Can Stop Rape and Masculinity U, two activist groups both addressing male responsibility against street harassment. Kearl also runs workshops with community groups, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, educating them on street harassment. Speaking with youth is a more recent development in hopes of reaching the next generation and raising up a harassment-free community.

Works Cited


http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/2013/10/shistory/.

Photograph by Sarah Stackhouse. Section of a mural in Columbia Heights.
Our Trip in Pictures

Photographs by Erin Bennett (top) and Maggie Sullivan (below). During our trip we saw numerous spaces occupied by, or designed for, children. These include (clockwise from top): the fountain at 14th St NW & Park; the Eleanor Roosevelt statue at the FDR Memorial; a sign by a mural in Columbia Heights; and part of a mural by Harriett Tubman Elementary School.
The Citywide Scavenger Hunt
The Citywide Scavenger Hunt

For the Scavenger Hunt, students were given a PDF file with unidentified pictures. Students had to identify the places in the pictures and use public transportation to get to as many places as possible, where they took photos to prove they had visited.

The winners of the Scavenger Hunt, Maggie and Jocelyn, received souvenir mugs and gift cards for coffee and frozen yogurt.

The third-place prize in the Scavenger Hunt was a giant, fake $5 won by Grant and Kyle. It proceeded to appear all over D.C., including multiple group pictures.
Restoring the Anacostia Watershed

By: Erin Bennett and Leah Cannady

Had we visited the Anacostia River approximately 400 hundred years ago, we would have encountered a bustling American Indian trading culture. The Native Americans found shelter, food, and community along the banks of the river, which was bursting with aquatic life and game. Although the landscape of the Anacostia has changed dramatically as a result of American colonization, today we are seeing promising new developments in the area. During our time in Washington, D.C., we had the opportunity to sit down with Dan Smith, the director of Public Policy and Advocacy for the Anacostia Watershed Society, who explained the history of the Anacostia River, what is being done today to improve conditions of the watershed, and plans for the future developments of the area.

Past

The Anacostia watershed today is the product of many years of change. European explorers like John Smith arrived in Anacostia in 1608, which quickly led to the leveling of forests to make way for European immigrants and colonial farms. Bladensburg, Maryland, is technically the start of the Anacostia and was a major shipping port, bustling with commerce. By the time of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., was bustling with commerce as soldiers and their families flooded the area. The expansion of the city happened so quickly that the infrastructure couldn’t keep up, marking the beginning of many problems for the Anacostia River. According to Dan Smith, plans for sewage and storm run-off were quickly approved without a second thought. As a result, today, the Anacostia River is suffering from a hastily constructed infrastructure that was unable to protect the river from trash and pollution.

Over the past century, major polluters of the river include the Navy Yard (located right along the Anacostia) and Washington Gas. Dan Smith explained that, until the 1980’s, everyone was ignoring the conditions of the river, with neither the military nor other polluters held responsible for their actions. Like the Navy Yard, Washington Gas was a booming establishment along the river but also a major contributor to the contamination of the river. Washington Gas used coal gasification to produce their gas and, because of much less strict regulations, there was a great deal of burying, spilling, and open dumping of chemicals into the river that still has yet to be corrected today. As this open dumping continued, the wetlands along the river were under appreciated and seen as a bad thing by many people. Smith explained that this was one of the reasons people historically viewed the Anacostia in a poor light. The wetlands, when sewage contaminated the river, would often become a breeding ground for mosquitoes, making people think this area was creating malaria—therefore, generating negative feelings towards the river.

More recently, people began to stand up and try to make a difference, particularly after a tragedy involving Washington Gas in the 1960s. Smith elaborated, “they had activists in the 60’s fighting those things but for [Washington Gas] to be closed, it took this 7 year old little boy to be burned to death while he was playing with his friends.” Because the company allowed open-burning and had very few regulations, a fire got out of control when a large wind blew up. Little boys playing by the water ran for their lives, but the youngest didn’t make it. So finally, the government agreed to shut the plant down. They filled it with dirt, gave it to the National Park Service, and today it is Kenilworth Park, which can be seen from the Anacostia River.

The growing awareness of the problems facing the Anacostia River is reflected in publications—including the 1988 pamphlet, “In the Anacostia Watershed”—that began to shed some light on the issues of the watershed and increase awareness in the community. While the pamphlet surveyed the ecological challenges facing the river, the authors had not yet identified practical solutions to these problems (Interstate Commission).

Present

Today through various legislation, lobbying, and community support, nonprofit organizations like the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) are able to begin making differences along the Anacostia River. For example, Dan Smith explained how the AWS ended up suing the Naval Yard for the pollution they

The picture above shows the current state of the Anacostia River after a storm near or in the Anacostia Watershed. Storms cause large amounts of trash to be swept straight into the river or via storm drains that lead to the river.

The picture above shows a group of people at rowing practice with their coach. This is one way that the Anacostia Watershed Society is getting people out on the water and trying to create positive feelings towards the river again.
caused in the river, deeming them the responsible party and therefore responsible for the clean-up. As a result, the Navy Yard did some environmental mitigation on and around the river, but never cleaned the actual river.

To raise awareness of the issue, AWS encourages community involvement on the water. They host “Free Paddle Nights” once a week where anyone is able to come borrow a kayak and paddle up and down a stretch of the river. This allows people to see first-hand many of the problems the river faces today. We had a similar experience on a pontoon tour of the river with Dan Smith and some other employees at the AWS. We learned about the various methods they are using to help clean up the river—mechanisms such as a “trash trap” that catches a great deal of the larger trash items that are the river. We saw directly the sheer amounts of trash in the river—although we did visit the day after a big DC storm.

Smith enlightened us on the concept of CSO’s, or combined sewer overflows, that occur after a typical storm in DC. Due to the combined sewer systems that were installed in a hurry during the Civil War expansion, any over flow of the storm water run-off system, will also cause an overflow in the sanitary sewer system, and vice versa. When the storm run-off drains become overwhelmed, they back up and overflow directly into streams and tributaries, and therefore directly into the Anacostia—as do the sanitary sewer systems. This causes a heavy flow of liter, silt, and diluted raw sewage into the river, only contributing to the heavy pollution that has been there for generations.

As one solution to this problem, the city is currently in the middle of a massive project to help solve the sanitary sewage overflow problem. So rather than digging through the middle of DC to remove the combined sewer systems, a huge tunnel is being dug underneath the Potomac River to act as a cistern or holding tank for any overflow sewage. Smith elaborated that the tunnel is being dug a few feet each day and will resemble some of the metro tunnels that are in place today, but will be available only for the overflow. Instead of backup sewage running directly into the river, untreated, it will flow into the new tunnel until the treatment plant is at a low enough capacity to pump in the overflow and treat it, before it is released into the river. The first leg of the project is projected to be complete in 2018 and should fix approximately 40% of the sanitary sewage problem, and when the project is completed finished in 2023, 98% of the sanitary sewage will be treated, drastically improving the water quality of the Anacostia.

In addition to this large scale project that is in process, AWS is also implementing smaller projects along the way. They hosted a clean-up event on Earth day where they had a couple thousand volunteers come out among 30 different sites along the river and clean up visible trash. Afterwards, they celebrate their work with a cookout and fellowship among the community of the Anacostia. They also have begun work on a project at a local Methodist church in Hyattsville, Maryland to reconstruct their parking lot and to improve their storm water runoff system. Personnel of the AWS, along with landscape engineers, construct these plans to incorporate grass medians and more storm drains so the smaller streams surrounding the area aren’t blown out every time it rains. Smith informed us that the AWS has various locations where they hope to implement plans like such as this to help fix the water issue one area at a time.

One problem that the AWS continues to see among community members is their lack of understanding about the depth of these issues. They will spend their entire day cleaning up around the river and then can’t understand why the trash is back after the next big storm. The complexity and the deep historical roots of these problems goes back much further than most of the community can understand and can often cause them to lose interest when working to fix these problems. The AWS operates off of some government funding but is operating mostly on donations from people that are passionate about the issues. Therefore, when they ask for money and complete one project, people get frustrated when they ask for more to fix the next problem. While they are in the process of working toward eliminating the combined sewage overflows, their next step will be to address the various toxins that inhabit the river. While research projects are underway and steps are being taken, there is still a long road ahead for the Anacostia to reach the conditions the community hopes to see.

Future

These successes are great, but the goals for the future would see the revitalization of the community around the Anacostia River and the aquatic life that is meant to be in the river. The Anacostia Watershed Society is doing their best to communicate with, involve, and encourage the community residents to keep the river clean. The main goal of the AWS is to make the river fishable and swimmable again with wide public access. They want to keep the community that has been suffering right alongside the river and let them enjoy...
the productivity, livelihood, and recreation that the Anacostia River can once again provide. They make it clear that all of the hard work the AWS, as well as the community, are doing for the river is for Anacostia’s current community and not for gentrification and developers. Dan Smith specifically states, “One of the things we’re concerned about is that we don’t want to be out here in the vanguard cleaning up for gentrification so we can have developers come in and make billions of dollars and have the people that live here run out.” The Anacostia Watershed Society wants the people that call this area home to have the opportunity to create goals for the community once the Anacostia River is clean and can be used again. They want their kids to be able to enjoy the river and the unique community that calls this area home.

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The picture above shows a trash trap. The trash trap is put in place to help groups like the Anacostia Watershed Society collect data to study what trash is found in the river and what needs to be addressed to clean up the river.

Our Trip in Pictures

Photograph by Maggie Sullivan. This image depicts the National Sculpture Garden, which we visited on the first full day of our trip, with the Capitol Building undergoing repairs in the background. Some students interpreted the pyramid sculpture on the left as a commentary on class in the U.S., with the power of a few resting on many others despite the equal size of each stone.
DC’s Battle with Deinstitutionalization of Mental Health Care

By: Kyle Smith and Grant Hughes

Emory Lee was born in the greater DC area in 1964. Not only was he born with Down Syndrome, but early in his life he was also diagnosed with a seizure disorder that exponentially increased his aggressive behavior. After multiple visits to the DC General Hospital, many doctors did not know how to handle Lee’s aggression. On January 18th, Lee was transferred to the 10th ward of the infamous St. Elizabeth’s. It was here where Lee’s aggressive behavior peaked, so much so that he was placed in seclusion. Here, Lee began to panic from the confined space. Early in his “captivity,” Lee would motion to the nurses to signal that he had calmed down and wished to be released, only to be denied on each occasion. On January 18, 1986, Lee was found unresponsive in the seclusion room after an undetected seizure. It was this story that brought mental healthcare to the forefront of DC local politics (U.S. House). Lee’s story brought about changes in how patients are treated, where they are treated, and how mental health institutions operated.

Today, of the roughly 600,000 people that live in the District of Columbia, 11.1% have some sort of mental disorder. However, DC also has a large number of homeless individuals, of which roughly 20-25% suffer from some form of mental disorder (“Mental Illness and Homelessness”). The DC Department of Mental Health also found that almost 8,500 District residents are in need of both housing and mental care. However, there are only enough services to cover 42% of the mentally disabled population in DC (“State Statistics”).

Washington, DC, has a long history of institutionalized treatment dating back to the founding of St. Elizabeth’s in the 1850s. These institutions formed a doctor-patient relationship based on authority and submissive personalities. Today, treatment methods have moved towards community, peer-led activities that foster more of a family atmosphere.

The Government Hospital for the Insane, today known as St. Elizabeth’s, opened its doors in 1853 and within a decade had treated several hundred patients. In early twentieth century, St. Elizabeth was investigated at least three times for mismanagement and patient abuse. Nevertheless, the hospital continued to adopt new treatment methods with questionable efficacy: locking patients in the seclusion for extensive periods of time, invasive brain procedures, electroshock therapy, insulin shock therapy and tranquilizing drugs (McMillen and Kane). These treatment methods continued until 1987 when the DC government established the Commission on Mental Health Services due to negligent services. This brought about the transfer of most St. Elizabeth’s patients to privately owned hospitals and group homes. The group homes, or community houses in which mentally disabled would live and be treated together as a group, were intended to prevent abuse. However, it was soon discovered that these houses only continued the tradition of malpractice.

In the 1990s, there were over 150 group homes spread out in Washington, D.C. Over 80% of these group homes were run as for-profit companies. In order to increase their profits, owners abused and neglected their patients. The Washington Post conducted an investigation and found more than 350 cases of abuse, neglect, molestation, or stealing that were not reported. For example, group home managers sent patients out to remove waste from stables or mow lawns (Boo).

Even before these reports were published, DC’s local government knew something must be done to solve the group home crisis. They found their answer in the form of a “clubhouse.” Green Door Clubhouse was established in 1977 in order to house clients leaving St. Elizabeth’s and other hospitals during the process of deinstitutionalization. They modeled the program on New York’s Fountain House, where clients were treated like “members of a club.” Instead of clinical care, a clubhouse treats its members through a variety of peer-led community activities, such as money management, proper social skill classes, and anger management classes (Barry and Carpenter). In 1987, the original Green Door Clubhouse was renovated in order to house more people. By 1993, Green Door managed 7 group homes and 33 apartments for its 78 members, which led to it becoming an alternative for the homeless.

The overall goal of Green Door Clubhouse was to care for its “members” and eventually train them to work in a full-time job. After successful completion of a training program, members entered the Transitional Employment Program, in which they worked part-time at a local business. Within four years of participation in this program, independent employment rates skyrocketed from 11% to 40%. The program appeared to offer a promising new direction for the DC mentally disabled community. In 2010, however, the city government slashed funding for mental healthcare, and Green Door could no longer survive on Medicaid alone. After serving over 1,800 people over 35 years, the clubhouse was sold (Cauvin).
Over time, the term mental illness has changed from broad words like “insane” to a more specialized catalog of illnesses: schizophrenia, depression, Alzheimer’s, and more. Importantly, today’s definition of mental illness now includes substance abuse. In response, DC’s government has combined the Department of Mental Health and the Addiction Prevention Recovery Administration into the new Department of Behavioral Health in 2013. Agencies such as Green Door can now treat clients who not only have mental illness, but also have some sort of substance abuse. “[A]ddictions are a huge part of mental illness and they are co-occurring, it is really hard to talk about one without the other. About 80% of our clients have some sort of co-occurring substance abuse,” says Maria Barry.

The federal government has issued two models on the best way to recover from mental disabilities and substance abuse. The first model is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Working Definition of Recovery. This model looks at the four different dimensions of recovery: health, home, purpose, and community. If all four of these dimensions are the focal points of mental healthcare, then the patient will recover in a more developed way than from other models (SAMHSA). The second model issued is the Stress-Vulnerability Model of Co-occurring Disorders. This model looks at biological vulnerability and stress as the two main factors in the cause and development of psychiatric disorders. Many things can influence these two factors, but the most important influences in this model are alcohol and drugs, medication, coping skills, social support, and meaningful activities (Hazelden Foundation). Many agencies, including Green Door, have merged these models in order to treat their clients in the most efficient way.

Overall, the mental healthcare system has seen a massive decline in funding and a complete change in how the mentally disabled have been treated. However, there is hope in the form of Green Door and other new non-profit mental healthcare agencies. The change from invasive procedures to psycho-pharmaceuticals for mental treatments has shifted funding away from institutional treatment. It is places like Green Door that help those who are not insured, or whose insurance does not cover pharmaceuticals, to be treated. Green Door also brings a more family-oriented relationship than seen in the past. The strict boundaries between patients and doctors during the St. Elizabeth’s era led to the potential neglect experienced by many patients. The new, community style treatment is another stepping stone in the battle of mental healthcare in the age of deinstitutionalization.

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Barry, Maria (CDO at Green Door) and Andrew Carpenter (HR Manager at Green Door), interview with Kyle Smith and Grant Hughes, June 10, 2015.


This is Green Door’s new Core Services Agency. It is here where 1,800 clients are treated in a community based setting.
Drawing the Community Closer Through Art

By: Emilie Gill and Ashley Marshall

In September of 2015, a new piece of public art will be installed in Washington, D.C. The artists commissioned to create it will not be well-known. Many of them have never made art before. They are students, postal workers, nurses, and writers. They are high school dropouts, professors, doctors, and veterans. Some live in newly developed condos; some are homeless. They will have no single age, race, culture, or economic status.

In fact, the piece will be the work of over 1,000 artists. When the art is unveiled at the Atlas Performing Arts Center on September 16, most of the viewers will be there not to casually observe another new piece of public art but to admire the work they all contributed to their installation. As advertised in a flyer for the event (see Figure One), members of the H Street NE community will construct fifty large mobiles as part of a project known as Mobilizing Our Community, under the construction of D.C. resident Kevin Reese.

“He starts by asking participants to draw or make models of what they think the mobile ought to look like in response to the theme, and the theme is ‘Balance and Connection in Our Evolving City,’” explains Mary Hall Surface, the project director. “So given how much this neighborhood is changing, how much our city is changing, how much the world is changing, how do we keep things in balance? How do we stay connected?” In this project, public art is not just art for the people; it is art with the people.

Patricia C. Phillips asserts that “[public art] is public because it is a manifestation of art activities and strategies that take the idea of public as the genesis and subject for analysis.” In other words, public art is really about showcasing the concerns of a community and using the art not only to raise questions about issues in the community, but to celebrate the good in the community as well. While a number of public artwork in D.C. consists of sculptures and murals commissioned and installed by the city, public art is not limited to a large, expensive piece one looks at from a distance on the side of a building. Nor is it always commissioned by a single, well-known artist. One of the goals of artists such as Reese and Surface is expanding the reach of public art and getting the surrounding community involved.

One issue that advocates of public art hope to solve is the issue of accessibility to a variety of art forms. People are often deterred from engaging in the arts due to high monetary cost or the location in which they live. In addition, funding for arts education in public school systems is often cut from the curriculum. Artists in D.C. hope to provide an alternative by offering low-cost or free access to public art as well as by bringing the artists to the people.

A lack of accessibility often leads to a lack of public engagement. While some public art is pretty to look at, it does not always invite the public to connect to it in some way. If people are not provided with opportunities to work together on projects that will improve their community, the gaps between them will only grow. These community gaps contribute to the issue of the very real separation in the D.C. area. In a city which is constantly re-building and changing, racial, cultural, and economic tensions have created gaps among people which are hard to bridge.

These issues are prevalent beyond the Washington, D.C. area as well. Many public school systems across the country have cut funding to their art programs or have eliminated them from the curriculum altogether (Yaffe and Shuler). While some schools attempt to compromise by making their art classes after-school activities, the instruction is often not as thorough as in-school class. In addition, communities nation-wide struggle to gather funds, resources, and volunteers in order to provide art programs outside of schools.

Despite the existing obstacles, a number of D.C. residents have seen the potential of art as a form of public engagement. Mobilizing Our Community is one of the most recent endeavors. After recruiting people from schools, community centers, homeless shelters and beyond, Reese and Surface will hold workshops to teach them how to design and balance a mobile. The organizers of this project hope that by allowing so many people to converse and interact with each other as they sand, paint, and connect their pieces, the project will bridge the gaps that exist throughout the city, strengthening the visual metaphor of “connection” (Surface). This project allows people to learn about the issues their community is facing, but it also encourages them to talk to people facing the same challenges and allows a dialogue to open up about how those challenges can be remedied.

Mobilizing Our Community will not be the first project Reese and Surface have organized in order to address the issue of community engagement. Surface is also the creator and artistic director of Intersections, an all-arts festival which runs for over eight days in the spring. The festival is designed to reach out on a national level; artists from across the country are invited to travel to D.C. and perform in music, dance, film, and more. Surface’s goal is to increase the accessibility of arts to the community and to give new artists the chance to display their art form to those who would normally not be able to view it.

“It’s all about expanding your perspectives, opening your mind up to things you wouldn’t necessarily experience and by doing that, your sense of self grows and then your sense of where you live, community in the broadest sense of the word, then ultimately to the larger, world community,” she says.

Other organizations have seek to solve the issue of accessibility as well. The Torpedo Factory Art Center, established in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1974, invites the public to watch artists at work at no cost. The Torpedo Factory is a different approach to public art; the pieces within it will eventually be sold and become private property. However, while the art is in the studio, it is very much a collaborative experience between the artist and the public. Viewers are allowed to converse freely with the artists on hand and learn about their processes and experiences. In addition, artists are granted the opportunity to work with other artists in their medium and to help display each other’s work. These opportunities are unique to the Torpedo Factory; such in-depth encounters between visitors and artists are not present in most galleries. In a studio on the first floor, Chinese brush painter and potter Tracie Tao can be seen glazing a new piece while visitors browse through the artwork on display. A few spaces down is the work of a paper mache artist. She recently put a paper mache giraffe in the hallway and allowed passersby to help her work on it.

Busboys & Poets, a restaurant chain in the D.C. area focuses on the importance of the spoken word as art. The public is invited to come and participate in open mic poetry; anyone may step up and speak about what they are most passionate. Head Curator Carol Dyson explains that for her, the art shared at Busboys & Poets is all about progression and transformation. From poetry to the paintings by local artists hanging on the restaurant walls, the art focuses on getting the public to see new perspectives on issues such as race and personal growth.

Civic involvement through public art is also being performed to beautify the city. Street artists and artist collectives like Albus Cavus gain permission from building owners to allow them to create large murals on their-

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YOU ARE INVITED!

Join Mobilizing Our Community and help conceive and create an installation of over 50 mobiles, a powerful visual metaphor for many parts coming together to create a new whole that will connect the H Street Northeast community and beyond in a whole new way.

In workshops at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, in schools, and at community centers, nationally known, DC-resident kinetic artist Kevin Reese will work with hundreds of diverse DC residents to create a large-scale installation of high-flying mobiles that celebrate balance and connection in our evolving city.

You will
• Learn how a mobile is designed and balanced.
• Make small-scale works, responding to the theme of “balance and connection” in our evolving city.
• Experience Reese’s acclaimed multi-media solo theatre performance, A Perfect Balance, that celebrates innovation.
• See your creation realized when over 50 mobiles made of hundreds of pieces are installed in the Atlas’ Sprenger Theater in September.
• Witness your art enjoyed by thousands of people at the Atlas along with music and dance at the September city-wide celebrations the H Street Festival (September 19) and Art All Night (tentatively September 26).
• Enjoy a mobile installed at your organization or business at the conclusion of the program.

“In 30 years of running an arts center, this was one of the finest experiences our community has had. People were unquestionably delighted. The joy we witnessed on the faces of those who participated was very moving. Do yourself a favor: invite Kevin to your town. Not only will his work change your community; it will change you.”

Steve Duchrow
Director of Performing Arts, Elgin Community College Arts Center

For more information contact Project Director Mary Hall Surface, mhsurface@atlasarts.org.

The Atlas Performing Arts Center brings people together through the arts to experience and celebrate a range of artistic expressions and traditions. The Atlas presents innovative and thought-provoking performances and arts events in music, dance, theatre, film and spoken word; provides valuable benefits and services to support its Arts Partners; and offers workforce development, arts education, and community engagement activities.

Atlas Performing Arts Center
1333 H Street Northeast | Washington, DC 20002 | (202) 399-7993 | atlasarts.org

Figure One: A flyer for “Mobilizing Our Community”
walls. Young students helped paint a number of these murals in the D.C. area. The murals are engaging and appealing; they are also effective at deterring unwanted graffiti from appearing on the sides and alleyways of buildings. The fact that the art is created by local residents seems to generate respect for the public space on which it is painted. A mural running along the walls of Harriet Tubman Elementary School was painted by students at a Latin American Youth Center and members of the Art + Media House, and the mural depicts people describing the community in which they live. While some street signs and nearby walls have been tagged with spray paint numerous times, the mural remains undisturbed.

Public art in Washington, D.C. appears to be on the rise and in high demand, but there are still some obstacles artists are having to face in order to share their work with the public. The major obstacle is funding. “There’s never enough money,” says Surface. “We are in the not-for-profit arts, and that’s different in that we’re not here to make money. We’re here to make art, though we have to have money to make the art.” Nonetheless, public artists are finding ways to overcome these obstacles. Surface adds that going out and getting grants and contributions from organizations, corporations, and individuals is simply a constant part of what you do.

While these organizations have sought to create access to public art mainly in the Washington, D.C. area, many of the organizers see the potential of public art on a national level. Kevin Reese has worked with students across the United States to build and install mobiles like the ones in Mobilizing Our Community through a program called School Sculptures. Meanwhile, Mary Hall Surface also works as a teaching artist and uses drama to engage and educate students nationwide. She hopes to use the theater and monologue activities she has created to teach children empathy and to broaden their perspectives of the world.

For those wishing to bring people together through public art in their own towns and neighborhoods, Surface has this piece of advice for them: “Talk to the community… so it’s not just the divine artist saying, ‘Let me enlighten you.’” There should be a back-and-forth conversation between the artist and the people, she explains, so that there is a clear sense of what the community feels should be represented or celebrated. In that way, it will truly be art for the public.

Some pieces of public art, such as the mural at Harriet Tubman Elementary School, will be on permanent display. Others, however, will not. After the mobiles of Mobilizing Our Community have finished displaying, the pieces will be disassembled and placed in the buildings and businesses of those who contributed to them (Surface). The artwork at the Torpedo Factory will eventually be sold. At Busboys and Poets, the spoken word is fleeting; once a poem is recited, it will not be heard the same way again. But public art does not need to be permanent to have a lasting impact on the people. By being granted the opportunity to witness art, to be involved in art, to play a role in making art, a community is receiving the engagement it needs. It can be a very real agent of change to an individual, a neighborhood, or an even larger community.

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Imagine driving your car. Suddenly, you lose control and crash. You’re badly wounded. You hear frantic yelling, then sirens in the distance. As the sirens get closer, you experience a vague feeling of relief. Next thing you know, you’re out of the car and on the ground, soothed words repeating that everything’s going to be okay, to just breathe. Then your pants are removed.

“That ain’t no bitch,” is what you hear next. “That’s a n*****. He’s got a dick and balls.” (Fox)

They stop helping you, and instead point and gape at the oddity of humanity that is you. You’re bleeding out, you’re dying, and all they can do is laugh.

A despairing end, one unfit for any human. And one that befell Tyra Hunter on August 7th, 1995. Hunter was a transgender woman of color who was denied on-the-scene treatment when she was broadsided by a motorcyclist. Washington D.C. Fire Department E.M.T.s refused to treat her when they found out she was transgender and instead mocked and insulted her. They didn’t resume treatment until Fire Chief Otis Latin walked onto the scene. Hunter was then taken to a hospital and given a paralytic, but died an hour later from blood loss. It was estimated that if Hunter had been given prompt, competent aid, she would have had a 71-88% chance of survival. Instead, a toxic mix of transphobia and racism resulted in Hunter’s death.

Unfortunately, this sort of injustice has been the norm in the United States’ capital for many years. Jason Terry, a member of the D.C. Trans Coalition, explained that while D.C. leads the US in trans equality legislation, it doesn’t stand out when it comes to the treatment of trans people (Terry). The fact that many Americans don’t know what it means to be transgender does not help. Gender is complicated, and being transgender doesn’t mean being a cross-dresser. It means a “person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person’s biological sex assigned at birth.” Say a person is born a female but knows that he’s a man. This means, whether or not he had gender affirmation surgery, commonly called a sex change, he is a transgender man.

Although the nation’s history of transgender activism starts in the mid-1900s, injustice toward trans people still permeates our society. D.C.’s own official history of trans activism started in 1984, when Transgenders Against Discrimination and Defamation was established. Hunter’s death sparked an outrage that spread throughout the nation (Greenspan). This led to policy changes like the Tyra Hunter Human Diversity Training Series for the D.C. Fire Department and the Tyra Hunter Drop-In Center, which provides showers and meals for homeless trans individuals (Holly).

Hunter’s death also sparked a change in the group Transgenders Against Discrimination and Defamation. It became Transgender Health Empowerment (T.H.E.) in 1996 and proved to be a valuable source for many trans people by providing housing, medical referrals, personal counseling, job training, a clear list of other trans resources, and more (Greenspan).

Later in 2005, the D.C. Trans Coalition (DCTC), which began as The Coalition to Clarify the Human Rights Act, worked to amend the Human Rights Act of 1977. This act attempted to end discrimination based on race, religion, and genetic information. DCTC sought to amend the act because it didn’t specifically refer to transgender people; it only placed them under the vague umbrella of no discrimination due to appearance. They made several key points, one of which pointed out that the average annual income of transgender people was less than $10,000.

DCTC went on to take another step in 2010, when they pressured the D.C. Office of Human Rights to enforce gender neutral bathrooms.

Despite the considerable headway made by activists, individuals identifying as transgender continue to face serious threats to their safety. As recently as 2011, in what Terry refers to as one of D.C.’s most violent years, at least twenty transgender individuals were assaulted or killed in what was a succession of hate crimes (Terry). Outraged activists demanded that the Metro Police Department and their Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit (GLLU) conduct a more thorough training plan concerning police interactions with the LGBTQ community (Tomassoni).

Even with the new plan in place and the resulting Trans Respect advertising campaign (which uses the hashtag #TransRespect to help encourage people to improve their view of transgender individuals), discrimination has continued. “Legislation… has been limited,” says Terry. “A lot of it has happened at the agency/policy level, not coming at the level of getting the laws passed.” The result has been a patch-work of breakthroughs for transgender individuals.

One major breakthrough that occurred at the legislative level, however, was the repeal of Prostitution Free Zones in 2014. These zones, originally designed to eliminate prostitution, could be set up by police for a period of twenty days in a four to five square block area. Police were then allowed to ask anyone in the zone who they suspected of prostitution to leave. The “prostitutes” police questioned were often transgender women of color who were then pushed to rougher areas of D.C. where their safety was jeopardized (Grosso).

Such blatant discrimination at the hands of the police is not uncommon, and the lawsuits filed against the Metro Police Department have led to improvements for trans people. Patti Shaw, a transgender woman, filed a lawsuit suing the department as well as the individual officers who dealt with her.

In a 2014 BuzzFeed interview, Shaw said that in 2009 she was arrested by Metro Police Officers. Because of a past police record which identified her as male, Shaw was
placed in the male cell block, even though she had undergone gender affirmation surgery and her driver’s license identified her as female. She was subsequently assaulted and harassed by male inmates and male officers (Pasulka). In 2014, Shaw settled her case, and the police department agreed to change the way that gender is reported in their database.

Such discrimination is not unusual. A report from the DCTC stated that 80% of transgender people surveyed reported being verbally abused in public, while 35% reported sexual assault or rape. Roughly 42% of transgender individuals are unemployed, while 28% face housing instability (“The Transgender Community”).

The past few years have seen improved relationships between transgender individuals and the rest of the D.C. community. D.C. regulated health insurance has been expanded to include gender affirmation surgery as well as other transition expenses such as hormones. The LGBT Homeless Youth Reform Amendment Act of 2013, which designates certain beds in homeless shelters as beds for youth, was also signed into law thanks to the work of local organizations such as Casa Ruby and Sexual Minority Youth Acceptance League (SMYAL) (“The Transgender Community”).

Casa Ruby, the only bilingual organization that provides beds and hot meals for LGBTQ individuals, and SMYAL, an organization working to empower the community’s LGBTQ youth, are two local organizations that have sprung up in the past decade. Grassroots movements such as these have led to more safe spaces for transgender people. Through their community education programs, they have helped bring trans issues to the attention of the D.C. community.

Terry praises these initiatives but believes progress is still needed. “We don’t do LGBTQ violence response in this city very well,” he says, referring to the fact that violence is an ongoing problem. To combat this, local activists created the Violence Prevention and Response Team, a group of local LGBTQ activists who meet with GLLU police to discuss recent hate crimes. This group, of which Terry is a part, also responds to any LGBTQ-involved incidents where police are called. “We go to the scene at three, four in the morning, and we actually mostly observe and make sure the police are doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” Terry explains. “We try to gather information on our own, parallel to their investigation.” Terry says the information gathered is used to ensure the fair treatment of LGBTQ people. (Terry)

The Response Team does help, but there is still work to be done. Right now, the focus is on harm reduction, decreasing the amount of discrimination and violence that LGBTQ individuals face. Such a focus, however, will never lead to much change. The ultimate goal for the future is to alter the way that transgender people are viewed and to transform the way the community interacts with them. For Terry, this change will not be seen for another twenty or thirty years. (Terry)

The D.C. community is taking steps in the right direction. They participate in the National Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day in November honoring Rita Hester whose 1998 death led to an increase in trans activism, and host community education events. In order for there to be complete change, though, more allies need to come forward offering support. The mayor, the police chief, the city council, and everyday citizens need to pledge themselves to action. “On a policy perspective, we really do lead the country,” states Terry. However, he cautions, “Policy is great…but if there’s no implementation, if there’s no commitment to it…it’s useless.” And he’s right.

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Our Trip in Pictures

Photograph by Emilie Gill. Trash swept into the Anacostia River served as an island for herons during our pontoon boat tour with Dan Smith of the Anacostia Watershed Society, which is working to restore the river for the communities that surround it.
Our House: 4907 14th St. NW

We were fortunate during this trip to stay in a beautiful house in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C., that we found through an online rental portal. Located at 4907 14th Street NW, it included plenty of room for cooking, eating, and relaxing, as well as a sweeping views of the city.

What we didn’t realize until our visit to the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., was that the house itself was emblematic of the changes that have swept Columbia Heights over the past century.

Adjacent to our home was St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was filled with churchgoers every Sunday. At the Historical Society, we learned that the same building was home to two successive Jewish congregations early in the 20th century: first the B’Nai Israel Congregation, and later the Congregation Talmud Torah. The owners of the 4907 property during this time were named William Jewell and Gustav Forsberg.

In 1956, as white residents of the 14th St NW corridor began moving to suburbs such as Silver Spring (where restrictive covenants blocked African Americans from owning homes), the house at 4907 fell vacant, and the synagogue was sold to St. Paul AME Church. In 1960, Horace Donnelly, Jr., purchased the home. The block did not suffer as much damage from the turmoil following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., as areas of 14th St. NW to the south, but property values nevertheless remained depressed in this part of the city for decades.
The Many Faces of Gentrification

In Washington, D.C., race and class intersect to challenge the typical definition of gentrification in the neighborhoods of Barry Farms and Columbia Heights

By: Jocelyn Porter and Maggie Sullivan

The Barry Farms neighborhood in the southeast region of Washington, D.C. east of the Anacostia River is going through a major transition that could change the whole character of the community. In the center of Barry Farms is a major public housing development that has been there for years, but looking at the area today, construction sites and dirt mounds are starting to replace those homes. Many of the public housing units in Barry Farms were in bad condition physically with dangerous toxins like asbestos and lead in their foundations. Now those homes are being torn down as a result of the New Communities Initiative program, a public-private partnership that hopes "to revitalize severely distressed subsidized housing and redevelop communities plagued with concentrated poverty, high crime, and economic segregation" ("New Communities Initiative"). Although residents in Barry Farms do agree that their neighborhood needs to be fixed up and redeveloped, what they are seeing today is more like displacement.

One of the difficulties that developers in Barry Farms are facing is the lack of vacant temporary housing units to relocate residents in the community when their homes are torn down which is resulting in widespread displacement in the neighborhood (Dawes). Phyllissa Vilal has been a resident of Barry Farms for three years and says that her plan to fix the neighborhood would be to move people in sections to avoid displacement since statistics show that few people who are displaced will return (Vilal). Some of the new public units that have been built in Barry Farms, including Sheridan Station and the Matthews Memorial Baptist Church Senior Citizens Center, have served as places for displaced residents to relocate and still have affordable housing. However, the rate at which homes are being torn down does not equal that of new ones being built, leaving many residents with no
choice but to leave.

Kalfani Turé is a professor at Morgan State University and has spent many years studying the history of Barry Farms and the changes coming to the community. He had the opportunity to meet and drive around Barry Farms with Prof. Turé for several hours. He discussed the idea of mixed-income housing that the New Communities Initiative hopes to create in the redeveloped Barry Farms. Mixed-income housing would include a combination of affordable public housing units (with subsidized rents) and then other units where the residents will be paying market price. Turé said that he liked the concept, but a “mixed income community cannot work in Barry Farms [today] because of the discourse and the original stereotype of what the low-income people do to property values and the community.” In his opinion, many wealthier people already have the idea in their heads that living next to someone who makes a lower income, even if they do live in a modern home, will hurt their own property values.

Columbia Heights is a neighborhood in the northwest section of Washington, D.C. that has experienced major changes for the past few decades and is recognized as the fastest gentrifying neighborhood in the country (Wogan). A historic neighborhood, Columbia Heights was devastated by the 1968 riots following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination. Tom Dawes, Director of Business Development with the Development Corporation of Columbia Heights, described it as a “ghost town” during those years. For decades after the riots, the community struggled to deal with high rates of gangs and drug use. However, many of the residents who did stay created a plan with the assistance of the Howard University Architecture School and the Catholic University of America that was approved in 1972 to redevelop their community (Dawes). Today the community has mixed-income housing and a variety of businesses. Over the years, Columbia Heights residents have experienced displacement and have been forced to relocate in many instances due to the changes in their community, but the circumstances of their transition have been unique. Many of the homes in Columbia Heights were privately owned and in better condition than the current public housing in Barry Farms; as a result, rent prices were the primary cause of displacement instead of demolished housing. According to one Governing article about gentrification in D.C., “In most of Columbia Heights, the median rent has grown by more than 80 percent since 2000, even after inflation” (Wogan). The arrival of a Metro station and the development of Tivoli Square and shopping center DC USA (home to DC’s first Target) led to an influx of higher income residents in Columbia Heights. With this redevelopment, low-income minority residents have been pushed out because of their inability to afford to rent in the neighborhood, but the Development Corporation of Columbia Heights (DCCH) works to find a balance between bringing economic growth to the neighborhood and displacement. The corporation has worked to implement many projects such as DC USA, while still attempting to protect the homes and businesses of the original residents. This means helping both small businesses and ensuring affordable housing options.

In fact, Columbia Heights at its current stage resembles the mixed-income idea proposed by the New Communities Initiative. Giant chain stores fill the area surrounding 14th Street NW near the Metro station while small businesses reflect the multiethnic demographics of the neighborhood line the streets. According to the DCCH website, DC USA was specifically designed to include not only large retail stores, but also small businesses with 15,000 square feet set aside for Certified Business Enterprises (“Commercial Businesses”). In addition, the mix of older homes and brand new condos could be considered an attribute of a mixed-income living community. However, it is doubtful that Barry Farms seeks to model itself after Columbia Heights, and both Turé and Dawes recognize that the development of Barry Farms faces separate challenges as a result of its public housing situation.

The distinct and seemingly contrasting physical features of these neighborhoods in housing and businesses is representative of a growing trend in Washington, D.C. and around the country towards redevelopment of communities that are often inhabited by low-income minority families. Recently the term gentrification has been used to put a name on what is happening in these communities. The term “gentrification” was first applied in 1964 by Sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the displacement of the working class in London by middle and upper class individuals. However, the term as discussed in modern urban development is typically interpreted as middle to upper class whites moving in and displacing the African American lower class.

Although gentrification has seemingly been adopted to be the all-inclusive term, some developers and community members in these areas have labeled their situation in other ways. The website for the New Communities Initiative utilizes words such as redevelopment and revitalization to describe the changes the program would bring to the community, while people in the area have called the change simply displacement. As our research team has studied these various neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., we have come to the conclusion that there is more going on in these communities than simply gentrification and the process that each of those communities has gone through to get to their current circumstances are all very different.

In some respects the key question seems to be, “Is gentrification a bad thing?” Although gentrification has negative connotations to most people, Dawes stated that he has never viewed it as a bad thing. Instead, he argues that the improvements made through gentrification, especially on the business side, are beneficial. This being said, one must also work to counteract the negative side effects, as the DCCH seeks to do, by ensuring affordable housing and helping small businesses. However, Dawes notes that the trust that the DCCH has built with the residents in Columbia Heights is not replicated in the Barry Farms region. The situation in Barry Farms is unique because it consists largely of public housing. Turé argued that this fact places it on a separate level from gentrification because the capital needed to redevelop the giant blocks of subsidized homes would be on a much larger scale than individual homeowners or developers renovating older spaces, as in the case of Columbia Heights.

The displacement of low-income African Americans from the homes they have occupied for years is a serious problem, especially in Barry Farms. Those who want to take advantage of the cheap real estate before the New Communities Initiative takes shape and the price of real estate skyrockets are purchasing the oldest, non-public housing homes. Unfortunately, in Barry Farms and similar neighborhoods in Washington DC, renters receive the short end of the stick in regard to revitalization. The Rent Control Reform Amendment Act of 2006 abolished rent ceilings and replaced them with a new system designed to match rent with market value and inflation (Harrison Institute). Under this law, landlords may increase rent annually to match inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a monthly measure issued by the US Department of Labor to record the average price change of consumer goods in urban setting. This annual increase can be the CPI plus a 2-10% increase in rent. However, in the case of a “substantial rehabilitation” where the costs are more than 50% of the assessed property value, the landlord may enact a permanent increase of rent up to 125%. Additional rent control exemptions were listed as publicly owned or subsidized housing, new apartments (built after 1975), vacant housing, and apartments under a building improvement plan. Although the act
may have provisions designed to limit rent increases, the rent control exemptions open the door wide open for the lawful displacement of residents as a result of increased rent.

Although Turé described Barry Farms as a situation of displacement rather than gentrification, perhaps gentrification deserves a wider definition as the changes happening in neighborhoods such as Barry Farms and Columbia Heights draw attention to the complex relation between race and class. At first glance, it appears that the issue is literally black and white, but upon further analysis the intersectionality of race and class is integral to the discussion. In other gentrified neighborhoods in DC, such as Columbia Heights, there is a visible difference on the streets between the incoming white middle class and the minority residents who are being displaced. In contrast, in Barry Farms, Turé pointed out that black middle and upper class individuals are teaming up with the government to push for the New Communities Initiative. Turé also remarked that some of the activists fighting displacement are white. This is not to say that race does not play a role in the matter; it does. However, to accurately analyze the problem, one must recognize how race and class are intricately intertwined.

Regardless of whether one refers to the current situation in Barry Farms and Columbia Heights as revitalization, modernization, or simply displacement, after time gentrification is the final result. Thus, gentrification in D.C. manifests itself in many forms; however, the fight is easier if you recognize that you are all working toward the same outcome. As neighborhood after neighborhood experiences gentrification, change appears inevitable, but in the words of Dawes, “Do you want progress or do you want to stay the same?” Change is needed, and it is coming, so the true challenge is protecting those who are hurt along the way.

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The results of gentrification in Columbia Heights, especially in relation to business, are quite visible today. This picture is of the DC USA shopping complex that has many chain stores, a couple of DC based businesses, and the first Target in an urban neighborhood. DC USA is next to the Columbia Heights Metro Station and has multiple floors. The DC USA shopping complex symbolizes the effort of Columbia Heights developers to bring well-known businesses to the community to attract new residents and visitors, but the fact that there are also some local businesses shows that they are trying to find a balance.
14th Street NW Corridor

Photograph by Erin Bennett. The intersection of U Street NW and 14th St. NW underscores the changes that are rapidly changing D.C.'s 14th Street corridor, with new condominiums rising over older homes and buildings.
Disenfranchised Citizens: D.C. Voting Rights

By: Jacob Tipton and Hayden Skinner-Fine

“No taxation without representation! No taxation without representation!” These were the words that sparked the chain of events that led to the revolution that gave birth to the nation in which we reside today: the United States of America. However, this phrase is still being used today in the capital of the same nation that was built on the promise of no taxation without representation: Washington, D.C.

Since the disenfranchisement of voters in Washington, D.C. with the passing of the Organic Acts of 1801, the citizens of the District of Columbia have not had representation in Congress. Only recently in 1961 with the passing of the 23rd amendment have the residents of Washington, D.C. been able to participate in Presidential elections. Other than that, the citizens of Washington, D.C. have no electoral voice in national politics. This historic, predominately African-American city was unable to share in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream due to no representation when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Wade Henderson, the President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights once said:

Voting is the language of our democracy. Without it, the citizens of the District of Columbia are the silent voice in the wilderness, spectators to democracy, right in the shadow of the very governing institutions that serve as a shining beacon to the rest of the world. ((DC Vote))

This injustice is not limited to the national level of government. In Article I, Section 8, Article 17 of the Constitution it states that “The Congress shall have Power To... exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatev- er, over such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States[,]” This means that Congress ultimately controls what goes on within Washington, D.C., ranging from approval of the budget to the implementation of local laws.

In the face of this adversity, the citizens of Washington, D.C. still move forward towards autonomy. In 1973, the Home Rule Charter was passed resulting in an elected mayor and a 13-member council. This council consists of a chairman, a representative from each of the eight wards, and four at-large selections. However, the District of Columbia is still overseen by Congress and unable to approve its own budget, impose a commuter tax that could gain the city an estimated $530 million to $1.4 billion each year, and D.C.’s “autonomy” through this charter may be revoked by Congress at any time.

David A. Clarke, a former chairman of the District of Columbia Council gave his opinions on home rule:

Home Rule means doing it ourselves. Whatever we have done, good or bad, and I believe mostly good, we did ourselves and under difficult circumstances. We have done it under the glare of the federal government and a press more identified with the nation as a whole than with us as a community. (Parr-Moore)

Even though the Home Rule law has done a great deal to help the citizens of Washington, D.C., they are still not satisfied. They are still striving for: “full representation in the House of Representatives and Senate, Authority to appoint judges to District of Columbia courts, sole authority to prosecute criminal violations of the District of Columbia’s laws, establishment of a formula on future federal payments in-lieu-of-taxes will be based, authority to pass laws without congressional review, and finally statehood.” (Parr-Moore)

In 1978 Congress passed a Constitutional Amendment to give Washington, D.C. full voting representation in both the House and Senate, but the amendment died in 1985 when it was unable to reach ratification from the needed amount of states. One theory as to why Washington, D.C. has been denied statehood is the fact that 70% of its citizens are

Democrats, and Republican states do not want the District of Columbia to give the Democrats an advantage in Congress. Another thing to consider though is the fact that the populace of Washington, D.C. is primarily African-American. The time period which we are discussing was during or just after the height of the Civil Rights Movement, so the refusal of Washington, D.C.’s representation could have been some people’s way of keeping African-Americans out of power.

We live in a different world today, then we did back then, and there is a vast amount of evidence for and against why Washington, D.C. should be considered for statehood. At first glance the facts are definitely in favor of granting the District of Columbia statehood, and creating the state of New Columbia. Washington, D.C. has a population of roughly 650,000 people, compared to the state of Wyoming who has approximately 88,000 residents, and their economy is larger than that of fourteen states. Washington, D.C.’s families have lost more residents in our na-

Many Solutions for One Injustice

What about modifying the current voting rights amendment for Washington D.C.? There are four potential changes that can be made to it: A law passed in 1980 allowed Washington D.C. to elect a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. The current representative from Washington D.C is Eleanor Holmes Norton. The first suggested alteration would be to allow Washington D.C. to have representatives with full voting rights in the House of Representatives. Another proposal was granting Washington D.C. one senator will full-voting rights, if that is too much of a leap they could initially add a non-voting delegate. They could also look into implementing a bipartisan system in which they could have two senators, but each would have to be representing a different political party. Retrocession into the state of Maryland has also been a suggested idea. If this were to occur, Washington D.C. would become a city in Maryland and be able to elect their representatives that way.
tion’s wars than twenty states. Its residents pay $1.6 billion a year in federal taxes, which is more per capita than the residents of every state. In addition, Congress treats the District of Columbia as a state for the purpose of over 500 of our nation’s laws.

Those opposed to the idea of granting Washington, D.C. statehood feel it is going against the Constitution’s expressed interest in creating a Federal District under Congress’s control. They also believe that it is highly unlikely that it would pass a Congress traditionally reluctant to reduce its powers. If the District of Columbia were granted statehood, the State of New Columbia would make four sovereign jurisdictions (3 states and the federal government) within this metropolitan area. Virginia, Maryland, and Congress already face many challenges when it comes to resolving regional solutions to problems such as transit, water, sewers, and pollution.

Even though Washington, D.C.’s population is larger than several states now, it has extreme size limitations. The proposed state of New Columbia could expect in the future to be America’s smallest in several areas such as: economic resources and perhaps in population as well. These opponents of statehood also feel that Congress should have control over the place where they meet and where government is housed because they have a legitimate interest in its issues.

The current situation may be unfair to the citizens of Washington, D.C., but is it a right or good idea to give all the power in the Federal District to a limited group of people? Some argue our nation’s leaders should not have to bargain with a local government when it has legitimate needs.

What about modifying the current voting amendment for the District of Columbia? There are four potential changes that could be made to the current system. A law passed in 1980 allowed Washington, D.C. to elect a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. The current representative from the District of Columbia is Eleanor Holmes Norton. The first suggested alteration would be to allow Washington, D.C. to have representatives with full voting rights in the House of Representatives. Another proposal was granting Washington, D.C. one senator with non-voting rights, and then over time moving towards granting them a senator with full voting rights. They could also look into implementing a bipartisan system in which they could have two senators, but each would have to be representing a different political party. The main reason for the bipartisan system would be to stop a shift in power towards the Democratic Party. Retrocession into the state of Maryland has also been a suggested idea. If this were to occur, Washington, D.C., would become a city in Maryland and be able to elect their representatives that way.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his speech, during the March on Washington of 1963: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.’” Whether you believe the District of Columbia should be granted statehood or not, the real basis behind this issue is, why are the citizens of Washington, D.C. denied the freedoms that every other American is given? The residents of the District of Columbia have a dream that they will one day be granted the same rights as every other American, and finally end taxation without representation.

Works Cited


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