The Urban Alley:

A Hidden Landscape of Social Change in Washington, D.C.

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role that alleys play in urban development. Based in Washington, D.C., it examines the impacts of historical transformations to the cultural, physical, and legal status of alleys from the 1950s to the present. It contends that understanding changes to alleys in the past is essential for critically evaluating the broad impact of alley transformations today.

Chapter One focuses on the integral role that alleys played in the 1950s in urban renewal in the Southwest neighborhood, and in historic preservation in the Georgetown neighborhood. In both locations, the presence of alleys as historically racialized and classed spaces influenced federal and private investment for slum clearance, spurring processes of racial displacement. Chapter Two highlights the role of alleys in social, political, and economic reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Emergent Black leaders in Washington, D.C.—from Youth Pride, Inc., the federal War on Rats, and the 1970 sanitation strike—centered their activities in the rat- and garbage-filled spaces of alleys, thereby making their impacts felt both citywide and in the intimate domestic realm of residents. Chapter Three demonstrates how the legal status of alleys as public land sparked intense debate in the 1970s over whether residents or real estate developers could claim these spaces. In neighborhoods like the West End and Dupont Circle, preserving low-rise housing or constructing high-rise buildings depended on the ability of residents and developers to navigate municipal bureaucracy and the intricacies of land-use laws regarding alleys.

Chapter Four uses the insights from the historical chapters to make sense of present-day alley initiatives, at a time when Washington, D.C. is younger, whiter, and wealthier than it has

ever been. City government, commercial investors, and residents are turning to D.C. alleys to meet a range of goals including affordable housing, green infrastructure, and economic development. As in the past, attention to the small scale of alleys reveals who has the ability to make claims to urban space and how they are leveraging this power to make decisions about the future of city neighborhoods.

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I offer gratitude to the people whose experiences and expertise I relay in this dissertation. Many of the people who appear in the first three chapters had no way of knowing that their actions and words would be analyzed and explained by a graduate student in Wisconsin decades later. To the individuals who spoke to journalists, participated in the Southwest Remembered oral history project, or testified at City Council hearings, I thank you for trusting that your experiences would help others broaden their understandings of life in Washington, D.C. To the

individuals I interviewed in Washington, D.C. from 2016 to 2018, I thank you for your time and for sharing your knowledge of alley life, history, design, and regulation.

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Lastly, I must thank my family. My parents, Laura and Jack Summer, and my sister, Carolyn Summer, have always shown their love and have offered support of many kinds. They deserve special thanks for their role in this dissertation. They raised me to be a proud D.C. native, to celebrate the city's vibrancy and diversity, and to critically question inequality in our home town. As D.C. residents, they also provided a home base for my many research trips. Whether giving a ride to the Metro or meeting up for lunch near an archive, their emotional support was critical during what could otherwise have been lonely or stressful times. Finally, I must give special thanks to that colleague-turned-friend-turned-husband, Kramer Gillin. It was Kramer who kept me calm and kept priorities in focus throughout the many uncertainties of graduate school. It was also Kramer and our extended Madison family who made me love living in Madison and who reminded me how to enjoy this uniquely independent and flexible time of our lives. This chapter of our lives may be ending, but the next one awaits!

Introduction

In 2006, George Pelecanos, a writer for the critically acclaimed television series *The Wire*, published *DC Noir*, an edited collection of fictional short stories set in Washington, D.C.'s neighborhoods. The stories range from 1968 to the early 2000s, and they occur in each of the city's four quadrants. In traversing every geography of this segregated city, they cover the breadth of the city's residents: Black and white, wealthy and poor.[1] As one might expect in noir fiction—and from a writer for a show that revealed and sensationalized horrific violence—alleys show up as a common thread running through the stories. The hidden corridors appear as sites of murder, intimidation, and other acts of violence that aren't meant to be seen. However, read closer and alleys appear in more benign ways—as a place for family evening walks, a place for a mentally ill man to safely watch the rhythms of the street, a place for a storeowner to mark his daily ritual of closing up by tossing his trash. Crime and violence in alleys may catch the reader's attention, but the range of functions and meanings that the characters ascribe to alleys reveal the ubiquity and mundaneness of these urban forms. Alleys are central features of everyday urban life. They remain ever present as a city changes. What happens in them, and to whom, tells a great deal about how those changes occur and who is in control.

This dissertation examines the role alleys play in urban development. In it, I ask: How do actions in and debates about alleys affect large-scale processes of urban development in Washington, D.C.? This question is based on the idea that urban political economy is influenced

[1] There is debate about whether to capitalize the term "Black" when referring to the American ethnic and racial group. Most style guides prefer lowercase for both Black and white, though the *Chicago Manual of Style* leaves the decision to the author's discretion. Few choose to capitalize white; some argue that "white" does not indicate a cohesive ethnicity as "Black" might, and others argue that capitalizing white elevates a racial category that is already excessively dominant. In this dissertation I have chosen to capitalize Black and use lowercase for white. I use the terms Black and African American interchangeably throughout.

by phenomena at many scales. While urban geographers and historians often explain urban development by pointing to policies, technologies, or laws operating at the global, national, regional, or city scales, I argue that we must also zoom into the most intimate, ordinary, and small spaces. It is at the scale of common cultural landscapes—buildings, streets, or neighborhood blocks—that one can understand social relations among people in cities. These social dynamics, influenced by histories of race and class, are essential for understanding why large-scale processes—like urban renewal or political movements or gentrification—affect particular people in particular city spaces. Zooming in to the small scale of alleys at different moments in the past and present reveals *who* has had the ability to make claims to urban space and *how* they have leveraged this power to make decisions about the future of city neighborhoods.

Alleys are particularly rich sites to examine the relationship between large-scale political economy and more intimate social relations among people in cities. First, as one of the oldest forms of urban public land, alleys have long been the inspiration for and target of urban planning initiatives, even before the field of city planning was professionalized in the first decades of the twentieth century. Alleys have played a key role in policies, designs, laws, and technological innovations related to housing, transportation, sanitation, and commerce. In the United States, the history of alleys cannot be separated from histories of urban development.

Second, alleys are among the most common landscapes in American cities, running behind residential streets and commercial blocks. Their ubiquity makes them ordinary, and therefore often unremarkable. Not only are they common spaces—like streets or sidewalks—but they are hidden "back" spaces. Their location in the interior of blocks means they are out of sight of passersby. As a result, they have been places where marginalized people and activities have

traditionally made claims to city space—whether children playing, homeless individuals seeking quiet shelter, or domestic workers and garbage collectors working with the waste of others. Alleys highlights social hierarchies and inequalities in ways that other ordinary common landscapes do not.

This combination of being so ordinary as to be unremarkable, and of being sites of historically marginalized activity, means that alleys are conspicuously absent from literature in geography and in urban and planning history. Some scholars have drawn attention to the social and built environment of late nineteenth-century alleys in Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Galveston,[2] while others have examined the merits of preserving alleys as important elements of late twentieth-century urban neighborhoods.[3] However, there are no studies of the broader role alleys have played in the trajectories of urban development.

Finally, alleys have been making a comeback. In the last decade, as cities nationwide have started to experience housing crises, pressures to practice environmental sustainability, and desires to solicit commercial investment, city governments, universities, and urban land organizations have turned their attention to alleys. These urban spaces have become a catch-all to meet a range of city goals, whether affordable housing, green infrastructure, or economic development. City governments in Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Austin, Baltimore, and

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[2] James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Mary Ellen Hayward, *Baltimore's Alley Houses: Homes for Working People since the 1780s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Ellen Beasley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston: an Architectural and Social History* (Houston, Tex: Rice University Press, 1996).

[3] Larry R. Ford, "Alleys and Urban Form: Testing the Tenets of New Urbanism," *Urban Geography 22*(3) (2001): 268–286; Michael David Martin, "The case for residential back-alleys: A North American perspective" *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 17(2) (2002): 145–171; Paul M. Hess, "Fronts and Backs The Use of Streets, Yards, and Alleys in Toronto-Area New Urbanist Neighborhoods," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 28 (2008): 196–212.

Washington, D.C., and more have devoted resources to investigating the untapped potential of alleys.[4]

Recent alley revitalization programs recognize the value that alleys can have in effecting citywide political-economic development. However, I argue that these common, overlooked spaces have always played a role in city-wide changes. In this dissertation, I examine how Washington, D.C.'s historical development in the mid-twentieth century was influenced by debates over and transformations to the cultural, physical, and legal status of alleys. I contend that understanding these alley debates and transformations in the past is essential for critically evaluating alley transformations today.

I. Why Washington, D.C.?

This research is based in Washington, D.C. for several reasons. As a major metropolitan center, with downtown density at the turn of the twentieth century, followed by automobile decentralization, D.C.'s early growth is representative of other American cities. Like many other cities, Washington, D.C. underwent extreme population shifts in mid-century, with the rise of

[4] Chicago Department of Transportation, "The Chicago Green Alley Handbook: An Action Guide to Create a Greener, Environmentally Sustainable Chicago" (Chicago: Chicago Department of Transportation, 2010), https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdot/Green_Alley_Handbook_2010.pdf; Mary Fialko and Jennifer Hampton, "Activating Alleys for a Lively City: Seattle Integrated Alley Handbook" (Seattle: University of Washington Green Futures Lab, Scan Design Foundation, Gehl Architects, 2011), https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/activating_alleys_for_a_lively_city_fialko.pdf; UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation and The Trust for Public Land. "The Avalon Green Alley Network Demonstration Project: Lessons Learned from Pervious Projects for Green Alley Development in Los Angeles & Beyond" (Los Angeles: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation and The Trust for Public Land, March 2015), https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/ca-green-alley-avalon-green-alleys-demo-project.pdf; City of Austin Downtown Commission, "Activating Austin's Downtown Alleys as Public Spaces" (Austin: City of Austin Downtown Commission, 2013), https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/EGRSO/Activating_Austins_Downtown_Alleys_as_Public_Spaces.pdf; Benjamin Nathanson and Danielle Emmett, "Alley Gating & Greening Toolkit Baltimore," ed. Kate Herrod (Baltimore: Community Greens, Ashoka, 2008), https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/baltimore_alley_toolkit.pdf; District Department of Transportation, "Green Alley Projects," accessed April 20, 2019, https://ddot.dc.gov/GreenAlleys; Kim Williams, "The D.C. Historic Alleys Building Survey" (Washington D.C.: District of Columbia Office of Planning, 2014) http://www.nps.gov/shpo/downloads/D.C.-AlleySurvey2014.pdf.

postwar suburbanization, the accompanying disinvestment in urban cores, and the subsequent selective gentrification of downtown neighborhoods by the 1970s. Examining the history of alleys in D.C. neighborhoods in the middle of the twentieth century leads to conclusions that can be applied to cities across the country. Findings about alleys in D.C. are relevant nationwide.

D.C. also has an unusual history of government structure and of racial and class divides that makes it an ideal place to study the interplay between political economy, alleys, and social hierarchies. As a city with a large African American population—and majority African American from the late 1950s to the early 2010s—D.C. has a rich and complicated history of racial dynamics. The city's racial politics are directly related to its unique history as a city governed by the overwhelmingly white federal government until 1967; not until 1973 did the majority African American city win the right to elect its own representatives.[5] Even with elected officials, the city government—particularly its budget—has remained under Congressional oversight. It has thus faced unique pressures to generate investment while simultaneously providing for longtime, predominantly African American residents. No existing studies have examined how the tensions between race and governance played out in material spaces in the city like alleys.

Washington, D.C.'s alleys themselves also garner specific attention. The city's Progressive Era alley dwellings are among the best-documented of any city because of their unusual configurations in the interior of downtown city blocks, where close-knit communities lived in tight quarters.[6] The extensive primary documents concerning the city's early alleys—by

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[5] Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City; a History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994); Howard Gillette, Jr., *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

[6] Grady Clay, *Alleys: A Hidden Resource* (Louisville, Ky.: Grady Clay and Co., 1978).

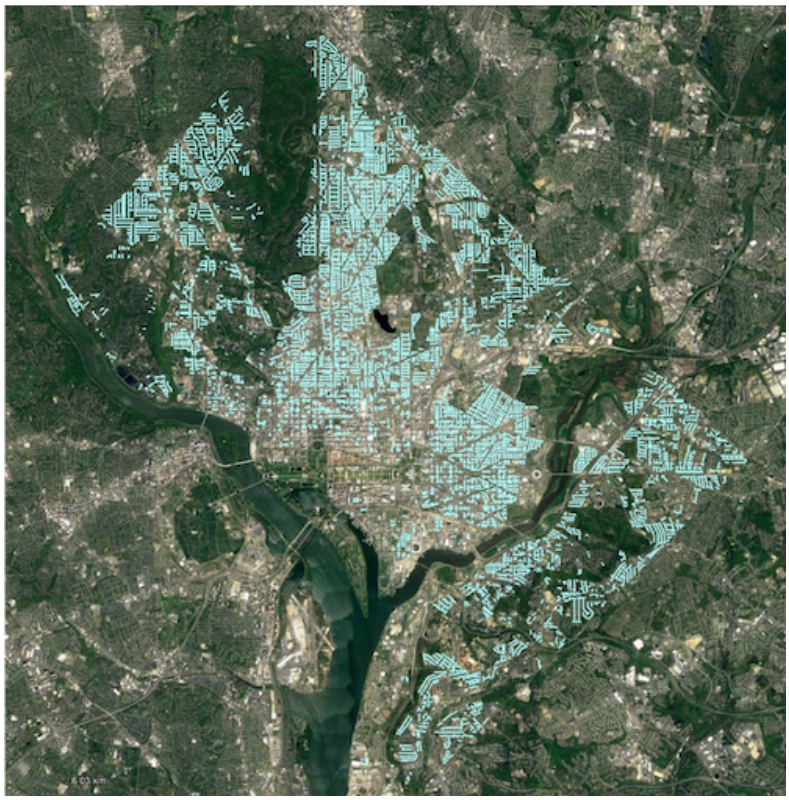

Figure 1. D.C.'s alleys (in blue) are present in all parts of Washington, D.C. 2013 data from dc.gov. Visualization by Kramer Gillin, 2019.

national reformers like Jacob Riis and the city's Alley Dwelling Authority—and influential scholarly works on these early alleys, including James Borchert's *Alley Life in Washington*, provide crucial starting points for continued research about alleys moving through the twentieth century. In the present, D.C. is also one of many cities with recent plans to revitalize its alleys. The city's Department of Transportation launched a Green Alleys Project in 2011; new zoning regulations, passed in 2016, encourage housing density in alleys; and developers are turning to alleys as sites for commercial use, encouraged in part by data from a 2014 survey of the city's historic alleys, released by the Office of Planning's Historic Preservation division.[7] With rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods that cater to a growing younger, whiter, and wealthier population, D.C. is an ideal place to critically examine these new alley initiatives.

Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington;* Bell Clement, "Wagner-Steagall and the D.C. Alley Dwelling Authority" *Journal of the American Planning Association* 78(4) (2012), 434–449; Williams, "The D.C. Historic Alleys Building Survey."

[7] District Department of Transportation, "Green Alley Projects,"; DC Office of Zoning, "Zoning Regulations of 2016 (Unofficial Version)," accessed April 22, 2019, https://dcoz.dc.gov/zrr/zr16; Williams, "The D.C. Historic Alleys Building Survey."

II. Literature Review

This dissertation bridges two broad bodies of scholarship. The first is scholarship on cultural landscapes, work that analyzes culture by closely examining the design and experience of everyday places. This body of work, from cultural geography, vernacular architecture, social history, and feminist geography emphasizes that places are experienced differently by those with different identities, whether race, gender, class, or otherwise. This scholarship tends to focus at the scale of individual experience, with an emphasis on sites such as buildings, streets, or neighborhoods.

The second broad body of work is urban political economy. This scholarship examines laws, technologies, and policies that affect the trajectory of urban development. Drawing from urban geography, environmental history, and urban history, this literature examines phenomena such as how capital moves within or among places, how infrastructure develops, or how property becomes public or private. This scholarship tends to focus at the city, regional, national, or global scale.

My goal is to merge these bodies of work, to see what a focus on small everyday landscapes brings to bear on understanding large-scale processes of urban change. In other words, I seek to reveal the power of small spaces. For example, I show how processes like gentrification or neoliberal privatization, which are often explained as political and economic phenomena operating at regional, national, and even global scales, are also influenced by cultural understandings of race and class that are rooted in very specific places.

Alleys as cultural landscapes

Geographers employ the concept of cultural landscapes to explain how landscapes are modified through human practice and ideas, and how landscapes in turn shape these human processes. For decades, many cultural geographers have argued that all landscapes, no matter how ordinary or common—whether main streets, suburban houses, or even front lawns—hold cultural meaning.[8] In the seminal edited volume, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, Donald W. Meinig explained that landscapes are "expressions of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time."[9]

Most studies of "ordinary" cultural landscapes focus on "front-facing" landscapes, meaning they are oriented to the front of a lot and are meant to be entered and experienced by the public. These places have a performative aspect to them and are designed and used with an audience in mind.[10] By contrast, the less visible and less accessible ordinary "back-facing" landscapes, oriented to the back of lots, are intimate, hidden, and designated for specific users. These "back landscapes" are less studied, but they reveal key insights about more private values and relationships because activities occur without the presence of watchful others. As common urban places, alleys are ordinary cultural landscapes, and, as spaces that are hidden behind

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[8] Donald W. Meinig, ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Pierce Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene" in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* edited by Donald W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-32; John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Paul Erling Groth and Todd W Bressi, *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Richard H. Schein, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87(4): 660–80 (1997); Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick eds. *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Chris Wilson and Paul Erling Groth eds. *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003); Richard H. Schein, "A Methodological Framework for Interpreting Ordinary Landscapes: Lexington, Kentucky's Courthouse Square" *Geographical Review* 93 (2009): 377–402.

[9] Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes,* 6.

[10] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959).

private homes or establishments, they are also back landscapes, rich sites to understand under-examined social relationships and desires for urban space.

Scholars who study back landscapes have analyzed architectural detail, the placement of buildings, and historical practices regarding labor or social life to uncover relationships that involve social hierarchy by race, class, and gender. These include relationships between slaves and masters; delivery providers and customers; or domestic workers and employers.[11] Often, one's ability to move through a landscape reinforces hierarchy, creating what Dell Upton calls "processional landscapes."[12] Processional landscapes indicate who belongs and has control in urban space.

Analyzing landscapes as racialized also helps reveal who does and does not have control over urban space. Richard Schein explains racialized landscapes as sites where "racial processes take place and racial categories get made."[13] In other words, the presence in a landscape of people with different racial identifies reinforces both cultural ideas of race and cultural ideas of particular landscapes. Alleys are prime examples of racialized landscapes. For example, in the late nineteenth century alleys in cities like Washington, D.C. became places where freed slaves could find inexpensive housing for extended families. The increasingly all-Black make-up of inhabited alleys reflected evolving, segregationist racial attitudes of the Jim Crow era.[14] Alleys thus played a role in shaping understandings of race in Washington, D.C. in the early twentieth

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[11] Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" *Places* 2(2) (1984): 59–72; John Michael Vlach, "'Without Recourse to Owners': The Architecture of Urban Slavery in the Antebellum South" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 6 (1997):150–60; Bernard L. Herman, "The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780-1820" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 7 (1997):41–57; Rebecca Ginsburg, "'Come in the Dark': Domestic Workers and Their Rooms in Apartheid-Era Johannesburg" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 8 (2000): 83–100; Richard H. Schein, "Urban Form and Racial Order" *Urban Geography* 33(7) (2012): 942–60.

[12] Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia."

[13] Richard H. Schein, ed. *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[14] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington;* Hayward, *Baltimore's Alley Houses*; Beasley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston.*

century. Black people, who lived and worked in alleys, became associated with these landscapes. The fact that their activities in these back landscapes were invisible to whites reinforced white perceptions of African Americans as untrustworthy. Because waste disposal and collection also often occurred in alleys, the presence of African Americans in alleys also contributed to white notions of African Americans as unclean members of society.[15]

Just as landscapes can be racialized, they can also be gendered or classed. Feminist scholars have demonstrated that cultural associations with gender can also be embedded in landscapes based on who moves through, feels threatened in, or feels liberated in space.[16] Of course, social hierarchies change depending on who is in a given space and hierarchical relationships can exist simultaneously along lines of race, gender, and class. Rebecca Ginsberg demonstrates this through an example from apartheid-era Johannesburg, when thousands of rural African women became domestics for suburban, white middle-class families, living in small buildings behind employers' houses. While the spatial arrangements reinforced hierarchies that disempowered the hired women in relation to their employers, who could watch them come and go, they also empowered the women by providing private spaces where women could gain control over their relationships with men from their home townships.[17] This conclusion is in line with scholarship by social historians and feminist geographers who emphasize that urban experience has never been uniform, and who embrace histories about the urban experiences of underrepresented groups such as people of color, women, and the working class.[18] Analyzing

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[15] Carl Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York: New York University Press 2016).
[16] Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx In the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Mona Domosh, and Joni Seager *Putting Women In Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
[17] Ginsburg, "'Come in the Dark': Domestic Workers and Their Rooms in Apartheid-Era Johannesburg."
[18] Damaris Rose, "Rethinking Gentrification: Beyond the Uneven Development of Marxist Urban Theory." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2(1) (1984):47–74; Wilson, *The Sphinx In the City*; Thomas J.

mobility, relationships, and responsibilities among people of different races, genders, and classes shows how alleys are racialized, gendered, and classed landscapes, implicated in the production and maintenance of social hierarchies.

Cultural landscapes are amalgamations of cultural ideas—overlapping and accumulating over time—made material in the built environment. Schein helpfully explains cultural landscapes as material nodes at which several discourses intersect.[19] Discourses about race, class, or gender, for example, intersect with physical spaces. Tracing modifications to the material and tangible aspects of landscape is how historical cultural geographers, urban historians, architectural historians, preservationists, and landscape designers are able to understand the past through the everyday built environment. As Pierce Lewis explained in his influential essay "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," following the physical expressions of landscape "through historic time and across geographical space tells us a good deal about the nature of American cultures: what it is and how it got to be the way it is."[20] By uncovering changes to site plans, additions of new materials, alterations to buildings, incorporation of new landscaping techniques, construction of walls or fences, or movement of structures, scholars can surmise how ordinary people have made meaning of and sought to transform the various functions of their built environment and their relationships to other people and elements within it.

As material manifestations of cultural ideas, landscapes also tend to normalize these ideas. For example, for much of the twentieth century, urban alleys normalized the idea that poor people and racial minorities belonged out of sight, in the unremarkable, narrow, back spaces of

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Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996); Domosh, and Seager *Putting Women In Place*; Craig E. Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wresting New Orleans From Nature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Zimring, *Clean and White*.

[19] Schein, "A Methodological Framework for Interpreting Ordinary Landscapes."

[20] Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," 18

cities. However, culture and physical spaces continually evolve together. Landscapes are not simply static representations of culture or spaces that freeze discourses in time; as groups and individuals modify the physical environment through daily practice, they also challenge cultural norms. This gives landscapes like alleys transformative potential. Like other ordinary places, alleys are spaces that make it possible for urban people to exercise what geographers call the "right to the city," or the ability to take control over urban lives.[21] Teasing apart *how* alleys become classed space or racialized space through material, tangible changes shows that these are cultural constructions that have changed and will change over time.

Alleys as material manifestations of urban political economy

The built environments of alleys have long been influenced by and have influenced urban political and economic development. From the late-nineteenth century until the present day, their histories have intersected with the evolution of housing policy; with the rise of transportation technologies; with the growth of sanitation infrastructure; with the movement of capital to and from cities; and with the privatization of public land.

Alleys have long been sites of housing. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many alleys were narrow residential spaces located in the interior of blocks, where African Americans and poor immigrants lived in densely packed and often dilapidated structures. Progressive Era reformers, from settlement house workers to Tenement Commission reporters, have left an extensive set of documents about conditions of the working-class poor who lived in alley-facing dwellings.[22] Urban and planning historians have relied on this documentation to

[21] Mitchell, *The Right to the City*; David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Brooklyn, New York: Verso, 2012).
[22] Friedrich Engels, "The Great Towns" in *The Blackwell City Reader* edited by G. Bridge and S. Watson (West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 1845 [2010]), 11-16; Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives:*

write about living conditions in this period and the socially motivated early forms of city planning that responded, including early public housing and slum clearance policy. However, only a handful of scholars have framed this history as a history of alleys.[23] This dissertation extends the history of alleys as sites of housing and targets of housing policy beyond the first half of the twentieth century. It explores the changing demographics of those who lived in alley housing and critically examines present-day motivations and emerging effects of new alley housing.

There is a well-established literature that documents changes in urban transportation technology and the related effects on urban expansion and land-use specialization. Scholars have noted periods of transition from the mid to late-nineteenth-century city dominated by walking and horse-drawn carriages, to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century streetcar era, to the automobile era that emerged in the early to mid-twentieth century and continues to today.[24] Along with changes to the mode of transport, scholars have documented the related material changes to the built environment of cities in terms of street paving and construction of service buildings like garages or auto repair shops.[25] Few of these studies focus specifically on alleys,

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Studies among the Tenements of New York (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1892); Janet Kemp, *Report of the Tenement House Commission of Louisville* (Louisville, KY: Tenement House Commission of Louisville, 1909).

[23] Borchert, Alley Life in Washington; Godfrey Frankel, *In the Alleys: Kids in the Shadow of the Capitol* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Beasley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston*; Hayward, *Baltimore's Alley Houses*; Clement, "Wagner-Steagall and the D.C. Alley Dwelling Authority"; Anne E. Mosher and Deryck W. Holdsworth, "The Meaning of Alley Housing in Industrial Towns: Examples from Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Pennsylvania" *Journal of Historical Geography*, 18(2) (1992): 174–189.

[24] Sam Bass Warner. Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Sam Bass Warner. Jr., *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (University of California Press., 1972); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Peter O. Muller, "Transportation and Urban Form: Stages in the Spatial Evolution of the American Metropolis" in *The Geography of Urban Transportation,* edited by S. Hanson and G. Giuliano. New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 59-85; Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

[25] Clay McShane, "Transforming the Use of Urban Space: A Look at the Revolution in Street Pavements, 1880-1914" *Journal of Urban History* 5 (3) (1979.), 279-307; Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 103-111; Leslie Goat, "Housing the Horseless Carriage: America's Early Private Garages" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 3 (1989): 62-72.

but the broader shifts in transportation provide the context for understanding why, for example, alleys in older neighborhoods are lined with dwellings or horse stables, while those in newer neighborhoods are often lined with garages. It also helps explain modifications to downtown alley buildings, as dwellings were converted to garages or repair shops in the first half of the twentieth century.[26] The history of urban transportation is necessary to track the built form of alleys—their width, their materials, and the structures that align them—and therefore is also necessary for understanding non-transportation-related activities and debates that have occurred in and about alleys.

This study also engages the history of urban sanitation. Martin Melosi's *Sanitary City* is the most comprehensive history of sanitation infrastructure in American cities, focusing on water supply, wastewater, and solid-waste disposal systems from colonial times to 2000.[27] Melosi concentrates mostly on the technologies, laws, and federal funds that helped these systems develop, and he pays little attention to smaller-scale implementation at the residential or street level. Others who have examined the expansion of cities and sanitation infrastructure have also taken this larger-scale technical and political-economic approach, focusing particularly on the role of real estate and speculative developers, and revealing little about how these systems affected the spaces of urban residents' daily lives.[28] Those scholars who have paid closer attention to the smaller scale of urban garbage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have pointed to back lots and alleys as sites of sewerage and solid waste disposal or burning.[29]

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[26] Jonathan Sager, "Washington on the Move: The Architecture of Transportation in the Capital Region," talk at the Maryland Historical Trust. March 7, 2009.
[27] Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
[28] John M. Levy, *Contemporary Urban Planning* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003); Anne E. Krulikowski, "'A Workingman's Paradise': The Evolution of an Unplanned Suburban Landscape" *Winterthur Portfolio* 42(4) (2008): 243–85.
[29] Donald A. Krueckeberg, *Introduction to Planning History in the United States* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1983); Ford, "Alleys and Urban Form: Testing the Tenets of New Urbanism"; Ted

However, there is less historical scholarship about alleys as sites of formal waste collection and removal, especially after the Progressive Era. Meanwhile, a separate thread of urban and labor scholarship has focused on the experiences of sanitation workers, particularly of African American men who staged a series of strikes in the 1960s and 1970s to demand reforms against racial discrimination.[30] This dissertation puts the history of sanitation infrastructure, labor, and reform into the small-scale, material landscapes of urban alleys.

Since the 1980s, a decade of federal disinvestment in cities, scholars have identified an urban restructuring phase of neoliberalism, with an ever-increasing reliance on public-private partnerships and governance to fund and facilitate urban development projects.[31] Scholars of urban planning have also noted that through the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, planning practice has become increasingly conflated with zoning and land use control, and it is increasingly aligned with interests of private developers.[32] Many of these privately funded projects involve revitalization, or gentrification, of older urban areas. This is made possible by decades of devalorization of capital in the inner city—from white flight abandonment and decreasing investment in repairs and upkeep—now leading to the opportunity for revalorization and profit-making. Scholars note that these political-economic processes result in sharpening inequalities and retrenchment along lines of privilege, what Neil Smith called the "revanchist

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Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Zimring, *Clean and White*.

[30] Robin Nagle, *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: the Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007); Zimring, *Clean and White*.

[31] Gordon MacLeod, "From Urban Entrepreneurialism to a 'Revanchist City'? On the Spatial Injustices of Glasgow's Renaissance" *Antipode* 34(3) (2002): 602–24; Setha M. Low and Neil Smith eds., *The Politics of Public Space* (New York: Routledge 2006).

[32] Michael P. Brooks, "Four Critical Junctures in the History of the Urban Planning Profession: An Exercise in Hindsight" *Journal of the American Planning Association* 54(2) (1988): 241-248; Levy, *Contemporary Urban Planning*; Jon A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: an Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1988).

city," as higher-income individuals displace lower-income—and often nonwhite—residents and establishments.[33] This retrenchment further contributes to uneven development, creating highly divided spaces of concentrated wealth and poverty within cities, what Peter Marcuse refers to as separate residential cities within a city.[34]

Critical geographers have also noted with distress the trend in the neoliberal era toward an increase in privately owned or controlled urban public space. They argue that the legal control of land by private interests—whether it is private space open to the public, or public (state-owned) space managed by private corporations—constitutes the "end of public space."[35] They claim that allowing private interests to control access and behavior within public spaces like parks or plazas—or alleys—can have dire social effects regarding the constitution of publics, unequal relations of power, and democratic participation in urban life.[36]

Geographers have examined how neoliberal effects of divisions of wealth, privatization, and heightened security affect different spaces of the city, whether public parks, historic sites, or fortified residential enclaves and gated communities.[37] This dissertation examines how these processes of neoliberal privatization have played out in Washington, D.C.'s alleys over the last

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[33] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[34] Peter Marcuse, "Cities in Quarters" in *Readings In Urban Theory,* edited by Susan S. Fainstein and Scott Campbell (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2011), 167-179.
[35] Peter G. Goheen, "Public Space and the Geography of the Modern City" *Progress in Human Geography* 22(4) (1998): 479–96; Teresa P.R. Caldeira, "Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation" in *Theorizing the City: the New Urban Anthropology Reader* edited by Setha Low (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 83-110. Low and Smith, *The Politics of Public Space;* Elizabeth Blackmar, "Appropriating 'the Commons': The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse" in Low and Smith, *The Politics of Public Space*, 49-80; Cindi Katz, "Power, Space, and Terror: Social Reproduction and the Public Environment" in Low and Smith, *The Politics of Public Space*, 105-122; Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell, *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Gregory D. Squires, "Partnership and the Pursuit of the Private City." in Fainstein and Campbell, Readings in Urban Theory, 207-228; Kevin Loughran, "Parks for Profit: The High Line, Growth Machines, and the Uneven Development of Urban Public Spaces" *City & Community* 13(1) (2014): 49–68.
[36] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 1995); Tim Cresswell, *In Place/out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
[37] Caldeira, "Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation"; Setha Low, "How Private Interests Take Over Public Space: Zoning, Taxes, and Incorporation of Gated Communities," in Low and Smith, *The Politics of Public Space*, 81-104; Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Loughran, "Parks for Profit."

few decades. I argue that what has recently happened in the city's alleys not only reflects the trend of neoliberal private investment; the unique histories and cultural imaginaries of alleys help direct where that investment goes and who benefits or suffers from it.

III. Methods

I conducted this research between the summer of 2016 and the summer of 2018. I was based in Madison, Wisconsin, but took ten research trips to Washington, D.C. throughout this period to conduct research at archival institutions, walk through and photographically document alleys, and conduct interviews. Each of these research trips lasted a few days to a week.

In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I examine the role of alleys in Washington, D.C.'s historical development from the 1950s through the 1970s—a period of major transitions in the city's racial demographics, its governance structure, and its cycles of disinvestment and investment. These three historical chapters draw primarily from archival research at the following institutions located in Washington, D.C.: the D.C. Public Library Special Collections; the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; the Special Collections Research Center of the George Washington University Libraries; the District of Columbia Office of Public Records; and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. The excellent collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society, in Madison, Wisconsin, also includes primary documents related to Washington, D.C. across the twentieth century.

The documents in each of these archival collections offered insights from historical actors with different perspectives, based on their different positions in relation to power. To understand the broad outlines of historical events, while acknowledging the biases of media coverage and of different publications, I turned to the D.C. Public Library whose research centers—the

Washingtoniana Room at the Martin Luther King, Jr. main branch and the Peabody Room at the Georgetown branch—provide thematic newspaper clippings from several Washington D.C.-based publications. The D.C. Public Library's online access to the historical database of the *Washington Post* was also a great help when I was in Madison, Wisconsin. To understand the missions, operations, and impacts of municipal and federal agencies charged with managing the many aspects of the city's built environment, I found the collections at the District of Columbia Office of Public Records, the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and the reference stacks at the Washingtoniana Room particularly helpful. To trace changes to the built environment over time, I relied on visual materials including maps and photographs, which I found mostly at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Institutional archives often privilege the perspectives of formal organizations and individuals in positions of power. Even when voices of more marginalized groups are represented—for example in media interviews—their perspectives are still mediated by the author of an article or the curator of an archival collection. Keeping these limitations in mind, I sought the voices of ordinary Washingtonians and found especially helpful the oral history collections in the D.C. Public Library Special Collections and transcripts from City Council public hearings in the Special Collections Research Center of the George Washington University Libraries.

In Chapter Four, I bring the historical case studies from the first three chapters to bear on understanding alley revitalization projects in the present. My understanding of present-day initiatives is based on twelve semi-structured interviews (each with one to two people) and on site visits of neighborhood alleys. The individuals I interviewed all had professional connections

to present-day alley design, management, or development. Some of the individuals also lived and worked in alleys or had property that abutted alleys, and therefore had personal connections. They included real estate developers; urban planners at the D.C. Office of Planning and D.C. Department of Transportation; elected neighborhood representatives; and architects. I used the "snowball" method to find participants, as my initial contacts introduced me to others or recommended others to interview. I conducted the interviews in Washington, D.C. between March 2017 and May 2018. Each lasted one to two hours, and they were recorded and transcribed for analysis, with the interviewees' consent.

I visited and photographed many of the alleys that appear in this dissertation more than once over the two years of research. I often walked through and photographed them as I was doing other things nearby. This allowed me to observe and document changing aesthetics and activities in the alleys at different times of day and different times of year. For example, Blagden Alley and Naylor Court—alleys discussed in Chapter Four—were often part of my research trips, even when observation and documentation was not my main purpose in visiting the alleys. The D.C. Office of Public Records is located in Naylor Court and so I photographed the alley and ate at the sandwich shop in the alley during my lunch breaks. Of my twelve interviews, five took place in Blagden Alley or Naylor Court, either at one of the coffee shops or at the workplace of the interviewee. In addition, on more than one occasion I met family members and friends at the restaurants inside and just outside Blagden Alley. The time I spent in D.C. alleys, even when not "doing research," contributed to my understanding of the functions and cultural meanings of alleys in Washington, D.C. today.

IV. Chapter outline

Chapter One sets the foundation for understanding alleys as racialized and classed cultural landscapes. It explains how by the late 1940s, downtown inhabited alleys (those with houses lining them) were firmly rooted in the minds of both white and Black Washingtonians as urban spaces associated with poor African Americans. This widespread association of inhabited alleys as poor and Black was decades-old, dating to a post-Civil War housing shortage. In the 1950s, however, a series of developments happening nationwide—middle-class suburban white flight, postwar growth of the federal government, urban renewal, historic preservation—transformed these cultural landscapes. Alleys remained racialized and classed space, but as small-scale developers renovated alley houses, many inhabited alleys in downtown Washington, D.C. ceased to be "slums" occupied by poor Black people and instead became exclusive enclaves for professional whites. The racial and class transformation of alleys didn't just reflect political-economic trends at a larger scale; I argue that the built forms and existing cultural landscapes of the alleys themselves influenced where and how national processes took place in Washington, D.C.

Chapter Two shifts focus away from downtown inhabited alleys toward the alleys that run through the blocks of nearly every neighborhood in Washington, D.C.: the back alleys where Washingtonians dump their garbage and expect that it is to be collected. This chapter, set in the late 1960s and early 1970s, builds on the idea of alleys as cultural landscapes. In this period, alleys were also largely considered spaces of the city's lower-income African American residents. Unlike in the inhabited alleys from Chapter One, this cultural connotation was not based in a century-long housing history, but rather was a result of recent postwar movement of capital. In fact, it was the same political-economic developments that had encouraged the

creation of exclusive white enclaves in Chapter One—racially restrictive covenants, middle-class suburban white flight, urban renewal—that also led to neglect and disinvestment in the majority of the city's African American neighborhoods, where most alleys were located. This chapter examines how the city's African American residents took advantage of the cultural landscapes of alleys to advocate for social, economic, environmental, and political change. Understanding that cultural landscapes are inseparable from physical landscapes, young Black men, in particular, strategically adopted the mainstream idea that the culture of poor African Americans was connected to neglected, garbage- and rat-filled alleys. In claiming this cultural landscape, they were also able to claim the physical landscape. With control over physical space in the city they could then launch platforms to demand anti-racist policies and economic changes, ultimately linking up with city and national Civil Rights agendas.

Chapter Three, set in the 1970s, is in some ways similar to the cases from Chapters One and Two. As in Chapter One, real estate developers sought to acquire alley property in downtown neighborhoods to change the cultural landscape of the city's alleys, from poor Black neighborhoods to professional white enclaves. As in Chapter Two, majority African American residents sought to claim the cultural landscape of alleys as their own, in order to maintain control of their physical environment—in this case in order to resist gentrification and displacement. What sets Chapter Three apart is the role of municipal land-use law. As city planning nationwide became increasingly controlled by private interests and regulated through zoning and land-use law, residents confronted unanticipated challenges to their resistance tactics. Claiming the cultural landscape of alleys—and by extension of urban neighborhoods—was not enough to block gentrification. In the 1970s, resistance also required legal arguments and savvy navigation of municipal bureaucracy, a task for which local residents were unprepared. This

chapter introduces land-use law as an essential element of cultural landscapes. Just as race and class are discourses that run through and intersect in material landscapes, so does the law. Understanding how land-use law is embedded in urban spaces is essential for initiating and resisting changes to the physical, cultural landscapes of cities.

Chapter Four uses the insights from the historical chapters to make sense of present-day alley transformation projects in Washington, D.C., a city that is now whiter, wealthier, and younger than it has ever been. I examine three projects in particular: the D.C. Department of Transportation's Green Alleys program; the 2016 zoning legislation to permit housing on alley lots in downtown residential neighborhoods; and the emergence of commercial use in alleys, as part of a trend to "activate" overlooked urban public spaces. In this final chapter I critically evaluate these present-day initiatives, drawing from the historical chapters' conclusions about how cultural landscapes are transformed, how the physical spaces of alleys can help bring about citywide change, and how land-use law can facilitate or obstruct efforts to control urban space. Just as in the past, decisions about alleys in the present have larger implications for who belongs and has the power to shape the future of urban neighborhoods.

Chapter One. From Black Alleys to White Neighborhoods: The Removal of Alley Dwellings in the 1950s

On May 14, 1955, the residents of Cherry Hill Lane had a party. They danced in the street under colorful Japanese paper lanterns, sampled a punch buffet, and mingled among 150 neighbors and friends. The gathering was not simply a spring festivity; it was a celebration of the escape of Cherry Hill Lane's tiny row houses from the wrecking ball.[38] Cherry Hill Lane was located in Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown neighborhood, a historic former shipping port along the Potomac River, home to middle-income Blacks and whites. In recent years, however, Georgetown's quiet cobblestone streets and eighteenth-century brick homes were making the area increasingly desirable to higher-income whites. Within the previous five years, young white professionals had purchased and remodeled twenty homes on Cherry Hill Lane. Yet the city's governing body, the presidentially appointed, three-member Board of Commissioners, had slated the Cherry Hill Lane row houses for condemnation for one simple reason: Cherry Hill Lane was less than thirty feet wide and therefore not a street; it was an alley. [39]

According to the Alley Dwelling Act, a law written in 1934, all alley-facing dwellings in Washington, D.C. were to be vacated by July 1, 1955. When the law was written, the small row houses lining alleys were generally overcrowded, and they lacked adequate waste disposal, clean water, and maintenance. Housing reformers, social workers, public health officials, and police

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[38] "New Look, Paving Spur Alley Dance," *Washington Post*, May 15, 1955.

[39] The Board of Commissioners was a body of three President-appointed officials empowered to make decisions on the city's behalf and report annually to Congress. One of the three commissioners was always an officer from the Army Corps of Engineers. The Board was first put in place temporarily in 1874 when Congress voted to end the territorial government in the District of Columbia. This loss of an elected government was largely recognized as a step to disenfranchise D.C.'s many Black voters. The Board became permanent with the Organic Act of 1878. The Board of Commissioners remained in place for one hundred years, until the D.C. Home Rule Act, signed into law in December 1973, granted D.C. residents the right to vote and elect their own representatives again. See Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 165-166; 379.

also understood alleys to be criminal spaces, infused with a vague sense of immorality. More than other factors, such as the lack of municipal infrastructure or maintenance neglect by landlords, they believed it was the built environment of residential alleys—maze-like narrow streets, hidden from public view—that encouraged and exacerbated immorality and crime. Those who passed the Alley Dwelling Act in 1934 believed that removing this built environment could rid the city of slum conditions and would be "in the interest of public health, comfort, *morals*, *safety*, and welfare."[40]

Crucially, reformers also believed that removing alleys would remove the people drawn to live in them: people with immoral and criminal tendencies. Unsurprisingly, in the Jim Crow era, the people forced to live in cheap substandard housing in alleys—those people with supposedly immoral and criminal tendencies—were overwhelmingly poor and overwhelmingly African American. If, as policy-makers agreed, clearing the built environment of dwellings was the way to rid the city of slums and crime, it would mean displacing the poor Black people associated with these conditions. On paper, the unredeemable built environment was the driver of this residential displacement; the fact that those displaced would overwhelmingly be poor Black families was simply an unfortunately consequence. It was for these reasons that the houses of Cherry Hill Lane, and all residential alleys like it, were slated for future removal under the 1934 Alley Dwelling Act.

By the late 1940s, however, with the 1955 enforcement of the Alley Dwelling Act still years away, Washington, D.C. was changing. Young professionals, nearly all whom were white, were moving to the city to work for the growing federal government, and these new Washingtonians wanted places to live near their workplaces. These newcomers were also

[40] District of Columbia Alley Dwelling Act of 1934, Pub.L.No. 73-307,48 Stat. 930 (1934), emphasis added.

moving to a segregated city with a dwindling white population. Middle-class whites were moving to growing suburbs in droves, while decades of the Great Migration from the South also meant a growing African American population; by the end of the 1950s, Washington, D.C. would be the first major city in the United States to have a majority African American population.[41]

It was in this context of a city segregated by race and class that developers, both large and small, set out to make downtown neighborhoods—those with alley dwelling communities—desirable to upper-income white newcomers. Yet the cultural landscape of alleys posed a problem. The historical cultural production of alleys as a classed and racialized space—poor and Black—was so powerful in mid-century Washington, D.C. that developers could only be successful in transforming downtown neighborhoods by ridding them of alleys altogether. Still years off from the Alley Dwelling Act's deadline, they pursued other means of removal: physically via federal funds for urban renewal, and symbolically through private investment in early historic preservation.

Mid-century urban renewal and historic preservation are often seen in opposition to each other: one process was publicly funded and the other privately, one worked at the neighborhood scale and the other at the building scale, and one carelessly demolished houses while the other carefully preserved them. But in Washington, D.C., these processes both became tools of displacement, and they converged in simultaneous efforts to remove inhabited alleys, a classed and racialized space in the first half of the twentieth century. In both processes, removing

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[41] Eunice Grier, *People and Government: Changing Needs in the District of Columbia 1950-1970* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, 1973), 10. Many sources cite 1957 as the year Washington, D.C. achieved an African American majority. See, for example, Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 154. Blaire Ruble cites 1956 in Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince, eds., *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, D.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 333. Charleston, NC also became majority African American in the 1950s, though most do not count it among the "major" cities at the time.

residential alleys was an essential step in the overarching goal of facilitating the transition of downtown neighborhoods to enclaves for white professionals.

Examining how these processes of alley removal unfolded demonstrates how larger processes of racial and class transformation took place in downtown Washington, D.C. during the 1950s. In the neighborhood called Southwest, large-scale developers and municipal agencies used federal urban renewal funds to raze alley dwellings, which were located in a larger area designated as blight. These Southwest alleys became the first victims of federally funded slum clearance in Washington, DC. From the alley, urban renewal spread and resulted in the demolition of much of Southwest's building stock and the displacement of thousands of the neighborhood's African American residents. Federally backed private developers built high-rise apartment buildings where the alley dwellings once stood.

In neighborhoods like Georgetown, on the other hand, small-scale private developers set out to rehabilitate individual alley dwellings. In the early 1950s, they bought dilapidated housing stock, evicted poor African American tenants, rehabilitated homes according to emerging historic preservation standards, and sold the homes to newcomers with high-paying jobs in the federal government. New white alley residents, like those on Cherry Hill Lane, worked to symbolically disassociate themselves from the poor Black tenants who came before them. They argued before the Board of Commissioners that even though the narrow streets remained, they had cleared former alley slums through personal efforts and dollars. They had transformed the infamous alley dwellings into desirable town homes. They had even renamed their streets, removing the unsavory term "alley," and calling them "courts." In May 1955, just before the citywide ban on alley dwellings went into effect, they successfully petitioned to have it repealed.

They were able to keep and celebrate their rehabilitated homes, and their small communities of new neighbors remained intact.

This chapter examines how the cultural landscape of Washington, D.C.'s house-lined alleys transformed in the 1950s. The inhabited alleys that survived the decade remained racialized and classed cultural landscapes, but in many of them, the people and practices that those categories indicated shifted dramatically. In 1929, the African American sociologist and former Howard University professor William H. Jones had written, "So closely have the terms *Alleys* and *Negros* been associated, that in the minds of the older citizens they are inseparable."[42] By 1960, Jones would not have recognized many of the city's alleys. In neighborhoods like Southwest and Georgetown, African Americans had been kicked out or priced out of the inhabited alleys. Those that remained were no longer Black and poor, but were white and wealthy.

I. "A Menace to Good Health and Government": Alleys as African American Slums

Washington, D.C. had had a unique configuration of alley housing since before the Civil War. As the city's population increased by fifty percent in the 1850s, alleys were cut through large blocks to provide access to more residential space. Unlike alleys in other cities that bisected city blocks to provide access to the back of house lots, many alleys in downtown Washington, D.C. formed I or H shapes on the interior of blocks. These courtyard-like alleys were accessible only by narrow outlets to main streets, and they were called "hidden" or "blind" because the activities inside could not be seen from front streets.[43] Frame dwellings or brick row houses

[42] William H. Jones, *The Housing of Negroes in Washington, D.C.: A Study in Human Ecology* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1929), 31, emphasis original.
[43] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*, 17-18.

faced the interior space of the alley. Alley residents were socially removed from life on front streets.

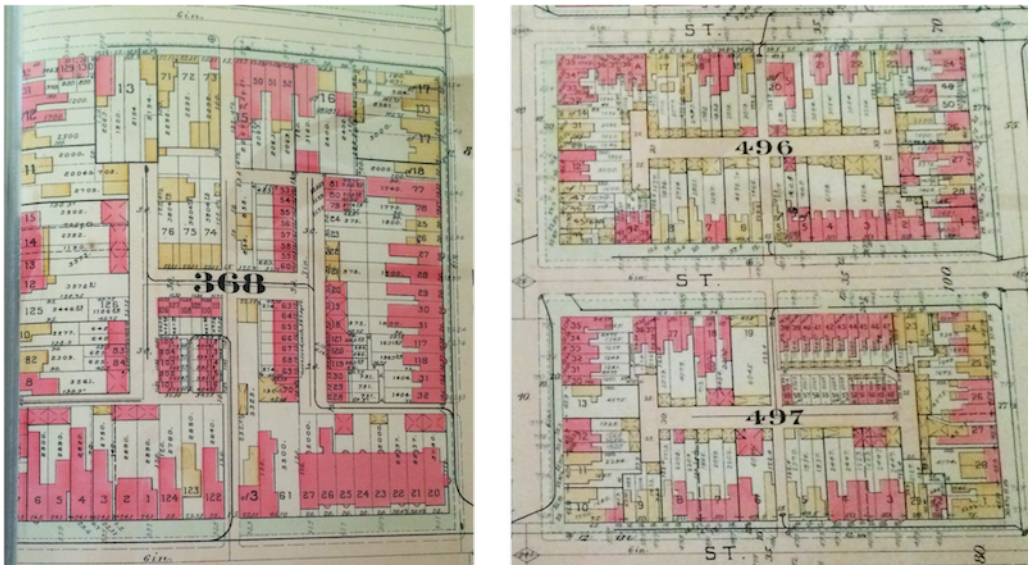

Figure 2. H-shape and I-shape alleys. G.W. Baist, *Baist's real estate atlas of surveys of Washington, District of Columbia*, 1903.

In addition, alley residents were legally separated from front street residents. While in some Southern cities like Galveston, Texas, slaves or servants lived along alleys in housing that was oriented to the front house, in Washington, D.C. alley homes were oriented to the back alley.[44] In fact, the homes that faced the alleys were on separate lots from homes facing front streets. This legal separation of property was often reinforced by other narrow alleys or by fences between alley-facing lots and street-facing lots.[45]

Whereas residential alleys in cities like Baltimore or Galveston were racially mixed in the nineteenth century, alleys in Washington were nearly always segregated by race.[46] In 1858, there were actually more white alley dwellers than Black; twenty-one of forty-nine alleys were all-

[44] Beasley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston*; United States Congress, District of Columbia Alley Dwelling Act of 1934, Pub.L.No. 73-307,48 Stat. 930 (1934).
[45] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*, 25.
[46] Hayward, *Baltimore's Alley Houses*; Beasley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston.*

white, while seventeen alleys were all-Black, and only nine were substantially mixed.[47] During and following the Civil War, the city faced a severe housing shortage as the city's population increased seventy-five percent between 1860 and 1870, from 72,000 to 132,000. Growth of the African American population was particularly profound as freed people flooded the city after Emancipation; in the same period, it more than tripled from 14,000 to 43,000.[48] In a pedestrian city without mass transportation, these migrants were forced to live close to downtown. As historian James Borchert has detailed, many individuals and families found shelter in makeshift housing located on the blind alleys, which became increasingly overcrowded. The lack of adequate sewerage systems, clean water, and waste disposal also caused high rates of disease and death.

The overcrowding was not just due to an increase in population; it was also due to a need to share the burden of rent. Absentee owners of alley properties recognized the high demand for shelter and charged higher rents in alleys. By 1870, it was well known that alley property paid a higher rate of interest than money invested on front streets.[49] High rents in turn led to more overcrowding as families were forced to double up or take in boarders in order to pay rent. In the 1880s, a typical alley dwelling housed two families, each headed by a father between 18 and 30 years old working as a laborer, a mother working as a servant or washerwoman, and two to three small children.[50] Alleys continued to be carved out of larger blocks through the 1880s to meet demand for living space.

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[47] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*, 26.
[48] Katherine Masur, *Reconstructing the Nation's Capital: The Politics of Race and Citizenship in the District of Columbia, 1862-1878* (Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2001), 11.
[49] Jones, *The Housing of Negroes*, 34.
[50] James Borchert, "Alley Life in Washington: An Analysis of 600 Photographs." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 49 (1973): 251.

Figures 3-4. African American alley residents in the 1940s. Top image: Edwin Rosskam, "Negro family and their home in one of the alley dwelling sections. Washington, D.C.," 1941. Bottom image: Edwin Rosskam, "Negro family in front of their alley dwelling. The older woman is a cleaning woman in the U.S. government. Washington, D.C.," 1941. Images courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

By 1897, approximately ninety percent of alley dwellers were African American.[51] One study from that year found that in thirteen downtown alleys, all but one of the 248 alley residents were "negroes or mulattoes."[52] Borchert argues extensively that through the first decades of the twentieth century, despite the real threats of disease and poverty, African American alley residents in Washington, D.C. valued their alley communities. Many residents were newly adjusting to urban life from being enslaved on Southern plantations, and they created close-knit, alley-based communities rooted in extended kinship networks and communal aid. They treated the alley itself as communal property where children could play, adults could socialize and exchange goods, and neighbors could warn one another about outsiders—particularly white outsiders like police or social reformers—entering the alley.

[51] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*, 42.; Charles F. Weller, *Neglected Neighbors: Stories of Life in the Alleys, Tenements and Shanties of the National Capital* (Philadelphia: J. C. Winston, 1909), 38; Paul A. Groves, "The 'Hidden' Population: Washington Alley Dwellers in the Late Nineteenth Century." *The Professional Geographer* 26(3) (1975): 270-276.

[52] Clare de Graffenried, *Typical Alley Houses in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: The Woman's Anthropological Society, 1897).

As Borchert notes, "On the outside of the alley was a white world that was threatening at best and destructive at worst. … The lifestyle [in the alley] was not one of disorganization but of organization and community, constructed for survival in a hostile world and based on sharing and mutual help."[53]

Borchert demonstrates that alleys also had exceptionally high retention rates given high population turnover in other cities at the time, and especially because alley dwellers did not own their own homes.[54] Residents who lived in the city's alleys in the early 1940s remembered alley life similar to that in the early twentieth century. One recalled, "That's the way we lived down there, with extended families. It was pretty hard to go hungry, because everyone would feed you, take anybody's child and feed them."[55] For those living in alleys, they were places of African American identity and belonging, where necessity reinforced strong communities. In alleys, African Americans made claims to the city.

Public health and housing reformers, on the other hand, were appalled by living conditions in alleys. Between 1897 and 1922, public health advocates, sociologists, housing reformers, and representatives from charitable organizations published studies reporting on the high rates of disease, death, poverty, and crime in alley dwelling communities.[56] Building on each other's work and enlisting support from famous reformers, such as Jacob Riis, their goals

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[53] Borchert, "Alley Life in Washington," 259.
[54] Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*; Borchert, "Alley Life in Washington."
[55] Frankel, *In the Alleys,* 58.
[56] Clare de Graffenried, *Typical Alley Houses in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: The Woman's Anthropological Society, 1897); George M. Kober, MD, *Report on the Housing of the Laboring Classes in the City of Washington* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900); Weller, *Neglected Neighbors*; W.C. Dodge, "The Alley Slums: How to Abolish Them and By Whom it Should Be Done," 1911, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; Grace Vawter Bicknell, *The Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.* (Committee on Housing Woman's Welfare Department National Civic Federation, 1912); Jesse Jones, *Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.* (Washington: Monday Evening Club, 1912); E.W. Oyster, "Discontinuance of Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia." Statement of Mr. E. W. Oyster Before the Committee on the District of Columbia United States Senate. Sixty-Seventh Congress, Second Session on S. 2675. February 24, 1922, 7, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C. See also Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 109-120.

were to garner public support for opening the alleys to front streets and clearing them of dwellings. In 1912, by one estimate, there were 275 blocks in the city with inhabited alleys.

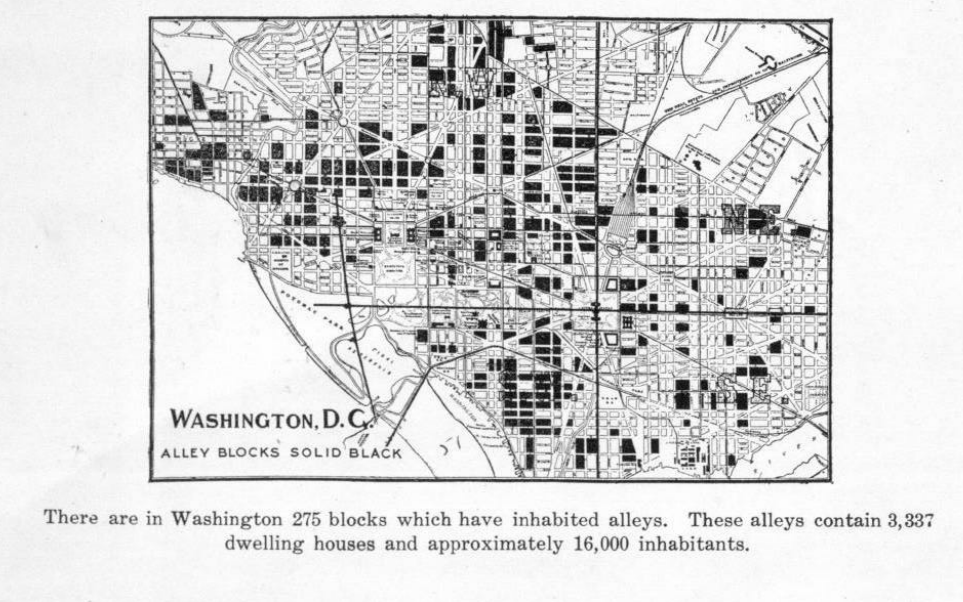

Figure 5. Map of inhabited alleys in 1912. From Jesse Jones, *Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.*, 1912, 5.

These alleys housed 16,000 people in 3,337 dwellings.[57] Though reformers treated alley dwellers paternalistically, they believed that clearing alleys would improve sanitary conditions and reduce crime, which in turn would provide care for D.C.'s poorest residents.

Public health was a growing field in cities across the country, and in Washington, D.C. public health dominated concerns about alleys. Few dwellings had indoor plumbing or heat, and multiple households shared outdoor water pumps and outhouses. In 1912, for example, Jesse Jones, the chairman of the housing committee for the Monday Evening Club, published a report titled, "Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C." In this publication, he cited the 1910 report of the Health Officer for the District of Columbia, who noted that alley death rates far exceeded street death rates. For infants under one, the mortality rate in alleys was over one third, whereas the rate was closer to fifteen percent for infants on front streets. As on front

[57] Jones, *Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.*, 5.

streets, the leading cause of death was pneumonia, followed by tuberculosis, diarrhea, and whooping cough.[58] While reformers wanted to improve conditions for alley residents, a main concern was how health in alleys would affect better-off residents in other parts of the city. Jones and others believed that diseases like tuberculosis originated in alleys and then moved to infect front streets. Testifying before the Senate's Committee on the District of Columbia in 1922, in a hearing titled "Discontinuance of Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia," Mr. E. W.

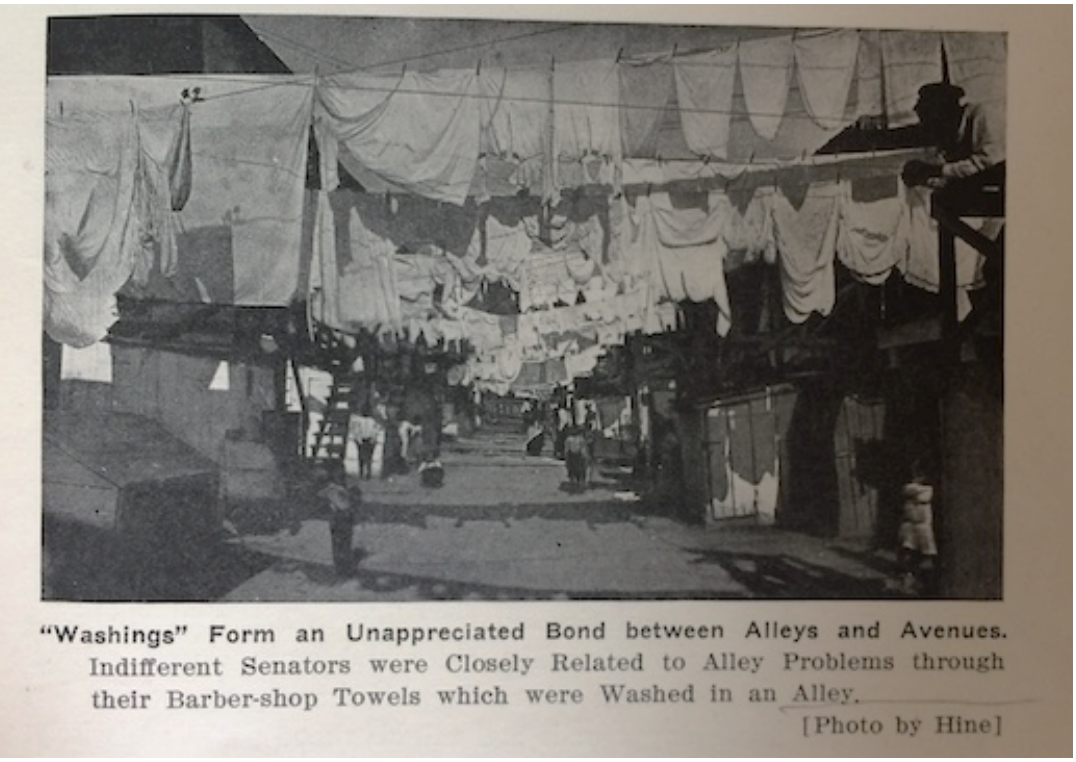

Figure 6. Laundry hanging in an inhabited alley. Image and caption from Charles Weller, *Neglected Neighbors*, 1909.

Oyster explained the common understanding that tuberculosis spread from alleys to front streets on freshly laundered clothes that alley-based washerwomen cleaned for front street employers.[59]

[58] Ibid., 11.
[59] Oyster, "Discontinuance of Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia," 7. The belief that tuberculosis spread from alleys to the rest of the city continued into the 1930s. See Sandra R. Heard, "Making Slums and Suburbia in Black Washington During the Great Depression" *American Studies* 57(4) (2019), 9.

Crime in alleys was another major concern. However, while these reports had numbers on disease and death rates, their evidence of crime and crime rates was less precise. In report after report, crime is mentioned as one of the chief "evils" of alleys, but few statistics of arrests or examples of crime are provided. "Crime" itself is ill-defined. For example, in his testimony before the Senate, Oyster described how policemen were afraid to patrol alleys alone, because "crime breeds unchecked." He also related the comments of a justice who blamed upbringings in alleys when he convicted four African American men of murder (which occurred outside the alleys). The justice exclaimed "alleys in the District are a burning shame, and so long as they exist there will be a riot of crime." In 1909, social worker and executive secretary of the Associated Charities of Washington, Charles Weller, published *Neglected Neighbors*, a comprehensive report on housing, which included an in-depth study of twenty inhabited alleys. Weller was more specific about what is meant by crime when he noted, "One finds, not brutal fighting, but drunken brawls; not shrewd robbery, but petty thievery; not premeditated crime, but a general moral laxness."[60] In providing examples of criminal behavior that occurred in the alleys, Weller referred mostly to drunkenness and general cases of another poorly defined action: "disorder." In his 1929 book *The Housing of Negroes*, Jones was perhaps most specific when he named bootlegging, gambling, fights, and manslaughter as common "anti-social" behaviors found in alleys.[61] In neglecting to clearly define the type or amount of crime in inhabited alleys, the authors of these reports during the first decades of the twentieth century either assumed their readers would be already familiar with the nature of crime in alleys, or they perpetuated a dangerous reputation without questioning the evidence.

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[60] Weller, *Neglected Neighbors,* 56.
[61] Jones, *The Housing of Negroes*, 46.

Despite a loose definition of crime and less evidence of crime than of disease, social workers, public health officers, and housing reformers generally concluded that the isolated built environment of blind alleys fostered crime. They noted that any positive morals residents may have had before living in an alley would be extinguished by the environment. Weller explained, "It is the alley itself, rather than detailed physical defects, which constitutes the fundamental problem. The basic evil is the alley's ground plan, the peculiar arrangement whereby a little community is walled about and shut off from the common influences of the city's general life."[62] In other words, he explained that the alley was a hiding place for those who would break the law. Another housing report from 1912 clearly stated, "the seclusion of the alley encourages and protects immorality and crime."[63] Ten years later, Oyster reiterated in his 1922 testimony before the U.S. Senate's Committee on the District of Columbia, "There is little hope of any permanent moral improvement in an inclosed [sic] alley. … because the seclusion of the alley encourages immorality and crime."[64]

The belief that alleys fostered immorality and crime extended to poor white alley residents as well. In his 1909 study of D.C.'s inhabited alleys, Weller cited a police census of 1908, which counted 1,873 white alley residents compared to 17,203 African American residents. Despite the minority of white alley dwellers, Weller devoted a whole chapter to examining the conditions of white people who lived in alleys. He concluded that "alley life exercises the same deteriorating influences upon both races."[65] The 1922 Senate report described Huntoon Alley, "a white alley in the southwest part of the city" which was "said not to have improved as to its moral conditions within the past 10 years," and was understood to be "a

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[62] Ibid., 16.
[63] Bicknell, *The Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.*
[64] Oyster, "Discontinuance of Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia," 7.
[65] Weller, *Neglected Neighbors,* 40.

menace to the immediate neighborhood and to the children of the public school near by."[66] While the experts testifying on housing conditions acknowledged that the built form of the alley could negatively affect whites, the great majority of alley residents were African American. In fact, cultural associations of African Americans and alleys were so pervasive and persistent that

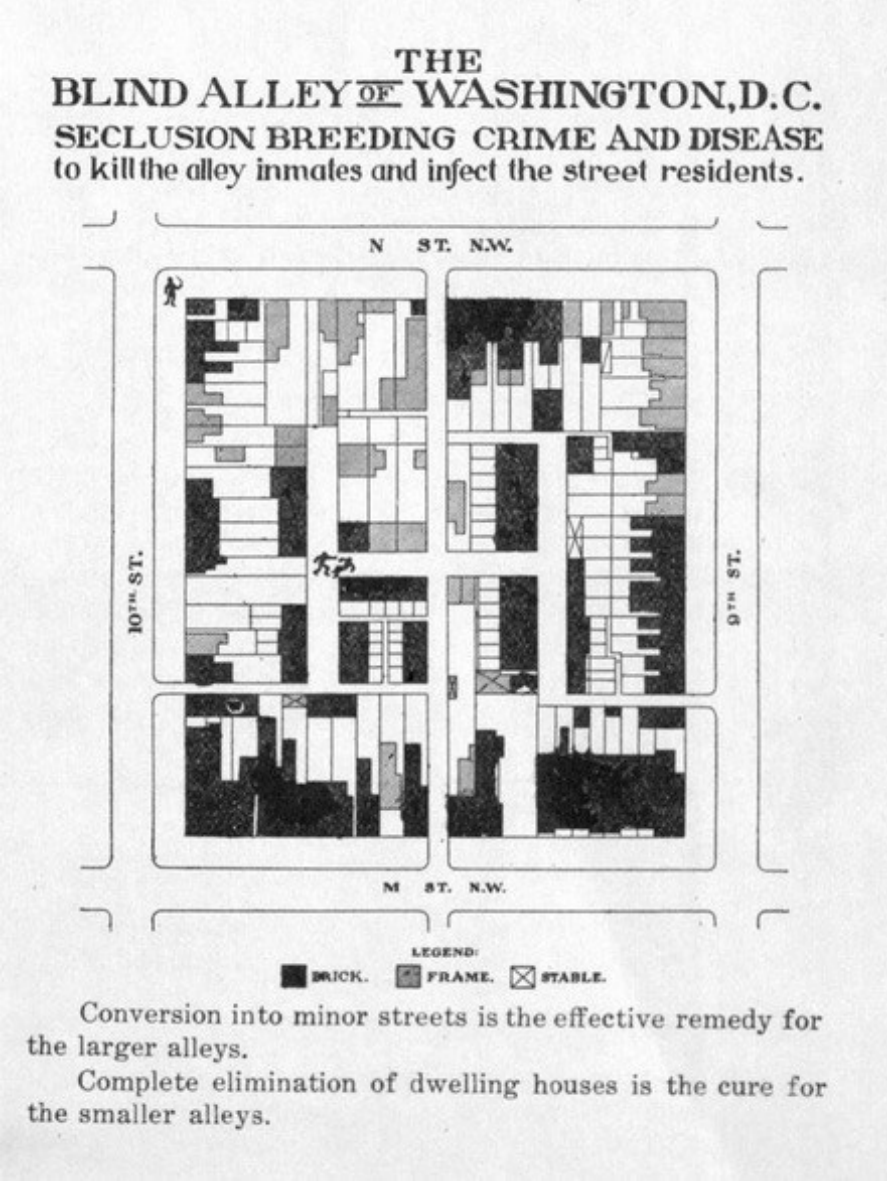

Figure 7. "The Blind Alleys of Washington, D.C. From Jesse Jones, *Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.*, 1912, 6.

[66] Oyster, "Discontinuance of Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia."

twenty years later, in a 1943 Congressional hearing about suffrage for D.C. residents, one white resident who feared that local suffrage would tip the balance of power toward Black residents warned in coded language, "the alley will dominate the avenue."[67]

Though reformers believed the built environment of alleys was primarily to blame for "inviting lawlessness and crime," they also blamed the poor and mostly Black alley residents for choosing to live and stay in these places. Clare de Graffenried, of the Women's Anthropological Society, wrote in her study of thirteen inhabited alleys as early as 1897:

> In reproach of the alley denizens, it may be urged that they inhabit these wretched quarters as being convenient places to hide their misdoings, or as an escape from sanitary regulations by which they are indisposed to abide. True, to rest content for four, eight, twelve and twenty-eight years with such poor and uninviting surroundings betokens a nature unambitious and thriftless, with only animal cravings and low moral standards.[68]

Jones, the African American sociologist and Howard professor, also blamed alley residents for their housing conditions. Over thirty years later, in 1929, his observations echoed de Graffenried's, but were more explicit in naming the inferiority of lower-class African Americans. He wrote:

> The alleys are the neuclei [sic] of a certain retrograde kind of Negro culture. They are now the habitats of a class of people who are unable, or who do not wish, to measure up to the white cultural standards. … Wherever the white man's interests do not penetrate the alley inhabitants remain on a very low level of culture. A certain class of people prefer the alley life, because it enables them to escape responsibility to the wider phases of society.[69]

Upper-class housing reformers, sociologists, and public health advocates—both Black and white—promoted the understanding of alleys as urban spaces of danger, squalor, and immorality.

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[67] U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, Reorganization of the Government of the District of Columbia, USGPO, 1943, 151, cited in Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City,* 270.
[68] de Graffenried, *Typical Alley Houses in Washington*
[69] Jones, *The Housing of Negroes*, 40-41. William H. Jones was not the upper-class African American to denounce poor and working-class African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. Other Howard University professors and leaders of Black civic associations believed that lower-class African Americans threatened neighborhood stability and jeopardized heard-earned social status. See Heard, "Making Slums and Suburbia," 8-11.

Findings like these ignored or were blind to the positive associations of community or mutual aid that were so central to life for many poor African American alley residents. They also ignored the predatory practices of landlords and the conditions of a Jim Crow America which prevented upward mobility for most alley residents.

Importantly, studies about the immorality of alley life reflected the cultural biases of those who conducted the studies. For example, in the third chapter of Weller's 1909 study of alley life, called "Immorality and Child Life," he defined immorality as a woman and a man living together or having a child together while not being legally married. Few alley dwellers that Weller and his team interviewed were legally married. Yet instead of investigating why marriage certificates were uncommon among couples, he concluded that most households had "immoral" members. This assumption about the morality of legal marriage led to contradictory observations. For example, in reporting on the ability of one household to make a steady living, Weller reported, "In the Sammons family the girls, though immoral, are all industrious."[70] Conclusions about immorality were also based on observations that women more often were heads of households than men. Despite acknowledging that poor African American women could more easily gain regular work than men by doing laundry or service for whites, Weller still concluded that women were often the breadwinners because of the "irresponsibility of the alley man."[71] Studies like Weller's, which emphatically reported on the immorality of alley life, were rooted in cultural assumptions about gender roles among Progressive-Era elite whites. Through their publications, reformers and elites popularized perceptions of alleys as immoral African American slums.

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[70] Weller, *Neglected Neighbors*, 28.
[71] Ibid., 29.

In 1929, the same year that Jones noted the inseparability of African Americans and alleys in the minds of Washingtonians, the Great Depression was taking hold. The Board of Commissioners turned their attention to slum housing conditions in the alleys. They hoped to make Washington, D.C. a model for New Deal housing programs.[72] The city's symbolic importance as the nation's capital was essential to the desire to clear alley slums. For years, social reformers, congressmen, and visitors had noted the disgraceful proximity of the city's inhabited alleys to the Capitol. As a 1925 article in the *New York Tribune,* titled "Slums of Washington," opened:

> Under the broad shadow of the National Capitol at Washington, within a block or two of the chambers of the national legislature, there are alleys crowded with human inhabitants, condemned to live in structures and under conditions which are impossible when even the proper housing of pigs is considered.[73]

In a 1933 Senate hearing, Senator Copeland of New York remarked "it is a menace to good health and to government to have people living under conditions such as they do within gunshot of this capitol."[74]

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[72] Piecemeal efforts to regulate and clear alley housing through policy had begun well before the New Deal. In 1871, a newly created Board of Health was granted authority to condemn unsanitary buildings, and it proceeded to demolish over 300 alley dwellings in the 1870s. Some argue that more would have been demolished in the 1870s if not for opposition from owners who secured higher profits from alley rents than from rents on front streets. Afterwards, alley dwellings became more substantial as developers built two-story brick row houses along alleys, replacing the cheap shelters made of found lumber. In 1892, Congress approved legislation that banned new construction along alleys, defined as thoroughfares less than thirty feet wide and without sewerage, water mains, and light. While this law prevented new construction, alley dwellings built before 1892 remained. By 1914, Congress passed a law to eliminate all alley housing by 1918. However, the start of World War I brought a housing shortage to the city, and the ban was indefinitely postponed. Despite the postponement, many alleys were cleared of dwellings through the 1910s and 1920s due to the rise of the automobile and suburbanization. Those who could afford to live farther from the city center moved, relieving some of the congestion experienced in downtown alleys. Furthermore, the demand for automobile storage space accelerated the conversion of center-city alley dwellings to garages. Jonathan Sager has demonstrated, for example, that in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C., the number of alley dwellings decreased from 223 to 116 between 1916 and 1928. Sager argues that 72 percent of this decrease was due to houses being converted to or replaced by garages. See Sager, "Washington on the Move"; Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington;* Williams, "The D.C. Historic Alleys Building Survey"; Jones, *The Housing of Negroes*, 34.

[73] "Slums of Washington: Superlatively Unsanitary Conditions in Shadow of Capitol," *New York Tribune*, October 30, 1925.

[74] Alley Dwellings: Hearings on S.101, Before the Comm. On the District of Columbia, 72nd Cong. 6 (1933) (statement of Senator Copeland)

Ulysses S. Grant III, the director of the National Parks and Planning Commission, invited housing advocate John Ihlder to Washington to address the problem. Like reformers before him, Ihlder focused on the city's alleys as breeding grounds for disease, crime, and immorality, and he argued that clearing inhabited alleys and relocating displaced families in public housing was the best way to address slum conditions in the city. Ihlder collaborated with Charlotte Hopkins, a prominent local housing advocate. Together they enlisted First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's support for alley dwelling removal by touring her through local alleys and making her honorary chair of the newly organized Washington Housing Association. They guaranteed support from members of Congress by emphasizing the unsanitary health conditions of inhabited alleys near the Capitol. In 1934, with funds from the Public Works Administration, Congress passed the Alley Dwelling Act. This law established the Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA), which was granted authority to condemn property on any block containing an inhabited alley. In its place, new construction had to be "in the interest of community welfare." As historian Howard Gillette, Jr. notes, the ADA in essence became the nation's first local housing authority.[75] It was charged with removing all inhabitants from alley dwellings by July 1, 1944.

Concerned as Ihlder may have been with responsibly rehousing alley dwellers who would be displaced, the intersection of class and race in the identity of alley dwellers limited what Ihlder saw as available options. On the one hand, he did not want to disrupt "respectable colored neighborhoods" by "flooding them with undesirable new tenants." However, more important to Ihlder than protecting class divisions among African Americans was maintaining racial segregation. Ihlder agreed with other housing advocates that alley dwellings should be cleared to reduce Black proximity to white neighborhoods.[76] The ADA's ability to rehouse Black alley

[75] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 137-139.
[76] Ibid., 137.

dwellers in appropriate public housing became further limited as the Senate and House of Representative's District of Columbia committees, committees notorious as havens for Southern segregationists in Congress, repeatedly slashed funds for the city. These included the funds needed to provide public housing for all the African American alley dwellers to be displaced.[77]

Over the next eleven years, the ADA successfully cleared many inhabited alleys, and it did build new segregated low-income housing for both Blacks and whites. However, not all displaced persons were rehoused in new ADA housing, which the ADA acknowledged in its 1940 annual report: "The program does not necessarily mean that identical families move from demolished dwellings to new ones."[78] Edward F. Harris, the president of the African American neighborhood organization, the Lincoln Civic Association, was particularly critical of the ADA. He argued in 1939 that the ADA spent far more money on new housing for whites, despite the fact that more Black residents had been displaced. In a 1939 letter to Ihlder, he noted that the ADA had recently applied for a permit to spend over one million dollars on a single project for 326 white families, which was more than four times as much as had been spent rehousing Black families from 212 homes over the past five years.[79]

The ADA was perhaps most successful in removing Black families from downtown locations near white neighborhoods. The agency reported in 1936 that it had built and reconditioned twenty-three one-family houses for African Americans and had begun construction of an apartment house for thirty-one African American families on the sites of two formerly

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[77] Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City,* 254-257.
[78] The Alley Dwelling Authority, "Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C.: Alley Dwelling Authority, 1940), 3, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.
[79] Edward Harris, "Statement of Facts: in re: administration of the Alley Dwelling Authority law enacted June 12, 1934 and amendments thereto, as observed, experienced and endured by colored citizens within the territory of the Lincoln Civic Association, Washington, D.C.," December 31, 1939, 6, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

inhabited alleys. However, it had replaced seven inhabited alleys with parking garages and repair shops or had sold the land to private investors.[80] This pattern of displacement without rehousing repeated over the next several years and prompted outcry from African American civic associations and residents. Harris, remarking on the sale of a former African American-inhabited alley to a private investor, because the site was supposedly "not adapted to low rent housing," demanded, "Is the truth the desire of this governmental agency to assist in routing colored people from this section where they have resided for more than seventy five years[?]."[81] However committed Ihlder and ADA staff were to removing slum conditions, they were not willing to challenge racial segregation to provide equitable access to housing for displaced African Americans.[82]

The city slowed its alley demolition in the 1940s, but not in response to citizen complaints. Housing and public health advocates were still highly concerned with slum clearance, but the federal government's preparation for World War II brought a severe housing shortage to the capital city. In 1942, the ADA was directed to shift its attention and funding to construction for temporary war worker housing. Even low-income housing under construction before the war was repurposed for incoming defense workers.[83] By 1943, the elimination of alley dwellings had been pushed to a low priority and the deadline for ending the inhabitation of alley dwellings was delayed until July 1, 1955. The ADA's name changed to the National Capital

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[80] The Alley Dwelling Authority, "Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C.: Alley Dwelling Authority, 1936), 2, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.
[81] Harris, "Statement of Facts," 7.
[82] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 142-144; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City,* 259-260.
[83] The Alley Dwelling Authority, "Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C.: Alley Dwelling Authority, 1942), 1, Pamphlet Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; Clement, "Wagner-Steagall and the D.C. Alley Dwelling Authority."

Housing Authority (NCHA), and it was charged with building new housing units in the metropolitan region.[84]

II. "Once Stood Dixon Court, a Foul Alley of Crime and Vice": Alley Clearance through Urban Renewal

The beginning of urban renewal policy is most often associated with the Housing Act of 1949, which provided federal funds for slum clearance programs across the country. The clearance of Washington D.C.'s Southwest neighborhood, immediately south of the National Mall, is infamous as the city's first and largest urban renewal project. Between 1954 and 1960, 23,500 residents were displaced, seventy-seven percent of whom were Black and sixty-four percent of whom lived below the poverty line.[85] The majority of families was rehoused in other parts of the city with better-quality housing, but these displaced families experienced a widely reported sense of loss and isolation as generations of neighbors and informal mutual aid societies were torn apart.[86] By the end of the program, Southwest's demographics had transformed radically: in 1950 the area was seventy percent Black, the majority of residents did not have a high school diploma, and rents were half the average in the city; by 1970 the population had declined by half, was seventy percent white, the majority had a bachelor's degree, and the rents were double the city's average. Modernist high-rise apartment and condominium buildings, government offices, a regional theater, and large commercial sites took the place of row houses, community stores, and churches.[87]

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[84] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 147.
[85] Frankel, *In the Alleys*, 92.
[86] Ibid.; Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 165; Daniel Thursz, *Where are they Now?* (Washington, D.C.: Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area, 1966).
[87] Francesca Russello Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism: The Mixed Legacy of Urban Renewal in Southwest Washington, D.C." *Journal of Planning History* 8(3) (2009):185-186, 196-198.

The transformation of Southwest is largely recognized by historians as a product of federal urban renewal policy. However, it is important to note that initial plans to clear Southwest began not with federal orders, but were a direct continuation of local alley-elimination policy. Urban renewal provided the funds and political will to finally clear D.C.'s built environment of inhabited alleys, and the first clearance targets in Southwest were the same alley dwellings whose removal had been escaping housing reformers for decades. This driving force of alley removal set the stage for the large-scale disruption of the entire Southwest neighborhood and the displacement of thousands of its residents.

As early as 1942, the parties who had been involved in alley elimination and housing provision for over a decade—John Ihlder, the Washington Housing Association, the District Commissioners, and Howard University faculty—worked with Arthur Goodwillie of the Home Owners Loan Corporation to propose a plan that would simultaneously clear alley dwellings in Southwest and construct housing for federal workers employed nearby. Goodwillie drew up the proposal, which would raze and rebuild eighty-five city blocks.[88] His plan was never implemented, but it was indicative of a shift in thinking about housing problems in the city. Through the 1930s the ADA had cleared selected alleys from blocks and had even left individual homes intact along the way. By the 1940s, housing advocates were focusing on entire block or even neighborhood redevelopment to combat the more spatially ambiguous condition of blight. The shift from targeting specific alleys to targeting broader areas of blight was partially a result of changing housing conditions on the ground. In a letter to the *Washington Post* in 1949, Ilhder, in his capacity as the executive officer of the NCHA, made the case that alleys were no longer the only places of substandard housing, but that many homes facing streets also exhibited slum

[88] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 145; Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism," 181.

conditions. He opposed the continued use of the words "alleys" and "slums" interchangeably, writing "If they were [synonymous] we could, theoretically, get rid of our slums by demolishing the 'remaining 1300 alley dwellings.' Unfortunately, however, the 1300 alley dwellings are only a very minor part of the 40,000 to 44,000 substandard dwellings in the District of Columbia."[89]

While Ihlder's shift in attention beyond alleys was based in the reality of prevalent substandard housing, the shift toward redeveloping large swaths of land was also due to an increase in the power of the private building industry, which wanted control over all rehabilitation—whether low-income or not. In 1945, Congress passed the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act, which established the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA). The RLA was charged with acquiring and clearing sites for redevelopment, relocating displaced families, and offering first right of redevelopment to private bidders. To acquire the sites, the RLA secured the right of eminent domain, a right which had belonged to the NCHA. As a result, the NCHA was left to provide low-income housing without the right of condemnation, and it could acquire sites only after private investors had made their bids.[90] The NCHA's ability to rehouse low-income people was further diminished when the Housing Act of 1949 channeled federal funds to the RLA; with the backing of federal funds and urban renewal policy, the RLA and private industry could carry out their work of land clearance and neighborhood-scale redevelopment.[91]

Over the next decade, the RLA, along with the Board of Commissioners, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the District's Office of Urban Renewal, identified four areas for redevelopment: Southwest, Northwest, Foggy Bottom, and the area around George

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[89] John Ihlder, "Street Slums and Alley Dwellings," *Washington Post*, January 6, 1949, 10.
[90] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 149-150; Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism," 182.
[91] Redevelopment Land Agency, "Annual Report District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency, 1958" (Washington, D.C.: Redevelopment Land Agency, 1958) Albert J. Headly Jr. Papers 1945-1976, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections.

Washington University.[92] The Southwest area, covering 550 acres, was the largest and was addressed first. Toward the end of Southwest's redevelopment, in 1958, the RLA reflected in its annual report that the area was addressed first because of "the extent of deterioration." However, according to historian Francesca Ammon, Southwest was chosen for several other reasons: its location near downtown and the waterfront made it desirable for future development; its proximity to the Capitol would make it accessible to congressmen and would serve as a visible, successful example of urban renewal; it was a discrete, bounded neighborhood but still large enough to prevent organized opposition; and its majority-renter population would have little power to mount opposition.[93] Those working on housing in the city would have already been familiar with the idea of redevelopment in the area from Goodwillie's 1942 plan.

By 1950 the RLA had received funds from the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency for planning parts of Southwest. By 1951 it had hired staff and was working with other agencies to create a redevelopment plan. The Redevelopment Plan divided Southwest into three sections: Project Area B, Project Area C, and Project Area C1. In 1952, the National Capital Planning Commission adopted the redevelopment plan for the 80-acre Project Area B, which was approved by the District Commissioners. The RLA set to work acquiring land and relocating families.[94]

Southwest, and specifically Project B, were also chosen first for a larger symbolic reason: the alleys. The persistent alley communities "in the shadow of the capitol" represented failure of alley-clearance attempts over the preceding half century. Starting urban renewal by finally clearing the alleys would be a symbolic win for the many reformers whose attempts at alley

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism," 183.
[94] Redevelopment Land Agency, "Annual Report District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency, 1958."

clearance had been perpetually stalled. Project Area B was home to Dixon Court, an alley with one of the worst reputations in the city. As early as 1951, just as the urban renewal plans for Southwest were being formulated, officials took an "official slum tour" to Dixon Court to examine its notorious conditions. After just a few minutes in the alley, one of the District Commissioners stated, "I was sold [on slum clearance] before I came down here; now I am doubly sold."[95] In 1953, the Senate Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee reported that Dixon Court was a "center of adult crime, vice and delinquency" and "the worst spot" in the city.[96] The alley was known for high rates of "illegitimate children," high rates of juvenile arrest, and violent crime.[97] Owned by absentee landlords who charged exorbitant rents, houses had no indoor heat, gas, or electricity, and residents shared outdoor privies and water faucets.[98]

To outsiders, Dixon Court was representative of the entire Southwest African American community. They operated under the longstanding impression that as "breeding grounds," alleys not only were sites of immorality and disease but were the source of them, causing conditions to spread. In 1953, a *Washington Post* reporter described the process of slums spreading from alleys to front streets: "[Alley dwellings] have a long history of falling into slums, breeding crime and disease and reaching out to pull down houses on the perimeter of the block."[99] Urban renewal proponents used the visceral imagery of Dixon Court as a warning of what the rest of Southwest was like or would soon be like. According to this logic, alleys had to be the first to go; there could not be a new Southwest if it still had inhabited alleys.

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[95] Thomas Winship, "Dirty Dixon's Court Included in Area for SW. Slum Project," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1951, B1.
[96] Eve Edstrom, "Dixon Ct. Conditions Seen Crime Sources," *Washington Post*, December 18, 1953.
[97] Ibid.; "Illegitimacy found high in Capital's Dixon Court," *Washington Afro-American*, December 26, 1953.
[98] "Scratch One Slum," *Washington Daily News*, December 19, 1953.
[99] Richard L. Lyons, "Alley Dwelling Law Hearing Likely to Provide Fireworks," *Washington Post*, September 27, 1953.

Meanwhile, Southwest's own African American residents could easily identify class differences and spatial segregation between those who lived in alleys and those who did not. As Jessie Lancaster, a resident of Southwest before urban renewal, recalled in 1983, "We had places like Dixon Court where they say don't go in there. But the difference was that those people stayed within their confines. You knew not to go to certain areas."[100] Clifton Meade remembered, "You could bet the weekend was always exciting. Somebody would be cut or shot back in Dixon Court. It was a terrible place to go and everyone knew about Dixon Court."[101]

Inhabited alleys in other neighborhoods were similarly regarded by better-off African American neighbors. Alaveta Mitchell, a young African American woman who moved to D.C. from South Carolina in the 1910s to work as a domestic, recalled Snow's Court in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood:

> Oh, I can tell you about a place everybody talked about and the one place I learned all about on day one. It was called Snowy [Snow's] Court, in the Bottom. A bad place, I'm here to tell. Now, I saw a dog run down there and then run out—scared by just the looks of the people who lived in there. And they told me to not even look down there 'cause them was some rough people—just too rough. … But a time or two I went in, just to see it. A small place, dirty like I can't tell you. Small houses, but people who looked out for one another. I took up with a girl who took me in there and into where she lived. So I seen the place inside to out. But I shouldn't been in there.[102]

Mitchell acknowledged that even though she was not supposed to be in Snow's Court because of its dangerous reputation, it was still a place where families looked out for each other.

Indeed, Dixon Court in the 1940s and 1950s—like the alleys of the late-nineteenth century—was a space where Black families made claims to urban space in Washington, D.C.

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[100] Jessie Lancaster, oral history transcript, 1 March 1983, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered—Urban Renewal, Washingtoniana Collection. D.C. Public Library Special Collections (hereafter cited as Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered).
[101] Clifton Meade, oral history transcript, no date, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered.
[102] Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 74.

They were places where poor families struggled to get by with each other's help. A former resident of Dixon Court recalled in the 1990s:

> A lot of people used to say that Dixon Court was bad, but the people in Dixon Court didn't think so. The reputation was bad. I was a little ashamed at being from Dixon Court. I didn't want anyone to know. But I loved being from Dixon Court. I loved coming back there.[103]

Another former resident recounted, "If you lived in an alley, you were called 'alley rat' on top of everything else. It left you feeling bad. The only protection you had was to get back home to the alleys, where you were safe."[104]

Alley dwellers were remembered favorably and even as generous by their better-off neighbors. Participating in the *Southwest Remembered* oral history project in the mid-1980s, Mignon Coates, who was born in Southwest in 1914 and left because of urban renewal in 1956, recalled of Dixon Court: "Those people back there, they were fine people because they had homes and their children went to school with us. … They have nice families back there. But a court was a place maybe sometimes you didn't have much money. You would get cheaper rent back there."[105] George Riseling, a former general council with the RLA, remembered in 1984 that many of the Dixon Court families found belonging there: "There were people who moved out [of the alley] and I can hear them still saying that they were in the street and decided that's not where they wanted to live. They wanted to go back in the alley because that's where they felt comfortable and dealing with the hardships and everything they had to endure."[106] Clyde Jones, his wife (who didn't provide her name), and Osborne Mallory recalled how people in the alleys were reliable and respected. Mrs. Clyde Jones remembered delivering papers in Dixon Court

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[103] Frankel, *In the Alleys,* 38.
[104] Ibid., 35.
[105] Mignon Coates, oral history transcript, 18 June 1983, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered.
[106] George Riseling, oral history transcript, 29 November 1984, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered.

with her brother, and that "those people in Dixon Court paid us better than those people out on the front street." Remembering other alleys in the neighborhood—called Bear's Gap, Brown's Court, and Temple's Court—the three recalled, "Those people paid you," and "They was good people."[107]

Despite the obvious class distinction between alley communities and the front street in the minds of neighborhood residents, outsiders viewed all parts of the African American neighborhood the same. One former Southwest resident remembered, "Southwest was not a good place to live, to outsiders. It was best not to tell them you were from Southwest. The first thing they thought of were the alleys."[108] Urban planners and housing reformers used Dixon Court's reputation to justify immediate clearance of the entire area. Buying property from the owners of Dixon Court's dwellings, razing the houses, and rehousing the poor Black alley residents in low-income housing units—the same goals alley housing reformers had advocated for decades—is how urban renewal in Washington, D.C. began. In April 1954, the demolition of Dixon Court was marked with a celebratory ceremony, even before all 53 families had been rehoused.[109] In 1957, Capital Park, a new eight-story apartment building, was completed on the site of Dixon Court as the first newly constructed building in Southwest. The *Washington Post* celebrated the transformation of the site: "There is something symbolic about this specific location, too—within its boundaries once stood Dixon court [sic], a foul alley of crime and vice."[110] Under the guise of

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[107] Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Jones and Osborne Mallory, oral history transcript, 21 July 1983, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered. Mrs. Clyde Jones' first name is not noted in the collection records
[108] Ibid.
[109] Wes Barthelmes, "First Walls in Squalid Dixon Court Pulled Down," *Washington Post*, April 27, 1954; Martha Strayer, "Dixon's Court Was the Scene of Some of Our Worst Crimes," *Washington Daily News*, April 15, 1954.
[110] The modernist design of Capital Park, designed by architect Chloethiel Woodard Smith, was celebrated in the architecture and design world as soon as it was complete. See Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism," 187; Cameron Logan, *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 190-191; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City,* 324; "A City's Dream is Near Reality," *Washington Post*, February 6, 1957.

federal policy intended to redevelop large swaths of blighted land, reformers could finally clear the elusive alley slums, ending claims that both poor and middle-class Black families held to their downtown neighborhood.

III. "It's Going to be Darling": A New Identity for Georgetown's Alleys

While city officials were on an "official slum tour" in Southwest's Dixon Court, young white professionals in the Georgetown neighborhood, just a few miles away in the Northwest part of the city, were settling in to newly refurbished dwellings along alleys. Individuals and small-scale developers had decided that by investing their personal funds into transforming dilapidated alley dwellings into desirable modern homes, they could take on "slum clearance" themselves. While in both Southwest and Georgetown slum clearance involved ridding city space of African American residents, the processes proceeded quite differently in the two neighborhoods. Clearing slums in Southwest had been accomplished through the largescale demolition of the built environment. By contrast, in Georgetown, the clearance of African American presence from alleys was accomplished through piecemeal preservation of houses. Georgetown residents championed the built environment of newly named "courts," while rejecting the history of their narrow streets as "alleys," home to African American families.

Georgetown had long had a substantial African American population. As early as the American Revolution in 1776, one third of Georgetown's residents were Black, of whom about eighty percent were enslaved and twenty percent were free. By 1810, nearly half of African Americans in Georgetown were free.[111] Free and enslaved African Americans had their own

[111] Kathleen M. Lesko, Valerie Babb and Carroll R. Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered: a History of its Black Community from the Founding of "The Town of George" in 1751 to the Present Day* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 3, 6.

segregated schools, churches, and businesses as part of a vibrant Black community. As a town separate from the rest of Washington City until the 1870s, Georgetown functioned as a port city. Like most of neighboring Washington City, including Southwest, Georgetown experienced tremendous population growth during the Civil War as African Americans fled slavery; between 1860 and 1870, Georgetown's Black population increased from 1,935 to over 3,271.[112] African Americans held a variety of occupations, from male laborers, cooks, and drivers to female washerwomen, dressmakers, and domestics. Despite economic stability, the Black community in Georgetown was forced to live in substandard housing. According to an 1879 housing report, three times as many Blacks lived in wooden frame houses than in brick houses, indicating they lived in older homes of lesser structural quality. No Black families lived in housing ranked better than "fair." It was common for these homes to be disconnected from sewer lines.[113] While whites and Blacks lived in close proximity through the nineteenth century, by 1910 African Americans mostly lived in small sections of Georgetown that had dilapidated and crowded housing with poor city services. Two of these areas were the alleys Bell's Court and Cherry Hill Lane. [114]

In the 1920s, demographics in Georgetown started to change more significantly as more whites, especially in the growing federal government workforce, found Georgetown's Federal-style housing and quiet streets desirable. As a 1936 report from the Conference on Better Housing Among Negroes stated, "Since the 1920s, this old port of Washington has been promoted as a quaint, historic, desirable place for white people to live. The dispossession of the Negro residents is part of the redevelopment project, and it is jointly managed by the city's

[112] Ibid., 20.
[113] Ibid., 44-45.
[114] Ibid., 45.

leading realtors and their allied banks and trust companies."[115] The author went on to describe how lending institutions were denying credit to African Americans in areas desirable to whites—a practice commonly known as redlining. In addition, African Americans were being evicted and their homes sold at higher prices to whites, while white developers moving into Georgetown were instituting racial restrictions to keep displaced African Americans from returning.[116] For the most part, these intentional demographic changes affected only those living on the front streets. The small alleys in Georgetown, considered slums, remained occupied by the poorest Black families. By the late 1940s, the small alley communities had become increasingly surrounded by wealthy whites, and the presence of African Americans in the neighborhood seemed more and more out of place.

In 1949, the ten Black families of the inhabited alley Bell's Court had become "surrounded on all sides by homes of wealth and distinction" as one *Washington Star* reporter observed. The contrast was striking, he added, as several Congressmen and federal officials lived nearby and "back yards of the alley dwellers crowded up against those of the well to do."[117] According to the 1941 city directory, which only listed adult residents, the tenants of Bell's Court included married adult couples and at least three widows. Many homes were multi-generational, and it was not uncommon for adult children to live with their parents. Mrs. Mabel Geter, for example, is listed as the household head at 1529 Bell Court, but Daniel and Robert Geter, presumably her sons, also lived at the house with their wives, Mary and Viola. It can be

[115] Cited in Lesko, Babb and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered,* 85. See also Dennis E. Gale, *Washington, D.C.: Inner-City Revitalization and Minority Suburbanization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 52.
[116] Lesko, Babb and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered,* 85.
[117] "10 Georgetown Families Face Condemnation," *Washington Star*, February 12, 1950.

assumed that children and grandchildren also resided on Bell's Court. Of those listed with occupations, all men worked either as drivers or laborers, and all the women as maids.[118]

These working-class African American families were not only outnumbered by their professional-class white neighbors, but the conditions of their alley-facing houses stood in stark contrast to the recently rehabilitated houses on front streets. In November 1949, an inspector from the Board for the Condemnation of Insanitary Buildings was summoned to Bell's Court, where he observed the alley littered with bottles, wood, and debris, and noted that each two-story brick row house had only outdoor toilets and plumbing. In 1949, inspectors were only summoned on a complaint basis; it was likely a resident of the increasingly white and affluent surrounding area who found the inhabited alley objectionable.[119]

Soon after, William J. O'Donnell, the owner of the houses on Bell's Court, was called before the Board. The Board claimed the buildings were unsanitary and ordered their condemnation. Even though rent control laws prohibited O'Donnell from evicting his tenants, a condemnation order made it illegal to continue occupying the buildings.[120] Thus it was the ten tenant families who were forced to move with barely two weeks' notice. These families were further punished for their neglectful landlord's actions when, after being unable to find suitable new homes with no assistance, four tenants were arrested for occupying their condemned homes. To add insult to injury, these tenants were told they could be charged a maximum of $100 per

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[118] *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: R.L. Polk & Company, 1941).
[119] In 1949, had no housing code in 1950, which meant the Board was operating off of a building code written in 1878, with a 1941 revision largely considered inadequate. Without a specific housing code to rely on, these inspections were an assessment of "general findings of insanitary conditions such as to endanger the health or lives of the occupants or persons living in the vicinity," which meant inspections could be highly subjective. The Board used inspectors from the Bureau of Public Health Engineering within the Health Department, which partly explains why they carried out building inspections only on a complaint basis. See Jack M. Siegel and C. William Brooks, *Slum Prevention Through Conservation and Rehabilitation*. Subcommittee on Urban Redevelopment Rehabilitation and Conservation, Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs, 1953, 40. Box 4 District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records.
[120] "Be It Ever So Humble…" *Washington Star*, February 13, 1950.

day for every day spent in the condemned building after the expiration date.[121] This fee was exorbitant, considering the tenants had been paying between $12.50 and $15 monthly for the four-room houses.[122]

The effects of the condemnation were swift and dramatic. With no financial or legal means to stay in Bell's Court, the African American tenants dispersed to other parts of the city, finding shelter in rooming houses or private rooms—if they were lucky.[123] Three tenants, who had been living on Bell's Court for fourteen years, moved to another alley near the Capitol called Dingman Place, where homes were described as damp, cold, muddy, and full of insects and rats.[124] Some of the families joined thousands of others on a waiting list for affordable homes with the National Capital Housing Authority (NCHA), the agency whose ability to rehouse tenants had been recently reduced with the creation of the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA).[125] Unlike alley slum clearances in the Southwest part of the city, the homes in Bell's Court were not taken under eminent domain by the RLA, and they were not demolished.

O'Donnell remained the owner, and having maintained unsanitary enough conditions at his properties to have his tenants displaced, he was now free to make much-needed repairs. The Board required new plumbing, electricity, floors, roofs, and walls before the buildings could be rented again, and the cost of this rehabilitation would require higher rents. For O'Donnell, the prospect of higher rents might also allow him to recoup some of his investments before the upcoming 1955 ban on alley dwellings, which would prevent him from renting out the houses at all. He and his sons planned to renovate the alley homes and then rent them to white tenants at

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[121] "10 Georgetown Families Face Condemnation," *Washington Star*, February 12, 1950.
[122] William Millen, "Condemned Slum in Georgetown Alley Goes High Hat at Pomander Walk," *Evening Star*, September 14, 1951.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ben Bradlee, no title, *Washington Post*, no date (ca. 1951)
[125] "Last Families to Quit Bell Court Alley Homes Next Week," *Washington Star*, February 24, 1950; "8 Bell Court Families Facing Eviction Still Without Place to Go," 1950.

higher prices.[126] The alley homes, cleared of their African American tenants, now presented an economic opportunity.

O'Donnell ultimately did not repair the buildings himself, but sold them to Russell Eldridge and Graham Lytle, two Georgetown residents who had collectively restored approximately 185 homes in the area over the previous fifteen years.[127] Since the 1930s, there had been a growing interest in historic preservation in Georgetown. This early leadership in historic preservation has been celebrated in the history of the preservation movement, yet it also went hand-in-hand with the mid-century removal of African Americans from Georgetown. Between 1935 and 1945, five hundred homes were substantially restored, and many of the Black residents in Georgetown could not afford the rents that accompanied higher housing prices. According to a 1953 report commissioned by the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners, titled "Slum Prevention through Conservation and Rehabilitation," "in the average case the original structure may have been purchased for $2,000 or less and $8,000 put into rehabilitation. The purchase price will be around $14,000."[128] This meant that the final selling price was at least seven times the original purchase price, which was already far beyond what Black homebuyers could afford and would demand rents far beyond what most could pay. Between 1940 and 1950, the number of Black tenants in Georgetown decreased from 599 to 313.[129]

In 1950, Congress passed The Old Georgetown Act, one of the earliest historic preservation laws in the country, which required that any new construction, alterations, or razing of buildings be approved first by the National Commission of Fine Arts and then by the District

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[126] "8 Bell Court Families Facing Eviction Still Without Place to Go," *Washington Star*, February 15, 1950; "Last Families to Quit Bell Court Alley Homes Next Week," *Washington Star*, February 24, 1950.
[127] Millen, "Condemned Slum in Georgetown Alley Goes High Hat at Pomander Walk," 1951.
[128] Siegel and Brooks, *Slum Prevention Through Conservation and Rehabilitation*, 36.
[129] Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 100.

of Columbia Board of Commissioners.[130] While the law enabled architecturally sensitive restoration of historic buildings, which is still in evidence today, it essentially discriminated against property owners without financial means to meet certain architectural standards. In particular, this law had pernicious effects on Black property owners in Georgetown. Many could not afford to restore their own homes.

Historians Kathleen Lesko, Valerie Babb, and Carroll Gibbs document the decline of Georgetown's Black population in their book *Black Georgetown Remembered*. Of the 1950 Old Georgetown Act, they write, "The passage of the Old Georgetown Act (Public Law 808) in 1950 effectively sealed the fate of many black Georgetowners who survived the earlier in-migrations [of whites]."[131] James Foy, the pastor of Georgetown's African American Mount Zion United Methodist Church, testified at the Congressional hearings in 1950 before the act was passed, and he predicted its outcome of Black displacement with accuracy:

> During the past 30 years, virtually 70 percent of the colored population has been forced from Georgetown because of this trend toward reclaiming, or remodeling the community to conform to certain standards. … If all remodeling improvements are compelled to be approved by certain architectural groups, and if they are armed with power to reject or approve, I am concerned to what extent this might become a process by which a squeeze may be put on the people to push them from the community.[132]

Foy's concerns about Black people being pushed from the neighborhood certainly played out in Bell's Court. Not even two years after the Bell's Court buildings had been deemed "unfit for human habitation," Eldridge and Lytle turned them into desirable homes with hardwood floors, new paint, brass fixtures, and individual gas furnaces. The alley itself was paved with new concrete, adorned with planted ivy and boxwood, and decorated with iron grillwork railings and

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[130] Old Georgetown Act of 1950, Pub.L.No. 81-808, 64 Stat. 903 (1950).
[131] Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 102.
[132] Cited in Lesko, Babb, and Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered*, 102.

signage. [133] None of the former residents were able to return. As the "Slum Prevention Through Conservation and Rehabilitation" report concluded, "This type of rehabilitation is intended for the upper-middle income groups. The result has been to push out the lower income element of the community. The problem of adequate housing for this segment of the population is thus aggravated by this type of rehabilitation programs [sic] rather than solved."[134]

Upgrading the built environment was not enough to rid the alley of its slum connotations; for Eldridge and Lytle, the alley required an entirely new identity. They successfully petitioned the District Commissioners to change the name from Bell's Court—the infamous alley—to Pomander Walk.[135] This strategy of changing alley names provided symbolic assurance to new owners and residents that they were not alley dwellers like those who had preceded them. It did not go unnoticed either. Osborne Mallory, who was raised in Southwest, remarked that those in Georgetown had simply renamed alleys in an attempt to erase the space's past reputation: "They call them courts. They were formerly alleys…[They] remodel it. But they were alleys."[136]

Just as dramatic as the physical and nominal transformation of Bell's Court to Pomander Walk was the demand for the houses; all of the homes had been spoken for before restoration was even complete. The new residents shared the sentiments of the prospective tenant who exclaimed, "It's going to be darling. Save me a house."[137] These new residents each paid between $120–$135 per month for the one or two-bedroom houses, compared to the $12.50–$15 per month that the previous tenants had paid. The *Evening Star* reporter William Millen mused in

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[133] Millen, "Condemned Slum in Georgetown Alley Goes High Hat at Pomander Walk," 1951.
[134] Siegel and Brooks, *Slum Prevention Through Conservation and Rehabilitation*, 41.
[135] While the name Pomander Walk was in common use by 1951, the District Board of Commissioners officially approved the name change in 1958. At the same time, the Commissioners officially designated the commonly used name Cherry Hill Lane. See *Minutes Including Orders Including Index, Volume 79, Part I* (District of Columbia: Commissioners Office, 1958), 969.
[136] Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Jones and Osborne Mallory, oral history transcript.
[137] Millen, "Condemned Slum in Georgetown Alley Goes High Hat at Pomander Walk," 1951.

September 1951, just eighteen months after Bell's Court families were evicted, "Georgetown is witnessing the evolution of one of its historic alleys from a slum to a highly sought-after rental property."[138] By 1960, the residents of the ten houses on Pomander Walk included the acting General Counsel of the Development Loan Fund, the Deputy Head of Mission attaché to the Embassy of the Netherlands, a research physician, a university instructor, an employee of the Philco Corporation, and other professionals.[139] Some of these individuals were early- to mid-career professionals, who very likely could not have afforded Georgetown homes on the front streets. For these professionals aspiring to a higher social class, the renovated alley gave the prestige of a Georgetown address.

Figures 8-9. Pomander Walk. Photo by author, 2016.

The successful transition from "slum" to "highly sought-after" was due partly to the upgrade in building materials and to the alley's new name. However, these surface

[138] Ibid.
[139] *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: R.L. Polk & Company, 1960)

improvements aside, Pomander Walk remained a narrow street hidden from public view, the very built environment that reformers had decried for decades. The transformation to "highly sought-after" was complete only because of a change in the classed and racialized meanings of the space. It was no longer a slum because its occupants were now well-paid professionals. And crucially, as Millen reported, "the area has gone white, and the little colored colony has found quarters elsewhere."[140]

Pomander Walk was not the only Georgetown alley to gain a new identity in the early 1950s. Cherry Hill Lane, the alley whose residents would throw the party in 1955, underwent a similar conversion process. In 1950, a new owner bought the twenty-six houses on Cherry Hill Lane for $52,000, displacing the approximately 150 tenants who had been living with five to nine people in each house, paying less than $10 a month per house. In 1951, the owner began selling each home individually, and the new owners independently rehabilitated the houses in accordance with the Old Georgetown Act. In 1955, one reporter noted that "the typical Georgetown group" of about forty residents now lived on the alley, "typical" presumably meaning white, highly educated, and well off.[141] Where African American laborers, drivers, and maids once lived, new residents included employees at the

Figure 10. Cherry Hill Lane. Photo by author, 2016.

[140] Millen, "Condemned Slum in Georgetown Alley Goes High Hat at Pomander Walk," 1951.
[141] "The Passing of Georgetown's Last Slum: Cherry Hill Rises From The Ashes…" *Georgetowner*, April 28, 1955.

Department of Treasury, the Department of Labor, the Bureau of Engraving & Printing, as well as other employees of the U.S. Government.[142]

With the help of developers and historic preservationists, these new residents had modified the built environment, adding shutters to their windows, installing brass fixtures on their doors and steps, refinishing their floors, and even renaming their streets. The result was homes that were not just "darling," but homes in which the presence of poor African American families had been erased. Newcomers could assert their own claims to the small streets as spaces of white professionals.

IV. "You Called My Street an Alley": Fighting for Houses and Rejecting Alleys

By 1953, it was becoming clear to the new residents of Cherry Hill Lane and Pomander Walk that the pending ban on alley dwellings—houses located on streets less than 30 feet wide—would not be delayed yet again. Under the law they would be forced to leave their remodeled homes. They began to organize. Residents of Cherry Hill Lane formed the Cherry Hill Citizens Association, with support from the larger, all-white Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown.[143] Elsewhere in the city, in the neighborhoods of Capitol Hill and Foggy Bottom, owners of alley properties had also begun to convert the dwellings, realizing, like O'Donnell, that they could turn a higher profit from more affluent white residents, especially before the pending 1955 ban on alley dwellings. The Georgetown residents joined forces with new alley

[142] *Boyd's Directory,* 1941; *Boyd's Directory,* 1960.
[143] Section 1 of the 1958 Constitution and By-Laws of the Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown state, "Any white resident and/or white homeowner in Georgetown shall be eligible to membership in the Association…" See "Constitution and By-Laws of the Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, Incorporated, Proposed 1958," Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, 1940s-1950s. Peabody Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections.

residents in these neighborhoods, creating the Washington Court Dwellers Association.[144] The group was intentional in picking its name, with the president writing in a 1953 letter to the *Washington Post*, "We feel that no relationship exists between the alley slums and the rehabilitated court houses."[145]

Between 1953 and 1954, these new "court" dwellers attended public hearings, pleading the case to keep their renovated homes. At one three-and-a-half-hour meeting of the Board of Commissioners in September 1953, more than one hundred homeowners showed up. They estimated that together they had spent more than two million dollars of their own money on restorations and claimed that they should not be punished for this private investment, especially since the city had sanctioned it by issuing building permits. These renovated houses constituted only one hundred to two hundred of the 950 alley dwellings estimated in the city, distributed across 112 alleys. The members of the Washington Court Dwellers Association almost unanimously agreed that these other homes *were* slums, and *should* be demolished under the upcoming ban on alley dwellings. In effect, these owners argued that through private action they had fulfilled the goal of the Alley Dwelling Act, which was to clear slums, and therefore they should be exempt from its implementation.[146]

Those who fought to keep their new homes were not opposed to the upcoming ban on alley dwellings because they didn't consider their small streets to be "alleys." In rehabilitating their homes and renaming their streets, they believed they had not only cleared slums but cleared the space of "alley" connotations. As a reporter in the *Washington Times-Herald* wrote in 1953, "The very word 'alley,' defined by Congress as a thoroughfare less than 30 feet wide, brings the

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[144] Richard Lyons, "Rescue of Remodeled Homes From Alley Ban Indicated," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1953.
[145] Ross McKeever, "Inhabited Alleys," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1953.
[146] Lyons, "Rescue of Remodeled Homes From Alley Ban Indicated," 1953.

residents to their feet fighting mad." The chairman of the Old Georgetown Fine Arts Commission commented that the renovated courts should "be forever relieved of the stigma of the word 'alley'."[147] The "court" dwellers generally agreed with the District Commissioners and John Ihlder, formerly head of the Alley Dwelling Authority, a Georgetown resident, and now chairman of the Commissioner's Committee on Alley Dwellings, that *alleys* were "injurious to the public health, safety, morals and welfare."[148] For court dwellers, alleys had nothing to do with the streets they called home.

The homeowners' opponents countered that it was the spatial form of small streets, whether rehabilitated or not, called alleys or courts, that was the problem. As one writer to the *Washington Post* insisted in 1953, the narrow spaces were "hidden communities tending to draw persons who are hostile to law enforcement. They offer almost no outdoor space for children."[149] District Commissioner Renah Camalier and Corporate Council Vernon West also rejected the distinction between alleys and courts. Camalier wrote that the proposed amendment to save alley dwellings above a certain standard essentially claimed "that these alley dwellings which are fundamentally wrong are acceptable only in the cases of people with money to renovate them."[150] West elaborated that the amendment would wrongly indicate that "that the evil existing from the occupancy of alley dwellings does not arise from the narrowness of the thoroughfare upon which they face, but from the condition of the buildings themselves."[151] With these sentiments, they echoed Progressive-Era reformers of half a century earlier who argued that the built environment of narrow hidden streets leant itself to crime and illicit activity. James Ring,

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[147] "The Big Washington Alley Fight," *Washington Times-Herald*, December 27, 1953.
[148] Ibid.
[149] "Reprieve For Alleys," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1954, 10.
[150] "Alley Plan Questioned By Camalier," 1954.
[151] "Alley Home Ban Repeal Advocated," 1954.

the head of the NCHA, conceded that the current owners had done an impressive job rehabilitating their homes but agreed with Camalier and West that "by location, alley homes ALWAYS will be substandard."[152]

By April 1954, the court dwellers' proposal to amend the alley dwelling ban to exempt rehabilitated dwellings had shifted toward a proposal to repeal the ban completely. This shift was not because city officials had a change of heart about alleys being "fundamentally wrong" or "evil." In fact, the parties never resolved whether it was the spatial form of small hidden streets or the people and buildings inside that were the problem. The negotiations shifted direction because Camalier and West discovered that preferential treatment for rehabilitated alley homes was unconstitutional. The amendment to the ban would remove only some residents from their alley property, possibly violating the Constitution's Fifth Amendment bar against taking property without due process.

In the process of investigating the law, West discovered further that the entire alley dwelling ban was unlawful in the first place. West explained that the ban on alley dwellings would prohibit residential use in alleys, but that zoning regulations implemented in the 1920s put most inhabited alleys in residential zones, thus forbidding use for anything other than residential. This contradiction would leave alley property owners without means to use their properties after the alley dwelling ban on July 1, 1955, again violating the Fifth Amendment.[153] As a result, on April 19, 1955 the District Board of Commissioners grudgingly urged Congress to repeal the alley dwelling ban entirely, even while it emphasized "the evils of alley living." Upon his

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[152] "The Big Washington Alley Fight," 1953.
[153] "Alley Plan Questioned By Camalier," *Washington Post*, February 17, 1954, 29; "Alley Home Ban Repeal Advocated," *Washington Post*, April 17, 1954, 21; Repealing the Act Approved September 25, 1914, and Amending the Act Approved June 12, 1934, Both Relating to Alley Dwellings in the District of Columbia, S.3506, 83rd Cong. (1954).

recommendation to repeal the ban, Commissioner Camalier stated, "I hope I can live with my conscience. … It hurts me to see us vote to continue lousy alleys in this city. They are breeding places of crime. You can't build character in an alley."[154] This association of alleys with poor character was directly related to the persistent public understanding of alleys as classed and racialized cultural landscapes. It also reflected the fact that over three quarters of alley dwellings in the city had not been renovated. While the Washington Court Dwellers were the most vocal, they constituted a minority of alley residents.

The repeal of the entire alley dwelling ban was more than the members of the Washington Court Dwellers Association had asked for. The Cherry Hill Citizens Association celebrated with dancing and a party on May 14, 1955. They rejoiced because their court-facing homes and investments were saved, but not because the repeal indicated any larger acceptance of alleys as appropriate urban residential space. In fact, like the District Commissioners, they were wary of this implication. Just one year later, in 1956, these same residents in Georgetown fought to prevent a developer from creating a street in the interior of a block and building new homes along it. The Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown unanimously opposed the construction of new dwellings in alleys and the creation of new alleys for residential purposes.[155] In a heated debate, Mrs. Harold B. Hinton, the president of the association, accused the developer of creating an alley, and the developer retorted, "You called my street an alley."[156] In contrast to the rhetoric just one year earlier about the benefits of the remodeled homes in Georgetown's "courts," Hinton declared at the October 1956 Progressive Citizens Association

[154] "D.C. Votes To Delete Alley Ban," *Washington Post*, April 20, 1954, 15.
[155] The Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, *News,* April, 1956; October 1956; November 1956, Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, 1940s-1950s. Peabody Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections.
[156] "Georgetown Group Fights 'Alley' Plea," *Washington Post*, October 9, 1956, 34.

meeting, "No one here thinks this [the new alley dwellings] is an improvement."[157] The group's opposition to the construction of new alley dwellings was featured prominently in its 1956 monthly newsletters and in the local newspaper. The all-white citizens' association surely opposed new alleys because of their continued connection to poor, African American tenants.

In saving their remodeled homes located along narrow hidden streets, residents of Georgetown and the other downtown neighborhoods of Capitol Hill and Foggy Bottom celebrated their investments and their neighbors, but they rejected any association with "alley dwellings." Instead of supporting the idea of living along alleys, the homeowners embraced "court" living. Even while they benefited from the close social networks and quiet living environments the small streets provided, these upper-middle-class white residents continued to malign alleys as slums with deteriorated housing and poor African American residents. By rejecting alleys at a moment when they could have embraced them, they further vilified alley dwellings—a space in the city's imaginary that belonged to African Americans—and they solidified their own claims to the downtown neighborhoods.

V. Conclusion

In 1985, Clara Brewer, a resident of Southwest before and after urban renewal, recalled: "Before the urban renewal we had some bad spots at certain alleys and streets that were bad, but the total community, your buildings and all that stuff, some of it could have been saved like Georgetown."[158] Brewer pointed out the similarities between the two neighborhoods, which had similar populations and inhabited alleys through the first half of the twentieth century. For both

[157] The Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, *News,* October 1956, Progressive Citizens Association of Georgetown, 1940s-1950s.
[158] Clara Brewer, oral history transcript, 13 April 1985, Oral History Project 11: Southwest Remembered.

neighborhoods, the presence of alleys dwellings was a motivating cause of the redevelopment that occurred in the 1950s.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, alleys in Washington, D.C. had been racialized and classed space. In alleys, low rents allowed poor people to live in the city. They became known as slums because of their overcrowding, lack of sanitary infrastructure, and high rates of poverty, disease, and crime. Since the Civil War, alleys had also been known as African American residential areas. They were sites where African Americans formed identities around mutual aid in the face of poverty and discrimination. They were also spaces through which white outsiders formed their own different notions of African American identity as inherently connected to criminality and slum conditions, despite the fact that these conditions were actually due to factors such as high rents, absentee landlords, lack of city services, poor employment options in the Jim Crow era, and racially restrictive covenants barring African Americans from white neighborhoods. Nevertheless, planners, housing reformers, and white Washington, D.C. residents widely defined alleys as Black slums by the 1940s.

In the early 1950s, large- and small-scale developers, the federal government, and individual residents became intent on transforming downtown Washington, D.C. neighborhoods into desirable areas for a growing population of upper-income whites. This was in the context of postwar white flight; middle-class whites were fleeing the city for growing suburbs as the Great Migration from the South continued to fuel a growing Black population. By the end of the decade, Washington, D.C. would be majority African American. Those wanting to create enclaves for upper-income white professionals could only do so by ridding select downtown neighborhoods of their most well-known racialized and classed space: the alley. Yet the different ways they approached alleys in neighborhoods like Southwest and Georgetown dramatically

influenced the neighborhoods' divergent futures. In Southwest, still a predominantly African American neighborhood, they approached alleys as the most offending examples of a large-scale environment of blight. When federal renewal policy offered an opportunity to clear inhabited alleys in Southwest, planners jumped at the chance; they inaugurated urban renewal in Washington, D.C. with the demolition of Dixon Court. The neighborhood clearance that followed did not fix any of the mechanisms that caused slum conditions in the first place, but it did displace thousands of African American residents, disrupting established close-knit communities. In Southwest, alley dwellings ceased to exist.

In Georgetown, on the other hand, the neighborhood was already predominantly white and increasingly upscale. Small-scale developers and new white residents approached African American alleys as isolated slums. Through private investment, individual white buyers renovated homes on a piecemeal basis, including the dwellings in alleys like Bell's Court and Cherry Hill Lane. In taking over alleys, these residents adopted the same built environment that housing reformers had argued for decades caused immorality and crime. Yet even as they occupied the same buildings and walked down the same passageways, they sought to sever any connection between themselves and "alleys," the cultural landscapes of poor African Americans. This presented a paradox: how to embrace a physical space without embracing the cultural meanings attached to it. In other words, in order to complete their transformation of residential alleys, new residents needed not only to paint and install plumbing, but to redefine the cultural landscape as their own. To do so, they made an intentional choice: they refused to call their streets "alleys" and their homes "alley dwellings." Instead, they celebrated their new "courts" and "townhomes." The built environments remained classed and racialized, but instead of being poor and Black "alleys", they became wealthy and white "courts." Only by ridding downtown

neighborhoods of alleys—physically in Southwest and culturally in Georgetown—could developers large and small facilitate the transition of these neighborhoods into elite white enclaves.

Chapter Two. Bringing the Built Environment to the Fore: Mobilizing Garbage and Rats for Racial Equity in the 1960s

In June 1972, a driver turned his car onto Groft Court, an alley in the northeast part of Washington, D.C. The driver braked and backed out immediately, for in his way was a path blocked by bed springs, cardboard, broken bottles, abandoned appliances, and furniture. Plastic and paper bags lined the alley, and it was clear that stray dogs had ripped most of them apart, spilling trash across the width of the narrow passageway. If the driver had opened his window he would have smelled the stench of the knee-high piles of garbage that had sat out in the summer heat for days. If the driver had attempted to pick his way through the detritus on foot, rats would have scurried across his feet, undeterred by the human intruder in their world of endless food and places to burrow.[159]

By 1965, it was estimated that more rats than people lived in Washington, D.C.[160] Like Groft Court and alleys across the country in this period of postwar white flight and urban disinvestment, many of D.C.'s alleys filled with garbage and teemed with rats. Over the next decade, a range of federal and municipal health and housing agencies struggled with waste removal and rat eradication. Two distinct groups weighed in with their own strategies: a youth employment organization called Pride and a federally funded program called The War on Rats.

At first glance, these two groups seemed quite similar. They each sent teams of men into alleys to sweep trash, clear abandoned furniture, lay rat poison, and bludgeon live rats. Pride worked in the Cardozo neighborhood, in the northwest part of the city. The War on Rats concentrated its efforts in an area designated for federal funding—the Model Cities area—just south of Cardozo. Yet while the day-to-day activities of their employees were similar, the groups

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[159] Donald P. Barker, "Living with Trash in Near Northeast" *Washington Post*, June 14, 1972.
[160] Ken Schlossberg, "There's No Need to Have All These Rats," *Washington Daily News*, January 27, 1965.

had different aims. Pride was an independent group run by local African American leaders who saw youth employment in rat eradication as a path toward longer-term employment and ultimately African American economic self-determination. The War on Rats, on the other hand, was a federally funded program with collaboration from several municipal agencies. A much larger and better-resourced operation, the War on Rats also paid its rat-killing workers. However, its primary goal was to educate the primarily African American Model Cities residents—not those paid to remove garbage and rats—to cultivate their own cleaner and healthier built environments. Despite these different aims of African-American economic independence and resident-led neighborhood maintenance, both groups approached cleaning alleys as one step toward alleviating racial inequality.

Indispensable to both Pride and the War on Rats were city sanitation workers, the individuals who spend their careers cleaning streets and alleys, not just in times of crisis. The continued regular garbage collection by city workers was a key element of rat eradication in areas where Pride and the War on Rats worked, and sanitation workers provided equipment and years of knowledge to the two new programs. They were also indispensable to the city at large; Pride and the War on Rats worked in prescribed neighborhoods while sanitation workers had the entire city under their purview. Sanitation workers were thus in a unique position to take advantage of the rat and garbage crisis to make their own demands for racial equity. In 1970, the unionized workers went on strike to demand workplace reforms.

This chapter traces how these three groups—Pride, the War on Rats, and city sanitation workers—used the garbage- and rat-filled landscapes of D.C. alleys to combat the effects of racial discrimination. Like organizations, agencies, and government-funded programs nationwide in the Civil Rights era, these groups were part of a national movement to break down racial

barriers. Also like myriad organizations and agencies across the country, they had different ideological positions about how best to battle pernicious racism in housing and employment, whether through economic advancement, education, or collective bargaining. Environmental justice scholars and urban historians might point to the common focus among these groups on mitigating the environmental hazards of garbage and rats in the places where they worked. This chapter instead highlights alleys as a central component in each group's strategy. Looking to their activities in alleys reveals how urban built environments are not merely backdrops but are essential components of movements for social change.

III. Race and Waste in 1960s Washington, D.C.

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, suburban growth, white flight, and Black migration from the South to the North dramatically changed the demographic makeup of American cities. Between 1950 and 1970, approximately five million African Americans left the South, settling largely in Midwestern and Northeastern cities.[161] In these cities, landlords followed dominant real estate practices and refused to rent to Blacks in white neighborhoods, forcing African Americans to live in already Black neighborhoods in the urban core. Soon, these areas became too densely populated, and as African American urban residents pushed areas of Black settlement out into white neighborhoods—often with the help of blockbusting real estate agents—whites set off for the suburbs. The growth of African American urban populations and all-white suburbs happened simultaneously.

[161] Howard P. Chudacoff, Judith Smith, and Peter Baldwin, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (Boston: Pearson, 2015), 197.

	White	Black	City Total	Suburbs Total
1940	474,326	187,266	663,091	304,894
1950	517,865 (+9 percent)	280,803 (+50 percent)	802,178	708,000
1960	345,263 (-33 percent)	411,737 (+47 percent)	763, 956	1,304,554
1970	209,272 (-39 percent)	537,712 (+36 percent)	756,510	2,104,000

Figure 11. Washington, D.C. Population Change, 1940-1970. Table adapted from "Population: Washington Metropolitan Areas," in Howard Gillette, Jr., *Between Justice & Beauty: Race Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* p. 153.

In Washington, D.C., these trends and effects were particularly strong. Between 1950—when the city was near its peak population at just over 800,000—and 1960, when it had fallen to around 760,000, the white population decreased by 33 percent and the Black population increased by nearly 50 percent.[162] By 1960, D.C. had become the first major city in the United States to have an African American majority. These trends continued. In the next decade, the white population continued to decrease—by another 40 percent—and the Black population increased by another 30 percent. The movement of white families, businesses, and federal agencies to the D.C. suburbs led to so much suburban expansion that between 1940 and 1970, the metropolitan area's population nearly tripled, and by 1970, the city's population constituted only a quarter of the metropolitan area's. Those still living in the city were disproportionately African American; in 1970, the city was over 70 percent Black.[163]

[162] Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, 153.
[163] Ibid.; Chudacoff et. al, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 202; Grier, *People and Government*, 11.

Cities nationwide became financially strapped as white residents and major industries left for the suburbs, taking tax revenue with them. Not only did cities lose revenue; those left in the cities had the greatest need for public services. In Washington, D.C., the fastest-growing age groups in the 1950s and 1960s were children, young adults under 24, and the elderly—groups typically dependent on government services. Meanwhile, the number of wage-earning and tax-paying adults declined. [164] Just as more services were needed, less money was available to fund them. To serve its residents and to accommodate pressures from suburban growth, D.C.'s municipal budget increased by more than 500 percent between 1950 and 1970.[165] However, the city did not have the tax base to meet this demand.

As a result, the efficacy of many city services declined. The decrease in services like trash collection and street cleaning, combined with rising volumes of garbage nationwide and densely packed urban ghettos, had an immediate impact on the landscape of alleys.[166] McLaughlin writes, "The buildings in slum districts were simply too densely packed with too many people, and as a result, the overall amount of waste produced per block was far higher than in the suburbs or more affluent urban districts."[167] A 1967 exposé in the *Washington Post* on

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[164] Grier, *People and Government*, 11-16.

[165] Washington, D.C. was among many cities in which population remained relatively stagnant but municipal budgets drastically increased. Baltimore, New Orleans, and Oakland, CA faced similar pressures. In D.C. the growth in municipal budget was attributed to a need for city services among a population that was increasingly African American, low-income, and in the child, young adult, and elderly age groups. The city also saw an increase in female-headed families and single-person households, both of which demanded more—albeit different—city services. In addition, in the mid-1960s, urban residents came to expect more services provided by local government, as War on Poverty funding translated to city-run programs in areas such as public health, housing, and education. Finally, the growth of Washington-area suburbs—the fastest-growing suburban area nationwide in the 1960s—put strains on city infrastructure including roads, water supply, and sewage disposal, despite the city not capturing suburban taxes. As the nation's capital, the city also had to provide public services and facilities for the thousands of tourists and world leaders that visited each year. For more on budget and demographic changes from 1950 to 1970, see Grier, *People and Government*.

[166] Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh, PA: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 190-192.

[167] Malcolm McLaughlin, "The Pied Piper of the Ghetto: Lyndon Johnson, Environmental Justice, and the Politics of Rat Control" *Journal of Urban History* 37(4), (2011): 546.

rising levels of trash in D.C., called "The Great Trash Explosion," noted that, "the amount of wrappers, plastic cups, papers—in other words, general combustible trash—is growing at a startling rate." D.C. officials estimated that the amount of trash per person would increase by 33 percent between 1960 and 1970.[168] Alleys piled with garbage and teeming with rats became visceral problems of urban life, and these problems were only exacerbated by neglectful landlords who allowed housing to deteriorate.[169]

In D.C., alley conditions were made worse by multiple and inconsistent garbage collection systems. For example, under city statutes, managers of residential buildings with more than six units were required to hire private contractors to collect garbage. Apartment buildings tended to be concentrated together in downtown areas, and if landlords neglected to contract with waste collectors, garbage could pile up to an overwhelming amount. Photographs of D.C. alleys from the late 1960s and early 1970s show trash piled along the sides, extending several feet into the center of the alley and at least two feet high. A 1970 account of an alley in the Adams Morgan neighborhood described "a clutter of heaped garbage, smashed bottles and scurrying rats."[170] Metal garbage cans stood full without lids to prevent trash from spilling out or rats from getting in.[171] In addition, trash collectors only collected refuse in containers, so garbage knocked out of cans by dogs or other animals remained uncollected and strewn across streets and alleys; it could take up to six or eight weeks for street-cleaning crews to come through.[172] Accumulated waste often overflowed into areas of other multi-unit or single-family buildings that did receive

[168] Aaron Lathman, "The Great Trash Explosion," *Washington Post*, September 17, 1967.
[169] McLaughlin, "The Pied Piper of the Ghetto."
[170] Philip A. McCombs, "Residents Skeptical of Clean-Up Drive," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1970.
[171] Hollie I. West, "Pride Task Force Bags 200 Rats in Southeast," *Washington Post*, October 18, 1967.
[172] Leon Dash, "Trash and the City," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1971.

regular collection. There, tenants and adjacent property owners had little power to arrange waste collection from property they didn't own, even when it was desperately needed.

In addition, the city's sanitation department was not responsible for garbage collection in public housing, which was managed by the National Capital Housing Authority. In the public housing area of Stanton Road and Alabama Avenue in the southeast part of the city, for example, some residents complained that garbage collectors themselves were partially to blame for the continued presence of rats. Residents charged that sanitation workers dented empty cans as they threw them from garbage trucks back into place on the sides of streets and alleys. Dents made it impossible to secure lids properly. Others claimed garbage collectors did not come regularly, despite scheduled Tuesday and Thursday pickups. Other times, city sanitation workers left behind garbage in certain areas, claiming it was under the jurisdiction of the housing authority maintenance crews or private contractors hired by landlords of large apartment buildings.[173] The blurred lines of responsibility and mix of actors involved—different city agencies owning different parcels of land, public and private waste collectors, and residents—made consistent and complete garbage collection rare.[174] This lack of coordinated investment allowed garbage-eating rats to proliferate, making them an unavoidable presence in D.C.'s neighborhoods.

The disproportionate presence of garbage and rats in poor African American neighborhoods was an environmental injustice. Though this crisis occurred more than a decade before the official start of the environmental justice movement, many residents and some policy makers, like environmental justice groups who would follow in later decades, understood rats

[173] "Pride Fights Rats and Frustration," *Washington Daily News*, Oct 18, 1967; Orville Green, "Southeast project residents call for Pride 'rat-patrol'," *Washington Afro American*, October 31, 1967.
[174] "Pride Fights Rats and Frustration,"; Green, "Southeast project residents call for Pride 'rat-patrol'."

and garbage as environmental hazards caused by decades of racially discriminatory policy.[175] They were indicative of housing policies like redlining and restrictive covenants that did not allow African Americans to leave inner-city neighborhoods for suburbs or more affluent parts of the city. They represented the paucity of municipal and federal funds for services like code enforcement and garbage collection in predominantly African American neighborhoods. They also epitomized the lack of nationwide attention to the health of African Americans; rats were known to bite and disfigure children, and they spread deadly diseases. The physical and emotional violence involved in rat infestations—from killing rats in one's home to fear that children would be bitten while they slept—was just the most visceral manifestation of broader social and environmental injustice inflicted upon African American urban residents in mid-century.[176]

At the same time that D.C.'s majority African American residents were confronting deteriorating environments in which to live, work, and play, they were fighting for political control of their city.[177] For nearly a century, D.C. had been governed by a Presidentially appointed three-member Board of Commissioners and by subcommittees within the Senate and House of Representatives. In essence, a white national political establishment controlled the lives of D.C. residents. By the 1960s when D.C. had become majority African American, "Home Rule" for the city was widely recognized as a civil rights issue. In 1967, President Johnson signed the Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1967, which finally granted partial control to District residents by appointing a city council and mayor, rather than the appointed Board of

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[175] Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1), (2000): 12-40; Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).
[176] Dawn Biehler, *Pests In the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 150-152.
[177] Scholars and activists in the environmental justice movement often identify goals of clean, safe, healthy environments in which to "live, work, and play."

Commissioners. It would not be until 1974 that D.C. was granted full Home Rule and residents were allowed to elect their officials. Meanwhile, national programs under Johnson's War on Poverty, including his Model Cities program, incrementally gave economic and political influence to poor African American urban residents nationwide, including those in majority-African American Washington, D.C. National Civil Rights legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, also provided protections against workplace and housing discrimination. In was in this context that Pride, the War on Rats, and city sanitation workers sought to implement their visions of how life for D.C.'s African American residents could improve, and who should be the ones to make these improvements.

II. The Built Environment in Waste-Based Social Movements

It is not entirely surprising that Pride, the War on Rats, and city sanitation workers—groups driven primarily to improve the experiences of African American residents and workers—would focus their actions on the presence of urban waste. Scholars of environmental justice and urban waste have long documented that since the country's founding, racialized people have disproportionately resided or worked with urban waste, whether garbage, air pollution, contaminated water, or other environmental hazards.[178] By the turn of the twentieth century, as industries created more waste and a growing middle class consumed more goods, sanitation labor became a necessary part of urban life. The growing field included those who collected garbage, traded junk, swept streets, washed clothes, and cleaned homes and businesses. Racial prejudices and employment opportunities reinforced the segregation of racial and ethnic

[178] Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping In Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism"; Lindsey Dillon, "Race, Waste, and Space: Brownfield Redevelopment and Environmental Justice at the Hunters Point Shipyard" *Antipode* 46(5) (2014):1205–1221; Zimring, *Clean And White.*

minorities—including African Americans and Jewish, Italian, Chinese, and Latino immigrants—into sanitation trades.[179] As European immigrants in the United States became increasingly redefined as white following World War II, they either abandoned sanitation trades or moved into white-collar positions.[180] In many postwar cities, African American men came to dominate sanitation work, particularly waste collection and street cleaning.

Scholars working worldwide have noted that those who work with dirt have been demeaned by societies as dirty themselves.[181] Historian Carl Zimring writes that employment in American waste trades has had as much to do with supply and demand of jobs as with social constructions of race, which have posited whites as clean and pure and dark-skinned people as dirty.[182] Sarah Moore notes that "people associated with garbage are often portrayed as dirty, defiled, dangerous outsiders" while Rosalind Fredericks writes that "labelling people and places as dirty/clean is thus all bound up with the socio-spatial ordering of society."[183] African American men comprised the majority of workers in Pride, the War on Rats, and in D.C.'s sanitation department. Their majority was neither unusual nor problematic for the dominant white establishment.

Despite social constructions of waste workers as dirty and outsiders, geographers, historians, and anthropologists have explored the political power that marginalized people can possess when they organize to control the circulation and accumulation of urban waste.[184] These

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[179] Zimring, *Clean And White*, 109-136.
[180] Ibid., 169-175.
[181] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); Zimring, *Clean and White*; Sarah Moore, "The Politics of Garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico" *Society and Natural Resources* 21(7) (2008): 597–610; Rosalind Fredericks, "Disorderly Dakar: The Cultural Politics of Household Waste in Senegal's Capital City" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51(3) (2013): 435-458.
[182] Zimring, *Clean and White*.
[183] Moore, "The Politics of Garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico," 604; Fredericks, "Disorderly Dakar," 438.
[184] Moore, "The Politics of Garbage in Oaxaca, Mexico"; Fredericks, "Disorderly Dakar"; Max Liboiron, "Tactics of Waste, Dirt and Discard in the Occupy Movement." *Social Movement Studies* 11(3–4) (2012): 393–401;

studies are explicit in their focus on the materiality and affective qualities of waste itself. They stress that the disgust that waste solicits make it an often-ignored yet powerful object to be mobilized for social and political aims. As Moore notes, "The disgust and revulsion provoked by waste become powerful political forces."[185] Historian Malcolm McLaughlin, writing specifically about rats, explains, "Rats—universally despised and widely viewed as objects of disgust—provided a particularly emotive and provocative symbol around which a community could unite and make a statement about the urban environment."[186] However, these studies often fail to recognize waste *spaces* in the same way; the built environment is often treated as a backdrop where waste accumulates and movements take place, rather than as an material and sensory object of study as well.

This chapter shifts focus from waste to the built environment of waste. Existing studies which do pay attention to the active role of the built environment in waste-based urban social movements most often note the repressive qualities of the spaces where waste concentrates. Historians of public health and urban planning note, for example, that the confined hidden spaces of nineteenth-century alleys were widely understood by social reformers as sources of miasma and as breeding grounds of disease and immorality. As seen in Chapter One, these qualities led to demolition of alleys and dispossession for groups who lived or worked in them.[187] However, for marginalized groups living and working along alleys in 1960s Washington, D.C., the built

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Forthcoming M. Rafi Arefin, "Infrastructural Discontent in the Sanitary City: Waste, Revolt, and Repression in Cairo" *Antipode* (2019).

[185] Sarah A. Moore, "Garbage Matters: Concepts in New Geographies of Waste" *Progress in Human Geography* 36(6) (2012), 10.

[186] McLaughlin, "The Pied Piper of the Ghetto: 546.

[187] Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1892); Friedrich Engels, "The Great Towns," 1845, 11-16 in *The Blackwell City Reader* eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Janet Kemp, *Report of the Tenement House Commission of Louisville,* Louisville, KY, 1909; Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington*.

environment of alleys made them not spaces of repression, but powerful spaces of organizing and resistance.

Alleys were essential to the success of these efforts because they were (and still are) contradictory spaces. They are both everywhere in the city and barely noticed; they are part of daily life, yet rarely meaningful. Like streets and sidewalks, alleys are part of the taken-for-granted landscape of cities, so commonplace as to be unremarkable. Alleys certainly vary across the city: the materials that comprise them differs—some are paved, others are brick or stone—and the frequency and quality of their maintenance varies. Some alleys are lined with detached single-family homes, others with rowhouses, office buildings, vacant lots, or commercial districts. Yet because of their ubiquity as an urban form, when something unusual happens in them, it affects—or at least resonates with—all parts of the city.

Alleys also, paradoxically, function as both public and private space. Nearly all alleys are public land and therefore space for municipal infrastructure. In particular, alleys citywide are sites of regular garbage collection. City garbage collectors and street cleaners come through to remove waste. In the 1960s, the presence of alleys running alongside the back of building lots, the presence of waste in alleys, and the presence of predominantly African American male garbage collectors, was a normal part of city life. This was the case for all residents of the segregated city, whether poor, rich, Black, or white.

Yet alleys also function as private spaces. Even when they are legally public land, back spaces like alleys, parking lots, or back yards are often treated as private space because they are less visible and less accessible. They are, as sociologist Erving Goffman described, using the metaphor of theater, places "where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the

audience will intrude."[188] Indeed, when entering alleys, Pride workers, War on Rats employees, and city sanitation workers wore uniforms to alert residents of their presence. In residential areas, alleys are intimate spaces where private activities of the domestic realm extend into public space. Whether entering or existing a home, visiting neighbors, parking a vehicle, or even taking out the trash, those who use alleys did not expect to come across others, unless they are neighbors similarly conducting these mundane domestic tasks. Other activities in alleys thus come into direct conflict with the intimate rhythms of daily experience.

For Pride, the War on Rats, and city sanitation workers, focusing social movements in alleys meant making their actions impossible to ignore. In this physical landscape, they could simultaneously reach a citywide audience and also penetrate the private domestic sphere. Though they worked at different scales—Pride in one neighborhood, the War on Rats in multiple neighborhoods, and city sanitation workers citywide—they each approached alleys as public infrastructure in which they could have a direct impact on the private experiences and behaviors of residents. Alleys thus became sites where plans for achieving racial equity took place.

III. "Not Just Any Old Jive Gig": Youth Pride, Inc.

In 1967, Marion Barry, who had recently come to Washington, D.C. as the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, connected with Carroll Harvey, the director of the D.C. government's office of community renewal. Combining Barry's organizing background and rapport with young men of the inner city and Harvey's established policy experience, the two African American men founded Youth Pride, Inc., or Pride.[189] They created the organization

[188] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 54.
[189] Barry would later become famous as D.C.'s "Mayor for Life" for his tenure as mayor in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. For more on Barry's background and political life, see Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*. For more on Harvey's background and the origins of Pride, see "Chapter 3: Pride" of *Dream City*, p.52-66.

to employ young Black inner-city men to patrol the alleys in their neighborhoods. Wearing bright green, Army-style work suits, these young men swept trash, cleared abandoned furniture, laid rat poison, and bludgeoned live rats. Pride's chairman and public face, Rufus (Catfish) Mayfield, was only twenty years old himself and served as a role model to Pride workers. Pride employees gained technical skills and employment experience, and they worked primarily in the Cardozo neighborhood in the northwest part of the city, where many of them also lived.

Like grassroots environmental justice groups in other cities, that have since set out to mitigate the negative health effects of environmental hazards by halting operations of sewage treatment plants or incinerators, removing contaminated soil, or replacing lead pipes that carry drinking water,[190] Pride targeted rats as just the most visceral manifestation of broader social and environmental injustice inflicted upon African American urban residents. Like environmental justice groups that would form in the following decades, Pride's founders saw environmental remediation as not the only end goal, but also as an avenue for having a seat at decision-making tables. For Pride, the ultimate goal was not just a seat at the table for Black Washingtonians, but for Black residents to have control over their own lives through owning and operating their own businesses. Pride provided steady employment through alley cleaning, just the first of other economic ventures to follow including a landscaping business, a painting business, and a car service station. For Pride, the alleys of urban neighborhoods were a place to kickstart Black economic independence.

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[190] Vernice Miller, Moya Hallstein, and Susan Quass, "Feminist politics and environmental justice: Women's community activism in West Harlem, New York," in *Feminist Political Ecology*, edited by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara, Thomas-Slayter and Esther Wangari (London: Routledge, 1996,) 62-85; Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010); Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); "Flint Rising," http://flintrising.com/, accessed August 20, 2018.

Pride saw hiring young Black inner-city men to kill rats and clean alleys as a way to engage them in the principles of Black pride and Black ownership. As Mayfield stated of its recruitment practices, "Our application is simple. We ask 'Do you want to work? Do you want to mess up the program? Are you ashamed of being Black?' If he is ashamed of being Black, there is nothing we can do for him."[191] One of Pride's later publications reflected on its founding, "Youth Pride, Inc. was conceived for, designed by, and directed toward inner-city Blacks." It went on to describe Pride's goals in Black empowerment: "Pride distinguishes itself by this special blend of double barreled manpower and economic development knowledge used in the attack on 'The Status Quo,' 'business as usual', and 'self-hate' philosophies of the present bleak moment." Pride sought to create a "world dedicated to a total man, a self-sufficient man" (underline original).[192] Its mission went far beyond cleaning up urban alleys.

Pride did not identify explicitly as a Black Power organization, but its focus on self-determination and social, political, and economic empowerment of African Americans by African Americans gave it much in common with Black Power organizations elsewhere in the country. As opposed to more widely studied Black Power mobilization around political and social gains, less has been written about Black economic programs of the late 1960s.[193] Yet economic self-determination was essential to the Black Power agenda. Whether Black Power economic enterprises embraced capitalism or rejected it outright, scholars Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig note that "those who engaged the business of Black power identified with commonly held goals—self-determination, community controls, and economic independence."[194]

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[191] Elsie Carper, "Mayfield Discounts Effects of Agitators," *Washington Post*, August 24, 1967.
[192] Youth Pride, Incorporated, "Holiday Booklet: The Opening of Tuskegee Institute," booklet, July 1969. Pride, Inc. Vertical File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections.
[193] Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, eds., *The Business of Black Power. Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012).
[194] Ibid., 2.

Pride's goals for economic independence were clear, but its origins necessarily contained contradictions. Like many Black Power organizations, Pride ideologically opposed the white power structure, but it lacked capital to get its programming off the ground and therefore turned to the federal government. While conservative members of the Republican party denounced Pride as a "junior black power movement" that should not receive federal funds, Pride did not satisfy hardliner Black Power activists either, who were skeptical of the organization's willingness to take government money and cooperate with white federal officials.[195] Hill and Rabig write of this paradox for Black Power ambitions nationwide: "Reclaiming and resurrecting these cities would in turn require similarly massive reinvestment and financial support from the foundations, corporations, and government agencies at the heart of Black power's critique."[196] During Johnson's War on Poverty, the best way to secure funding was through government agencies. Pride needed to access federal funds to have a chance at success.

While Pride was far from an apolitical program designed to eliminate rats and garbage, it temporarily embraced stereotypes of Black men as belonging with and working in waste. It employed what literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously called "strategic essentialism" to secure funding so that it could ultimately launch more economic and political enterprises.[197] Pride's stated mission to hire Black men to clean Black alleys did nothing to dispel racialized understandings of deteriorating inner-city environments as belonging with African Americans. Its decision to employ Black men in waste work in alleys also reinforced the longstanding history of racial minorities' place in waste trades.[198]

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[195] Carl Bernstein, "Officials Praise Pride for Rat War Victories," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1967; Musgrove, *Chocolate City,* 350.
[196] Hill and Rabig, *The Business of Black Power*, 10.
[197] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
[198] Zimring, *Clean And White*, 109-136

In the beginning of August, 1967, Barry convinced Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz to grant Pride an initial grant of $300,000, which would employ approximately 1,000 people over five weeks.[199] Wirtz, a liberal Democrat, believed strongly that job-creation programs were the best way to break cycles of poverty, and Barry sold the program as a way to employ Black youth who hadn't been reached by other War on Poverty programs.[200] In his pitch to Wirtz, Barry left out the plans for economic independence and Black pride. As one reporter reflected just one year later:

> What wasn't known at the time was that the green-jacketed young men had no intention of making a career of killing rats and cleaning alleys. This was nothing more than a bit of theatrical staging for what Pride really had in mind: the establishment of a number of member-owned business.

The reporter continued to reflect that Pride had duped Congress into misunderstanding its real goals: "Conservative members of Congress who might have attempted to derail any really grandiose Pride scheme could be counted on to support the idea of Black folks killing rats and cleaning up their own neighborhoods."[201] For those in power hoping to quell dissent and organizing among inner-city African Americans, providing a grant for Black men to stay in their neighborhoods, and better yet in the undesirable spaces of alleys, seemed to do little to challenge the status quo.

In addition to accepting racialized associations of Black men with waste work and with waste landscapes like alleys, Pride leadership also strategically endorsed Congress's racialized understanding of Pride's youth employment program as an anti-riot measure. Riots were taking place in cities across the country—the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders reported 164 disorders in just the first nine months of 1967—and the U.S. government was eager

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[199] "'Pride' Youngsters at Work," *Washington Star*, August 8, 1967.
[200] Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City,* 53, 59.
[201] William Raspberry, "Pride, Inc., Has a Dream," *Washington Post,* October 7, 1968.

to fund initiatives that would occupy young disaffected Black men.[202] These initiatives were especially popular in the summer because of a racist assumption that heat made young Black men more aggressive.[203] Wirtz was particularly nervous in late summer of 1967, because federal job programs would end at the beginning of August, leaving hundreds of Black youth unoccupied. He reflected on this time with reporters Harry Jaffe and Tom Sherwood for their 1994 book *Dream City*: "There were an astonishing number of minority kids that didn't have work. Things were getting pretty hot." Wirtz told his aides at the time, "This is a helluva situation. We can't let this place blow up."[204] For Wirtz, Pride came along at just the right moment to keep youth busy at the end of a tense summer.

Hill and Rabig note that Black Power groups needed to "negotiate and partner with white-dominated corporations and government bodies" and so often ended up working with those who were "newly politicized by the urban uprisings."[205] An article on Pride in *Ebony* reported in December 1967, "The first $300,000 was allocated last August when Pride got started on a one-month trial basis at a time when racial holocaust was exploding in other American cities and twitchy government officials were wondering whether D.C. would be next."[206] The Department of Labor was explicit about funding Pride as an anti-riot measure.[207]

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[202] Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam, 1968), 40, cited in Jon Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post-Urban America* (Columbia University Press, 2006), 144.
[203] J. Merrill Carlsmith, and Craig A. Anderson, "Ambient Temperature and the Occurrence of Collective Violence: A New Analysis" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(1979): 337-344; Robert A. Baron, "Aggression as a Function of Ambient Temperatures and Prior Anger Arousal" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 21 (1972): 183-189; Stephen Young, Alasdair Pinkerton, and Klaus Dodds, "The Word on the Street: Rumor, 'race' and the Anticipation of Urban Unrest" *Political Geography* 38 (2014): 57–67.
[204] Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City,* 52.
[205] Hill and Rabig, *The Business of Black Power*, 3-4.
[206] "Pride, Inc.: D.C.'s Cool Answer to Hot Summers," *Ebony*, December 1967, 82.
[207] Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City,* 52-29.

Pride strategically accepted these racist stereotypes, and its assistant director for programs, Mary Treadwell, called its initial $300,000 grant its "catalytic capital."[208] In Pride's one-month trial, it employed 1,000 youth, each paid between $50 and $100 weekly. These young men cleaned 1,400 streets and 1,200 alleys, killing 25,000 rats. By December of 1967, Pride was employing 1,400 youth and had secured another $2.3 million from the Department of Labor with support from Vice President Humphry, congressmen, local government officials, and 30,000 D.C. residents who signed a petition.[209] Pride mostly worked just north of downtown in the Cardozo neighborhood of the city's northwest quadrant, but workers occasionally also ventured to other parts of the city to clean alleys and kill rats when needed.[210]

The spatially limited reach of Pride's work was not an indication of its limited capacity but was an intentional effort to forge connections between Pride employees and their own communities in which they worked. This spatial match of Pride's activities and the experience of the work's impact was essential to the program's success in achieving broader Black pride and empowerment. Anthropologist Robin Nagle, who has documented the working lives of New York City sanitation workers, has written about how city sanitation workers widely report feeling invisible in the spaces where they collect garbage or clear streets. Not only do they feel unseen and ignored; they understand not to transgress unspoken boundaries, such as making small talk with residents.[211] Like the New York sanitation workers, Pride workers had to learn to navigate the "back-facing" landscapes of alleys, spaces oriented to the back, more private side of house and building lots. Yet Pride workers, in contrast, spent their days in the narrow alleys of their

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[208] William Raspberry, "Pride Turns to Job Skills for Youths," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1967.
[209] "Pride, Inc.: D.C.'s Cool Answer to Hot Summers," 82.
[210] "Project Pride," *Washington Post*, August 31, 1967; Iola Johnson, "12th Place Celebrates Rat War," *Washington Daily News*, August 31, 1969; J.Y. Smith, "Pride, Inc. Cleans Alley of Garbage," *Washington Post*, June 15, 1972.
[211] Nagle, *Picking Up,* 16-20.

own communities. They embraced the private nature of alleys, which made them intimate spaces to connect with private residents or businesses who abutted them. For Pride, alleys were safe places to plant community-grown seeds of political mobilization and independence. Even if a given alley did not back against a Pride worker's home specifically, it may have abutted a neighbor's home. With similar claims as residents to the hidden and semi-private back spaces of alleys, Pride workers became an accepted and even welcome presence in this built environment. They were far from invisible or ignored. Harvey reported on community members telling Pride workers what a great job they were doing and giving them treats like Kool-Aid and ice cream to thank them. Pride employees were very much seen, not as intrusive sanitation workers but as community members making their neighborhoods better. The outcomes of Pride's actions directly and immediately benefited residents in African American neighborhoods where they worked.

The spatial match of people working to improve their own communities kept collective labor and resources concentrated in the areas where their benefits were meant to be felt. It also instilled good will and youth pride, which for Pride leadership, was just as important as—if not more important than—cleaning alleys of rats and garbage. Mayfield noted that "dudes" would enjoy "a gig, not just any old jive gig or one that makes a person feel like a fixture, but one that makes you feel like part of an operation."[212] Harvey noted, "We're building pride and dignity by giving youths responsible positions. We've found many leaders with tremendous capabilities among these so-called hard-core youths. Every position here is to be handled by the dudes."[213] This sense of responsibility, Harvey noted, made unemployed youth feel valued: "They're out there seeing the people in the neighborhoods get excited about what they're doing, cleaning up

[212] Robert G. Kaiser, "Pride Leaders Are Looking Ahead," *Washington Post*, September 7, 1967.
[213] "Pride, Inc.: D.C.'s Cool Answer to Hot Summers," 88.

their alleys."[214] Just as important was the fact that Pride was completely run by African Americans. Treadwell explained, "White organizers just perpetuate the stereotype that Blacks are incapable of doing it themselves."[215]

Ultimately, Pride did not have long-lasting impacts of curbing rat infestation and poor alley conditions. It lacked the necessary coordination with and support from local and federal agencies to have a sustained impact. In the Cardozo neighborhood where Pride worked, the percentage of buildings with signs of rats—droppings, tracks, or burrows—actually rose from 27 to 32 percent between 1969 and 1970. U.S. Public Health Service inspectors attributed the increase in rats to "a lowering of the level of general environmental sanitation." Unlike the Model Cities area, Pride's area had more uncovered and overflowing garbage and trash cans as well as deteriorating buildings owned by absentee landlords.[216] These were conditions outside the purview of Pride's programming.

Given the amount of national attention to rat eradication and sanitation practices, it is likely the Department of Labor knew that Pride would be unsuccessful in redeeming the built environment of D.C.'s urban alleys. For the Department of Labor, Pride was an anti-riot and short-term employment measure; paying young men to clean alleys would keep them busy and out of trouble. The program allowed the federal government to counter riots while keeping the status quo of Black people and waste as separate from the white establishment. But Pride alone could not stop riots; by 1968, downtown D.C. would be ravaged by riots following Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination.

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[214] Robert G. Kaiser, "Pride Director Sells Hard Work and Pride," *Washington Post*, August 10, 1967.
[215] Leon Dash, "Pride is Proud of Its Record, Looks to a New Role," *Washington Post*, November 6, 1967.
[216] Claudia Levy, "PHS Finds Rat Population Halved in Model Cities Area," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1971.

Pride, on the other hand, did not see alley cleaning and rat killing as its main objectives, but as springboards to Black economic self-determination. With this bigger goal in mind, Pride was more successful. The narrow, marginalized space of the alley not only kept undesirable activities like rat killing and garbage collecting from outsiders' views, it was also essential for hiding Pride's ambitious goals and Black Power organizing from its early funders. Both the private nature of alleys and the spatial limits of Pride's work allowed it to build capacity to launch other efforts. Toward the initial grant's expiration, the *Washington Post* reported that, "Pride organizers insist there never was any intention for the group to remain an anti-riot, anti-rat patrol."[217] Until it folded in 1974 Pride did create economic opportunities for the city's young African American men. By 1973 it had secured millions more in federal funds and had several job training and Black-owned enterprises including painting, maintenance, landscaping and gardening, property management, and a full car service center.[218] Even after Pride ceased to exist, its members and leadership went on to be major players in D.C.'s political scene. Most famously, Pride launched the career of co-founder Marion Barry, who had been elected to the School Board in 1971, was elected to the city's first elected City Council in 1974, and became the city's mayor in 1978. While Pride failed in eliminating rats and garbage in inner-city alleys, it successfully used the space of alleys to mobilize for Black pride and economic and political success.

[217] William Raspberry, "Pride Turns to Job Skills for Youths," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1967.
[218] Pride Economic Enterprises, Inc., "Pride Economic Enterprises, brochure," 1973, Pride, Inc. Vertical File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections.

IV. "Kill Them! Starve Them! Keep Them Out!": The War on Rats

In 1965, William F. Roeder, the assistant superintendent of the city's Sanitation and Equipment Division, pointed to the multilateral investment needed to solve the rat problem: "It doesn't do any good for one guy to clean his mess, if his neighbor doesn't do the same. The rats will just shift garbage cans, but they'll still be there. … It would take a massive co-ordinated program of the Health Department, the Housing Division and the Sanitation Department—plus, of course, the co-operation of the public." Roeder expressed doubts that this would happen.[219]

President Johnson also saw rat eradication as a multilateral issue involving housing reform, health, sanitation, and crucially, civil rights. Like residents and community activists in D.C. and elsewhere, Johnson agreed that rats were a symptom of systemic disempowerment of poor African Americans. The same year that Johnson released Washington, D.C. from full Congressional control, he proposed the Rat Extermination Act of 1967, which would devote forty million dollars to comprehensive national rat control and would be administered by the newly created Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). However, Congressional conservatives shot down the bill, arguing that residents themselves were to blame for not properly managing their homes. 87 percent of Republicans opposed the bill and several Republican legislators laughed at the proposal. They saw rat infestation as an outcome of laziness in African American urban neighborhoods, not a legitimate pest control issue. Johnson angrily reflected that the same Congressmen had no qualms about funding pest control in mostly white agricultural areas: "We are spending Federal funds to protect our livestock from rodents and predatory animals. The least we can do is give our children the same protection we give our livestock." Babies, including an eight-month-old boy who had died from rat bites in Washington,

[219] Ken Schlossberg, "There's No Need to Have All These Rats," *The Washington Daily News*, January 27, 1965.

D.C., just two days before the bill failed, were most vulnerable to disease and disfigurement from rat bites.[220] Congressional Republicans failed to see rats as symptomatic of decades of racially discriminatory policy.

A few months later, a twenty-million-dollar provision for rat control was included in the Partnership for Health Amendments of 1967.[221] Johnson noted at that time in his remarks to Congress, "some important people—I am told—thought it was a joke when we sent up the rat control bill a few months earlier. Some joked about it. The bill we are signing today shows that the American people are not laughing about it. And it shows that the Congress and the country were listening."[222] The budget item was moved from HUD to the U.S. Public Health Service.

In December 1968, Congress granted D.C. $1.1 million to start a War on Rats, one of fifty-two rat-control programs funded by the U.S. Public Health Service in cities across the country.[223] The year before, the D.C. government had estimated that rats caused ten million dollars in damages to the city each year.[224] Just as Roeder had implied was necessary, D.C.'s program was a joint governmental and citizen effort. The city's health, housing inspection, and sanitation departments worked with the U.S. Public Health Service. Also integral to the effort was the Johnson administration's Model Cities program, started in 1966 under HUD to increase citizen participation in comprehensive planning.[225] While the funding came from the U.S. Public

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[220] "Republicans Laugh as Slum Dwellers Battle Rats," *The Democrat*, VII.7, July-August 1967; Rat Extermination Act of 1967, H.R. 11000, 90th Cong. (1967); McLaughlin, "The Pied Piper of the Ghetto"; Biehler, *Pests In the City,* 159-160.

[221] Partnership for Health Amendments of 1967, Pub.L.No. 90-174, 81 Stat. 533 (1967).

[222] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks Upon Signing the Partnership for Health Amendments of 1967," December 5, 1967. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28584; "Rat Extermination Bill Signed," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1967.

[223] Sue Cronk, "D.C. Gets Million to Kill Rats," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1968; Claudia Levy, "PHS Finds Rat Population Halved in Model Cities Area," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1971; Biehler, *Pests In the City,* 164.

[224] Stuart Auerbach, "City Asks Federal Aid For a 'War on Rats' in Model Cities Area," *Washington Post*, May 15, 1968.

[225] Claudia Levy, "PHS Finds Rat Population Halved in Model Cities Area," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1971.

Health Service, not HUD as originally intended, D.C.'s War on Rats took place in its Model Cities area, a 1,500-acre string of neighborhoods in the central part of the city. More specifically, the War on Rats concentrated in the alleys and streets near the Northwest 14th and 7th streets and the Northeast H street corridor, home to 17,600 families.[226]

While rat eradication may have seemed to be the primary goal of the War on Rats, it actually figured less prominently in War on Rats literature than the goal of encouraging Model City's poor African American residents to improve themselves and their communities. The three main purposes outlined in the first War on Rats annual report in 1970 were: 1) "to provide new opportunities in jobs offering useful, meaningful employment," 2) "to encourage city dwellers to improve their own environment, thereby helping to remove the causes of rats," and 3) "to improve services to residents which would support and strengthen their efforts to help themselves."[227] Absent in these goals was acknowledgement of structural disadvantages, such as workplace discrimination, predatory landlords, or discriminatory housing policy, that made maintaining a rat-free environment difficult. In this sense, the program aligned more with the Congressional Republicans' views that rat problems resulted from failure to take personal responsibility for proper garbage disposal. Geographer Dawn Biehler writes of the U.S. Public Health Service rat-control programs, "The revised program was a mixed bag for communities: they received modest funding to address the immediate problems of rats, but local grants came attached with strings of discipline, blame, and demands for physical work matched by limited new investment."[228] While it's true that Pride also addressed structural disadvantages through individual employment and community empowerment, it—unlike the War on Rats—had a larger

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[226] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* 5, Rats Vertical File, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections, (hereafter cited as Rats VF).
[227] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* 1.
[228] Biehler, *Pests In the City*, 162.

vision of African Americans controlling economic and political power. The War on Rats limited its vision for African American urban residents to individual self-help and behavioral change.

The War on Rats did acknowledge one structural cause of rat infestation: a lack of city services. Yet even as it set out to improve services, it emphasized that these services would "support and strengthen their [residents'] efforts to help themselves."[229] The housing inspection department increased code enforcement, and the city sanitation department increased trash collection.[230] The war also provided funds for new compactor vehicles that could collect combined garbage (food waste) and rubbish, allowing more frequent collection—twice per week—thereby reducing available food for rats.[231] The vehicles were piloted by city sanitation workers in the twelve waste-collection routes of the War on Rats area. A $7,500 line in the budget also provided free cans and lids to those who needed them.

To achieve its goal "to provide new opportunities in jobs offering useful, meaningful employment," the War on Rats hired neighborhood-based "environmental health aides" and "baiting teams." Environmental health aides earned two dollars per hour and worked part-time. They patrolled streets and alleys before and after trash collection and wrote weekly reports on what they found.[232] Baiting teams were composed of men who patrolled back alleys setting baiting boxes in areas where rats would be likely to find them. One article in the *Washington Afro-American* announced in 1970, the program's first year, "For months now, they [the War on Rats baiting teams] have been plying the alleys of the Model Cities area, first target in a

[229] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* 1.
[230] "War-on-Rats corps dons smart-looking new uniforms," *Washington Afro-American*, May 19, 1970.
[231] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970.*
[232] Harvey Kabaker, "Training for Inspectors Opens Rat War Phase," *Washington Star*, April 19, 1970.

proposed three-year program."[233] Like Pride, the War on Rats claimed alleys as spaces for men to gain experience with steady employment.

Like Pride workers who wore uniforms, the War on Rats baiting teams also wore uniforms with the War on Rats logo. As with Pride, the uniforms professionalized the position, but they also made workers' presence in back alleys understandable to residents who might otherwise be wary. The *Washington Afro-American* article continued, "The most likely places for rats are often unlikely places for groups of strange men to be seen. For ready identification to area residents, the War on Rats Project decided that uniforms would be an easily recognized identification."[234] Unlike Pride workers who embraced the private, semi-domestic status of neighborhood alleys for community connections, the War on Rats found the public-private nature of alleys to be more delicate. While government agencies did not doubt that alleys were public space under their purview, they also acknowledged alleys were also "unlikely places for groups of strange men to be seen." War on Rats employees would only last for the duration of the funding; residents were not meant to become accustomed to the men who were patrolling their alleys.

The largest component of the War on Rats was its educational mission. While the equipment and employment aspects of the program took capital investment from public agencies, thereby implying the public status of the streets and alleys where rats thrived, the educational campaign reminded residents that rat control was ultimately a private affair. It took seriously its goal "to encourage city dwellers to improve their own environment, thereby helping to remove the causes of rats." Neighborhood residents were enrolled in the program's self-help principles through a multi-part, public-education campaign. The "ratmobile," a converted and decorated

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[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.

house trailer, housed mobile educational exhibits; War on Rats staff conducted educational tours for students and other interested groups; health educators hosted assemblies at community meetings and schools, which featured the undesirable puppet "Rudy Rat"; the Smithsonian Museum's Anacostia Museum, in D.C.'s Anacostia neighborhood, prepared an entire major exhibit with educational giveaways, titled "The Rat;" and staff conducted house-to-house visits and distributed pamphlets and flyers.[235] Pamphlets instructed residents to keep their trash in lidded cans, to remove furniture and vehicles from yards, to raise materials like lumber and pipes off the ground, to clean up dog manure, bird seed, or other potential rat food sources, to repair holes in basement windows or foundation walls, and to use rat poison.[236] The program was explicit in its purpose: "In this project, every aspect of the program converges on one goal. … All these are directed to changing human behavior."[237]

One brochure featured an African American family called the Smiths who followed all the appropriate rat precautions and lived happily rat-free. Photographs of the Smith father repairing holes under the porch, the Smith mother putting trash in a lidded can, and the young Smith son helping his parents accompanied a story about their rat-eradication process, which concluded, "the rat ate the poison and that was the end of the rat. And no more rats would come to the Smith's house … because there was nothing there to eat and there was no place to live." While the story paints a picture of calm domesticity, the brochure also used sensational language that mimicked the violence of war. The juxtaposition of photographs of the smiling Smith family

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[235] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* 13.
[236]Government of the District of Columbia, Department of Sanitary Engineering, Bureau of Sanitation Services, "Kitchen Kard for the Residents of the Model Cities Area," Rats VF; Government of the District of Columbia, Department of Public Health, Department of Economic Development, Department of Sanitary Engineering, "Do Your Own Thing," January 1970, Rats VF; Government of the District of Columbia, Department of Public Health, "How to Get Rid of Rats," January 1970, Rats VF; Government of the District of Columbia, Department of Environmental Services, Department of Economic Development, "A Rat that Failed," 1972, Rats VF.
[237] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* 13.

with red capital letters exclaiming, "Kill Them! Starve Them! Keep them Out!" promoted the idea that daily violence against rats was necessary for a happy domestic life. A close-up photograph of a dead rat under the heading "A Rat that Failed" sits uncomfortably next to a photograph of the hugging and laughing Smith family with the reminder, "If you have rats in your neighborhood DO WHAT THE SMITH FAMILY DID!"[238] These materials clearly instructed how to take individual responsibility for eradicating rats.

The campaign was also explicit about the consequences of failing to change behavior. For example, the 1972 War on Rats annual report includes a series of posters, presumably replicas of posters that had been distributed in the War on Rats' educational and promotional campaigns. Each poster featured a photograph of a giant rat, superimposed on a photograph of a daily domestic scene—children boarding a school bus or the view from a kitchen window. Each had the same ominous phrase, in capital letters meant to resemble rodent scratches: "YOUR ___, OR THEIRS?" Whether the text read "Your alley? Or theirs?" or "Your city? Or theirs?" the messages of the seven posters were the same: without immediate action to eliminate rats through the steps outlined by the War on Rats, the rodents would take over even the most intimate parts of residents' lives.[239] The graphics were specifically designed to scare residents into compliance.

In treating alleys and streets of the Model Cities area as both public and private space, the War on Rats was able to mobilize the resources of public agencies and also inspire—or at least threaten—private citizens to take control of their private domestic realm. With federal funds, coordinated agency efforts, and a major citizen education campaign, the War on Rats was relatively successful in reducing the rat population in D.C.'s Model Cities area. By the end of the first year, the percentage of buildings showing signs of rats in the targeted neighborhoods had

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[238] "A Rat that Failed."
[239] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1972,* Rats VF.

dropped from 48 percent in 1969 to 18 percent in 1970.[240] 2,704 tons of solid waste were removed in excess of normal collection and 350 vehicles were removed.[241]

However, outside the Model Cities area, in neighborhoods without federal intervention, rats continued to be a problem. In fact, in both low-income and affluent neighborhoods, rat populations continued to be extreme. As Thomas C. Potter, deputy chief of the Health Inspection Service stated in 1973, "The 'war' has been successful in the inner city, but the over-all population is as bad as it's always been."[242] The War on Rats did not address underlying social and political conditions that allowed rats to thrive, in the Model Cities area or in other parts of the city. And, it didn't last; like other initiatives that started with Great Society funding under Johnson, the rat-eradication and alley-cleaning projects within D.C.'s Model Cities area slowed to a halt as federal funding ebbed.[243]

V. "Let the City Stink": The Sanitation Strike of 1970

Integral to both Pride and the War on Rats was the expertise and experience of D.C.'s sanitation workers. The Department of Sanitary Engineering provided equipment to both operations, and sanitation workers' continued diligence in routine collection was necessary to their success. The Department of Sanitary Engineering was critical to more than just these two programs; it was responsible for the collection and disposal of waste citywide. Thus, D.C.'s

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[240] Claudia Levy, "PHS Finds Rat Population Halved in Model Cities Area," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1971.
[241] District of Columbia, *War on Rats Progress Report 1970,* D.C. Public Library Special Collections.
[242] Fred Geiger, "An Abundance of Rats," *Washington Star*, (date missing), 1973.
[243] Clement, "Wagner-Steagall and the D.C. Alley Dwelling Authority." New alley cleaning policy in the city's Department of Environmental Services did last longer; in 1973, sanitation crews shifted from trying to keep all of the city's alleys cleaned regularly to cleaning alleys in lower-income areas on a weekly basis and all others as needed. In 1976, it reduced house trash pick-up crews in order to devote more time and manpower to alley and street cleaning. Yet these programmatic changes occurred amid increasing disinvestment in the city, and therefore only shifted the location and timing of sanitation labor without drastic effect on the overall environmental conditions of the city. See Jay Matthews, "Cleaning Alleys is D.C. Headache," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1974; Paul W. Valentine, "City Trash Change Starts Wednesday," *Washington Post*, February 28, 1976.

majority African American sanitation workers held immense power to influence public perceptions and policy through their manipulation of the city's waste. They used the city's alleys to tackle a different outcome of racial inequality: workplace discrimination.

In the late 1960s, on the heels of federal Civil Rights legislation, African American sanitation workers nationwide began to publicize their poor working conditions and wages as compared with their white counterparts. Most famously, Memphis's sanitation workers went on strike in 1968 to protest racial discrimination. They were soon followed by striking sanitation workers in Atlanta making similar demands.[244] The workplace situation was similar in Washington, D.C. By 1970, the majority of D.C.'s 1,700 sanitation employees were African American men. Despite their majority, African Americans held only 30 percent of white-collar positions. They were disproportionately concentrated in the lowest-paid jobs with exposure to poor working environments. For example, the stations where trash collectors and street cleaners reported for work regularly flooded, lacked running water and working toilets, had intermittent electricity, and had no space for men to eat lunch or take breaks.[245] Most African American workers were classified as laborers and earned just $2.94 per hour, the lowest wage, compared with labor leaders who earned $3.23, drivers, who earned $3.30, and foremen, who earned between $3.87 and $4.73. Many of the men spent their days collecting solid waste or cleaning in back alleys.[246]

Following the lead of Memphis and Atlanta, D.C.'s 1,700 sanitation workers went on strike on May 19, 1970, after two days of walk-outs. Like the striking workers in the other cities,

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[244] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*; Robert F. Levey, "Sanitation Dispute Becomes Polarized," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1970.
[245] "A dank, filthy sanitation tour," *Washington Daily News*, May 14, 1970.
[246] Alex Ward, "Trashmen's Study of Bias Cites Crisis," *Washington Post*, April 22, 1970; District of Columbia, *Solid Waste Management Plan: Status Report 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1971), 38.

they wore "I am a Man" buttons and decried low wages, poor working conditions, and racial discrimination. They asked for a ten percent wage raise, or at least thirty-five cents more per hour. The group Government Workers United Against Racial Discrimination (GUARD) helped expose conditions in the facilitates where African American sanitation workers worked.[247]

The strike was more than a set of demands; it physically took place in all parts of the city, in alleys where garbage accumulated without regular pickup. Because of trash collection routes and schedules, some parts of the city went without collection for two weeks. One article in the *Washington Post* reported, "Evidence of the strike could be seen all over town by yesterday. Uncollected trash and garbage were piling up on sidewalks in many areas and a number of residents reported seeing rats."[248] The strike also occurred during an unusually hot May; as temperatures reached ninety degrees, the trash overflowing from containers and spreading across sidewalks and alleys began to stink. Because commercial establishments and large institutions, including the federal government, contracted with private agencies, residential areas were hit hardest. There, residents had to navigate mounting trash, the stench of sitting garbage, and scurrying rats on their way to and from their doors.

The strike leaders and the city worked out an agreement three days after the strike's official beginning. The same union that had represented the striking workers in Memphis and Atlanta, Local 1 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), represented D.C.'s striking workers. Unlike the situation in the other cities, D.C.'s striking workers did not face an overtly hostile government; they faced Walter Washington, D.C.'s first African American mayor, appointed by a white Congress after Johnson's

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[247] Alex Ward, "Trashmen Vote Strike Unanimously," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1970; Levey, "Sanitation Dispute Becomes Polarized"; Robert F. Levey and Alex Ward, "Garbage Piles up as Strike Spreads," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1970.
[248] Richard E. Prince and Alex Ward, "Trashmen to End Strike on Monday," *Washington Post*, May 22, 1970.

Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1967. Instead of exposing a racist regime at the top levels of government, the strike exposed D.C.'s first government's limited power. One of the mayor's aides said in response to the men's "I am a Man" buttons, "The city has been honest. We know they're men, and we know they're Black men. But the mayor obviously has a great deal of reluctance to get into every one of these. We're being sincere, but with the Hill watching us, we're being cautious." He went on, expressing his own frustration at the mayor's limited capacity to address racial inequality while under the close watch of Congress: "The union looks on Washington as just another city. For Christ's sake, it's not Atlanta or Memphis. They ought to know that."[249]

In fact, the union leadership did recognize that D.C.'s case was different from that of other cities. Jerry Wurf, the international president of AFSCME commented: "You'll notice that the men wore buttons saying 'I am a man.' This was raised in Memphis and Atlanta, too. But in Memphis you had an anti-labor white supremacist, and in Atlanta a self-described liberal who figured that he could count on the Black community so he tried to crawl in with the power structure."[250] Wurf commended D.C.'s Mayor Washington for not discrediting the striking sanitation workers, and he also acknowledged that D.C.'s government had very limited ability to effect change as long as Congress still controlled the city's budget. At the end of the negotiations he remarked, "Technically, we've dealt with the government of the U.S., which is the real boss of the District of Columbia."[251]

In the negotiated agreement, the city planned to pay for the increase in costs by using a portion of an $8.5 million appropriation in the city's 1971 budget, which was still pending in

[249] Levey, "Sanitation Dispute Becomes Polarized."
[250] Richard E. Prince, "D.C. Mayor Stands like a Giant to Trashmen's Union Chief," *Washington Post*, May 24, 1970).
[251] Prince and Ward, "Trashmen to End Strike on Monday."

Congress at the time. With this budget plan, workers won a 35-cent raise. Among other concessions, the sanitation department agreed to equalize routes, which included limiting crews to twelve loads per four-day periods, or three loads per day. Wednesday was designated a bulk pickup and alley collection day. In addition, the agreement set out new rules for addressing racial discrimination in the department. Promotions were to be made by seniority, all vacancies were to be posted, there were to be new opportunities for training, and a new system for registering complaints.[252] Following the strike, the mayor requested a comprehensive study of racial discrimination in the Department of Sanitary Engineering. Published in July by the director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Office within the D.C. government, the report further exposed high levels of racial discrimination and validated the striking workers' complaints.[253]

The striking sanitation workers had taken advantage of the fact that alleys—and some fronts streets where garbage collection occurred—were ubiquitous segments of public space across the city. Through their professions, they were experts in these spaces. They could manipulate the material and affective qualities of the built environments that nearly every D.C. resident experienced. When the strike ended on a Friday, workers were insulted that they were expected to work Saturday to clean the city. They refused to return to work until Monday. As one strike leader, Thurmond Hayes, said, "Let the city stink just a little while longer."[254] Even if they were satisfied with the outcomes of the strike, the striking men's decision to let garbage fester for two more days hammered home their indispensability to the functioning of the city. While some residents may have already been used to intermittent garbage collection and were

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[252] LaBarbara Bowman, "Trash Workers Accept Settlement," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1970; Prince and Ward, "Trashmen to End Strike on Monday."
[253] James W. Baldwin, "Analysis of Discrimination within the Department of Sanitary Engineering of the Government of the District of Columbia" (Washington, D.C.: District of Columbia Equal Opportunity Program, 1970).
[254] Prince and Ward, "Trashmen to End Strike on Monday."

already familiar with rats, the garbage strike brought these conditions—albeit for a limited time—to all parts of the city, poor and affluent, white and Black.

Striking sanitation workers turned alleys into sites of dissent. Across Washington, D.C., they allowed garbage to block the narrow passageways, forced residents to encounter rats on their way to and from their homes, and let the stink of festering garbage fill the tight spaces. The alleys' proximity—if not inclusion in—the private domestic realm made the mounting waste impossible for residents to ignore. This disorder ultimately convinced both city and national government to grant higher wages, better working conditions, and an investigation into racial discrimination in the Sanitation Department.

VI. Conclusion

By the late 1960s, rats and garbage were commonplace in alleys of American urban neighborhoods. They thrived due to inconsistent waste management, declining tax revenues to fund municipal services, and rising rates of garbage production nationwide. In Washington, D.C., mounting garbage and reproducing rats reached crisis levels, at the same time that whites fled for the suburbs and the city became increasingly African American. Without sufficient resources for proper maintenance, alleys became the ultimate symbols of neglect of cities in general and of the poor African American urban residents who remained. One could not walk through the narrow passageways without sinking into piles of garbage, fearing broken glass and rusty springs, disturbing whole families of rats, or choking on the stench of trash sitting out for days and weeks on end.

The presence of rats and garbage in alleys provided an opportunity. These built environments were publicly accessible in nearly all of the city's neighborhoods, and they provided access to the private, domestic worlds of the city's residents. By tackling the rat and

garbage crisis, workers gained control over alleys, where they could advance larger agendas on behalf of the city's majority-yet-marginalized African American population.

Pride entered D.C.'s alleys to provide employment, improve inner-city built environments, and inspire pride among young poor African American men. By organizing youth in the alleys, Pride could nurture an agenda for Black economic independence and political action that would ultimately expand beyond the alleys. The War on Rats, on the other hand, entered alleys to encourage poor African American residents to improve the built environments of their own communities. Through public investment in equipment and employment combined with education of private citizens, the War on Rats reduced rat populations. However, with its focus on behavioral change, it left underlying structural disadvantages in Black neighborhoods unaddressed. For city sanitation workers, alleys were a place to exert control by *not* cleaning garbage and killing rats. Though they had the skills and means to improve the physical condition of alleys, they used their professional command of this intimate urban space to make their workplace demands impossible for the city's residents to ignore. For all of these groups, alleys were not simply sites of waste or just symbols of neglect. Their built environments were essential spaces where African American residents and workers could mobilize to achieve broader political, social, and economic gains citywide.

Chapter Three. The Right to the Alley: Legal Struggles over Neighborhood Change in the 1970s

In the summer of 1976, residents of square 15 in Washington, D.C.'s West End neighborhood petitioned the D.C. City Council to reject a proposal that would "close" the alley running though their block. Like other D.C. residents in the 1970s, they likely used their alley to park their cars, bring in groceries, greet neighbors, and dispose of garbage. Surprisingly, however, square 15's residents barely addressed these everyday alley functions in their testimony to the City Council. Instead, the working- and middle-class residents of the West End came together to fight the alley closing because they realized this seemingly small change to the built environment would weaken their claims to their neighborhood for years to come. As the attorney William H. Greer Jr. wrote of alley closings in 1976, "These apparently innocent requests [for alley closings] are the initial groundwork for a really mischievous change in the cityscape"[255]

By the mid-1970s it had become common practice for real estate developers to apply to the D.C. City Council to close public alleys in residential neighborhoods. Once the City Council deemed an alley "useless and unnecessary," it could be "closed," or removed from the public realm. Abutting private landholders—often the real estate developers who initiated the closing—then acquired the land. For developers buying up multiple lots on the same block, this practice allowed them to consolidate their properties. It not only gave them more land on which to build, it allowed them to build larger buildings according to the city's floor-area-ratio policy. In D.C. neighborhoods like Dupont Circle and the West End, a residential area adjacent to the Foggy Bottom neighborhood and George Washington University, alley closings provided developers a

[255] Letter from William H. Greer, Jr. to Mrs. James H. Rowe, Jr., 6 April 1976, Box 23, Folder 4. MS2017 Committee Of 100 On The Federal City Records [Part I], 1932-2003, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries (hereafter cited as MS2017 Committee Of 100 records).

way to circumvent zoning intentions and build high-rise office and residential developments. It was this neighborhood-scale change that residents opposed. The alleys themselves were the least of residents' concerns, yet this often-ignored space became the battleground over the transfer of public land into private hands. The control of alleys was essential for determining the neighborhood's future.

Attention to the phenomenon of alley closings in mid-1970s Washington, D.C. reveals how different groups—long-term residents, real estate developers, and the City Council—navigated land-use law to dictate what functions and what populations D.C.'s urban space should serve. The 1970s were an era of political and economic transition in the nation's capital. In 1967, the majority African American city had acquired from Congress control over its own affairs with the creation of the D.C. City Council and appointment of its first mayor. By late 1973, the city had achieved "Home Rule," under which residents were granted—for the first time—the right to elect their local representatives. The election of an African American government in 1974 marked a civil rights victory, but this new government inherited a city still reeling from the racialized social and economic devastation of 1950s urban renewal and the 1968 riots following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

In the mid-1970s, the city was also in the midst of demographic change yet again. Middle-class African Americans could finally access the suburbs just as more wealthy whites moved into the city. The city remained majority African American, as it had been since the late 1950s, but the Black population peaked around 1970. By 1975, more white residents were moving into the city than out; approximately two thirds of the 41,000 households moving to D.C. between 1970 and 1975 identified as white.[256] These demographic shifts created a city of

[256] Katie Wells, "A Decent Place to Stay: Housing Crises, Failed Laws, and Property Conflicts in Washington, D.C." (Dissertation, Syracuse University, 2014), 91. https://surface.syr.edu/etd/13/.

extreme inequality that was either poor and Black or wealthy and white. The predominantly African American poor left in the city faced a housing crisis, the consequence of speculative real estate practices that had taken quality affordable housing off the market. Downtown neighborhoods like the West End and Dupont Circle, which were multiracial and mixed-income at the beginning of the decade, felt the effects of these changes as much as anyone. It was in this context that the control over alleys in the neighborhoods' individual blocks represented a contestation over control of the city at large.

Ultimately, real estate developers largely won these contests. They were able to convince the City Council that the alleys in question were, according to law, "useless and unnecessary." This then allowed them to consolidate land and build large-scale profit-generating developments. A close examination of these historical contestations over alley closures reveals that developers achieved this legal outcome for two main reasons: 1) The reality of multiple land-use laws and the complicated organization of municipal government made it very difficult for residents to successfully block an alley closure, and 2) the City Council was already politically inclined to grant developers rights to build; the city was desperate for investment following the devaluation of urban land by white flight and riots. Presented with enough evidence in favor of a development-driven alley closure, the Council had no reason to reject an application. The outcomes of these municipal legal procedures had effects far beyond the scale of the alley concerned, and even the scale of the neighborhood.

I. The Legal Geographies of Municipal Governments

Critical urban and legal scholars have highlighted ways that municipal laws governing land use can have discriminatory effects that infringe upon residents' right to the city, or the right

of ordinary people to shape urban processes.[257] City ordinances, such those as those prohibiting being in parks after dark, for example, deny the rights of homeless people to be in public space.[258] Others such as zoning can result in the exclusion of lower-income people, and by extension many racial minorities, from living in residential areas zoned for single-family houses.[259] That the societal impacts of laws are unevenly influenced by and distributed across space is a hallmark of legal geography studies.[260]

Some scholars of legal geography point out that while the usage of law may be politically motivated, and may result in forms of discrimination, land-use laws themselves are not inherently political.[261] Because land-use logics are understood as politically neutral in courts, they nearly always prevail against more abstract claims, like those of citizenship. Therefore, working within the logic of the law, instead of only challenging the enforcement or outcomes of laws, is essential for defending the rights of people to be in public space.[262] In the case of alley closings in 1970s Washington D.C., the most effective arguments against alley closings were those that worked within the logics of the alley-closing law. They were those that used the law's

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[257] Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003); Setha M. Low and Neil Smith eds. 2006. *The Politics of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell, *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[258] Don Mitchell, "The Annihilation of Space by Law: The Roots and Implications of Anti-Homeless Laws in the United States," *Antipode* 29(3) (1997): 303–35; Katherine Beckett and Steven Herbert, *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[259] David Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Richard Ford, "The Boundaries of Race: Political Geography in Legal Analysis," in Nicholas Blomley, David Delaney, and Richard T. Ford eds. *The Legal Geographies Reader: Law, Power, and Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 87-104; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

[260] Blomley, Delaney, and Ford, eds. *The Legal Geographies Reader*; David Delaney, *The Spatial, the Legal and the Pragmatics of World-Making: Nomospheric Investigations* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2010); Irus Braverman, Nicholas Blomley, David Delaney, and Alexandre (Sandy) Kedar, eds. *The Expanding Spaces of Law: A Timely Legal Geography* (Stanford, California: Stanford Law Books, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2014).

[261] Nicholas Blomley, *Rights Of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Mariana Valverde, "Taking 'Land Use' Seriously: Toward an Ontology of Municipal Law." *Law Text Culture* 9 (2005): 34–59.

[262] Ibid.

language and sought to prove alleys were "useful and necessary" for transportation or environmental purposes. They were *not* those that claimed—however true—that alley closings would change land use patterns which could result in resident displacement. In other words, in the law's eye, an alley's value was tied to its usefulness or necessity in the present, not to hypothetical claims that the maintenance of public alleys would prevent future development.

Legal geographers may agree that urban citizens must work within the logic of land-use law to achieve their rights to the city. Yet few legal geographers have examined how and by whom municipal land-use laws are actually enforced in the messy material world. Engaging the language and logics of the law is made difficult when it is unclear to the public which laws are at the root of a problem.

In municipal governments with decades or even centuries of laws on the books, multiple laws may simultaneously influence the same outcome, therefore making it difficult for members of the public to know which law to attach to which phenomenon they observe in the world. Laws may exist for decades without being employed and suddenly find relevance and politically convenient applications far from the intents of those who originally legislated them. These laws, which may be understood to have been replaced by newer and more effective modes of governance, thus still linger and can exert influence.[263]

The ability of laws to re-emerge at various times is a condition of what Valverde calls "seeing like a city," the idea that many forms of land-use governance—whether modernist, such as zoning, or pre-modernist, such as nuisance law—can exist simultaneously and in practice

[263] Valverde, "Taking 'Land Use' Seriously: Toward an Ontology of Municipal Law"; Mariana Valverde, *Everyday Law on the Street: City Governance in an Age of Diversity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Franz von Benda-Beckmann and Keebet von Benda Beckmann, "Places that Come and Go: A Legal Anthropological Perspective on the Temporalities of Space in Plural Legal Orders," in Braverman, Blomley, Delaney, and Kedar *The Expanding Spaces of Law*; Federico Perez, "Excavating Legal Landscapes: Juridical Archaeology and the Politics of Bureaucratic Materiality in Bogota, Colombia." *Cultural Anthropology* 31(2) (2016): 215–43.

work together even if they appear contradictory.[264] The procedure of alley closings exemplifies Valverde's "seeing like a city." Alley closings in Washington, D.C. became legally possible with the Street Readjustment Act of 1932, designed to allow the closing of unused streets. Closings were carried out for decades without controversy, until they resurfaced in the 1970s with different motives: to acquire land for development. West End residents fearing development in their neighborhood would have been more familiar with challenging a zoning ordinance, and it would have been initially surprising and unclear that they should challenge a little-used law regarding alley closures.

This chapter draws attention to another important barrier urban communities face in challenging municipal land use laws. Aside from knowing which law to challenge, it can be difficult for the public to know *where* to challenge it. In municipal governments, agencies and committees are often charged with administering different aspects of land-use governance. In the case of Washington, D.C. in the 1970s, both zoning ordinances and alley closures affected land use patterns in neighborhoods like the West End and Dupont Circle. These municipal land use laws existed simultaneously in the same legal system—what legal scholar Bonaventura De Sousa Santos calls interlegality—but in practice they were administered by separate municipal departments and committees, each with its own jurisdiction over different features of land use and its own processes for public engagement. [265] Thus, to intervene in land-use decisions and combat the potential outcome of displacement, residents had to understand the organization of municipal government; they had to know to present different arguments to different departments

[264] Mariana Valverde, "Seeing Like a City: The Dialectic of Modern and Premodern Ways of Seeing in Urban Governance Theorizing Law's Spatial Governance." *Law & Society Review* 45 (2) (2011): 277–312.
[265] Bonaventura De Sousa Santos, "Law: A Map of Misreading. Toward a Postmodern Conception of Law" *Journal of Law and Society* 14(3) (1987): 279–302. Interlegality differs from legal pluralism, in which simultaneous laws draw their authority from different legal systems, say state law and religious law.

and committees, based on these divisions' jurisdictions. This bureaucratic maze varies from one municipality to the next, and the particular geographies of municipal governance is underexamined in legal geographies. Studying the historically and geographically situated procedures for reviewing and approving changes to land use—how applications are made, where they go, who comments and when, and how decisions are ultimately made—is critical for understanding how municipal land-use laws get enacted and to whose benefit. It also is essential for understanding how urban residents can effectively intervene in legal matters that affect their lives.

In the case of Washington D.C. in the 1970s, the City Council often approved the applications of real estate developers to close alleys and acquire land. These decisions had to do with proper legal arguments, but they also resulted from the political economy of alley closures. Examining the records of City Council hearings and public discourse surrounding alley closings exposes a public both unprepared to engage logics of land-use law and unprepared to navigate the bureaucratic intricacies of decision-making bodies and public hearings. In other words, residents with little practice interacting with municipal government were ill-prepared to present the right legal arguments in the right places. Real estate developers, on the other hand, had more practice with municipal proceedings. Surely the Council could have made accommodations for inexperienced residents, and some sympathetic Council members tried. Ultimately, however, the complicated geography of municipal government provided the City Council a convenient way to appease the real estate industry, which promised investment in a city struggling financially. As a result, in the West End and Dupont Circle neighborhoods, real estate developers succeeded in legally acquiring overlooked alleys in order to transform middle-class, mixed-race residential

communities into dense landscapes of high-rise developments, which brought greater profits for developers and the city government.

II. The Political Economy of Alley Closings

Since the Street Readjustment Act of 1932, closing alleys had been a process available to those wanting to close public streets and alleys in Washington, D.C. For thirty-five years, not a single alley closing was contested.[266] It was not until the 1970s that developers began to take advantage of the process in earnest to acquire land. The legal possibility of closing alleys meant little without the political and economic motivations for land acquisition that emerged in the mid-1970s.

The formal process for closing an alley in the 1970s was straightforward. After President Johnson transferred power from Congress to the new D.C. City Council in 1967, under the Congress Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1967, the process for approving alley closings moved from the Board of Commissioners and Congress's National Capital Planning Commission to agencies within the new city government. After 1967, anyone could apply directly to the Office of the Surveyor of the District of Columbia to close an alley.[267] The Office of the Surveyor would then seek approval from various municipal departments, including the Fire Department and Department of Highways and Traffic.[268] In addition, after 1967, the public was given thirty

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[266] Chevy Chase Citizens Asso. v. District of Columbia Council, 307 A.2d 740, 1973 D.C. App. LEXIS 413 (District of Columbia Court of Appeals June 26, 1973, Decided). https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/api/document?collection=cases&id=urn:contentItem:3RRT-B540-003G-12YK-00000-00&context=1516831.

[267] Ibid.

[268] After receiving the alley-closing application, the Office of the D.C. Surveyor would forward the application to Fire Department, the Municipal Planning Office, the Office of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Highways and Traffic, and the Department of Environmental Services. If the alley in question were U.S. property, the application would also go to the Office of Public Space Permits. Upon approval from these various departments, the application would go to the National Capital Planning Commission, and then finally to the Transportation and Environmental Affairs Committee of the D.C. City Council for a public hearing. See The District

days' notice to oppose an alley closing at a public hearing before the City Council's Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs. If there were no public objections, or if the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs deemed that the alley closing would still be in the public interest, despite resident objections, the Committee could recommend the alley closing to the full City Council. D.C. Code 7-401 gave the City Council power to close any street or alley which, in their judgment, and based on the approvals of other agencies, "has been rendered useless or unnecessary."[269] Once closed, alleys reverted to abutting property owners, thereby increasing the amount of land they owned.

The obstacles facing D.C. residents who opposed alley closings exemplify the problems that emerge when requirements of specific laws confront the reality of urban political economy. On paper, the legal procedure for closing an alley allowed for public input. However, in practice, the members of the public who would be most affected were often not given sufficient notice to prepare an effective opposition. For example, D.C. Code 7-402 required that owners of abutting property be given notice by registered mail.[270] However, renters, who did not own properties, were not sent a written notice. In addition, because developers often had already bought the abutting properties, nearby property owners—even those on the same block—were not always given direct notice. Interested citizens' groups were often informed quite late in the process, if at all.

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of Columbia Office of Housing and Community Development, "The Developer's Handbook," 1975, 29-33. Box 5 Department of Housing and Community Development records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records; Carr v. District of Columbia, 371 F. Supp. 293, 1974 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12280 (United States District Court for the District of Columbia February 12, 1974) at *2. https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/api/document?collection=cases&id=urn:contentItem:3S4V-RTG0-0054-6551-00000-00&context=1516831.

[269] *Carr* 1974 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12280, at *3; Jerry A. Moore, *Street and Alley Closing Report No. 1 on PR 1-142*, 3 September 1976. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers, 1974-1993, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University Libraries, (hereafter cited as MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers).

[270] *Chevy Chase Citizens Asso.*, 1973 D.C. App. LEXIS 413, at *6.

In addition, the Office of the Surveyor was also required to publish, for fourteen consecutive days, a notice of the intention to close any street or alley in the *D.C. Register* publication. The notice was required to advertise the time and place of the public hearing, at which residents could voice objections. However, announcements of public hearings in the newspaper were often vague or hard to find. Mrs. James H. Rowe, of the influential anti-development group Committee of 100 on the Federal City, wrote to the Office of the Surveyor in 1978 asking that it make announcements of alley closings easier to read and understand. She asked, for example, that the office consider the simple and seemingly obvious addition of the names of streets and alleys to be affected as well as the square and lot designations. Without these basic geographic locators, residents and neighborhood groups were hard-pressed to know if they would be affected by the listed alley closings. She also asked that the notices be printed in larger type, as they were easy to miss in the newspaper. In response, the Surveyor replied that since public alleys did not have names, they could not be identified, and that adding a description of the location would incur too large a printing cost. Using larger type would also be too expensive.[271] Instead, he proposed that she call the office to ask the location of the alley closing each time a notice appeared. While the Surveyor was not wrong to suggest that printing longer and larger notices would be too expensive—he provided calculations for Mrs. Rowe showing that the cost could surpass $1500 per alley closing—his response highlights how the law in practice failed to provide equal opportunity to inform decisions that would affect D.C. residents' lives. The cost of printing alone meant that the public was poorly informed of alley-closing applications, and applicants could easily proceed without opposition.

[271] Letter from Mrs. James R. Rowe to Office of the Surveyor, 28 June 1978, Box 23, Folder 4. MS2017 Committee Of 100; Letter from T. E. Koch, Jr., Acting Surveyor, D.C. to Mrs. James R. Rowe, 26 July 1978, Folder 4. MS2017 Committee of 100 records.

Not only was it relatively easy for developers to acquire alley land without opposition; it could be very cheap. According to D.C. Code 7-302, if a closed alley had been owned by the District of Columbia, its land would revert to the abutting property owner at no charge. In other words, if property owners abutted District of Columbia land, they could apply to acquire this public land for free. However, if the alley was land owned by the United States government, abutting property owners were required to pay the fair market value for the land, which would be deposited in the United States Treasury.[272] Still, for real estate developers, the price for unimproved land was generally far less than what they would gain from whatever high-rise development the increased square footage would allow.[273]

The ease and affordability of alley closings alone do not explain the surge in alley closing applications in the mid-1970s. It is critical to recognize that after 1974, the approval process was mediated by locally elected officials for the first time. As a legal process now controlled by the elected City Council, not by distant Congressmen, the motivations to deny or grant alley closings became tied up in the new government's larger agendas around the city's land use, property taxes, and affordable housing. There were now new political motivations to carry out an existing legal process. Those intent on building in the city via alley closings could promise the City Council development that would increase the hurting city's housing supply and tax revenue.

By the mid-1970s, Washington, D.C. was a landscape of uneven development. The 1960s had seen massive speculative buying of properties, and by the early 1970s these property owners began to turn a profit on their investments as white professionals returned to the city. Some speculative buyers flipped their properties and sold them to these newcomers. Others, however,

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[272] *Carr* 1974 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12280, at *3.
[273] Statement of John A. Wilson, Councilmember, Ward 2 Before Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, 16 May 1975. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 16. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

continued to sit on properties without investing in them. Thousands of these properties took the form of deteriorated, and often vacant, houses. In other cases, property owners demolished existing housing stock and replaced it with vacant lots and parking lots. The housing picture in the city was one of stark extremes: those with means—mostly whites of the professional class—moved into rehabilitated row houses whose cost was beyond what longtime African American residents could pay. Those without means—poor and African American—faced a housing crisis as the supply of affordable and livable housing stock continued to decrease. By 1975, the city had an estimated 22,000 vacant structures in overcrowded neighborhoods, while roughly 260,000 families could not afford or access decent places to live.[274]

In response to the housing crisis the City Council passed a series of progressive housing reforms in its first year, 1975, including eviction moratoriums, condominium conversion restrictions, and limited-equity cooperative provisions.[275] The City Council even passed an unprecedented, albeit short-lived, speculation tax. Despite these reforms, legislators were hesitant to move beyond the dominant paradigm that the private real estate industry would be the solution to the housing crisis.[276] The assumption of the private market as the normative provider of housing was not unique to Washington, D.C. National legislation, including the Housing Act of 1968 and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, also provided private market subsidies as the solution for affordable housing, rather than providing housing itself.[277]

The City Council desperately relied on private developers to upgrade existing housing, and it actively courted residential development in the city, even as it was wary of speculators

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[274] Steven Diner and Helen Young, eds. "Housing Washington's People: Public Policy in Retrospect," (Washington, D.C.: Department of Urban Studies, University of the District of Columbia, 1983), cited in Katie Wells, "A Housing Crisis, a Failed Law, and a Property Conflict: The US Urban Speculation Tax" *Antipode* 47(4) (2015): 2.
[275] Wells, "A Decent Place to Stay"; Amanda Huron, "Working with Strangers in Saturated Space: Reclaiming and Maintaining the Urban Commons." *Antipode* 47(4) (2015): 963–79.
[276] Wells, "A Housing Crisis, A Failed Law, and a Property Conflict"; Wells, "A Decent Place to Stay," 123.
[277] Wells, "A Decent Place to Stay," 90.

flipping properties simply to make profits. As one opponent of the speculation tax noted, the tax would "frustrate the District's efforts to massively engage private interests in rehabilitating the existing housing stock."[278] The city was so keen on recruiting developers that in 1975, the Council's first year and the same year as its progressive reforms, the D.C. Office of Housing and Community Development published "The Developer's Handbook." The 70-page handbook clearly laid out all necessary steps to acquire permits and government approval. The introduction reveals the city's intent to make the development process as smooth as possible: "It has often been said that governments operate and survive through a maze of red tape. But what is not generally recognized is the genuine need for government regulations to assist and protect you, the developer/builder and the average citizen/consumer."[279] The City Council was eager to accommodate private developers who promised housing of any form, and alley closings were one way they could do so.

Accommodating the private real estate industry was important to the City Council for another reason: the Council relied heavily on the real estate industry for financial investment and political backing. While D.C. had achieved Home Rule, which allowed it to control its political processes, its budget was still tightly controlled by Congress. Thus, Washington, D.C. was a city with limited financial means and without a manufacturing or commercial base. The private real estate industry could be counted on to invest in infrastructure, and it therefore held outsized importance and a powerful position. By the late 1970s, the real estate industry was the largest contributor to local campaigns.[280] For example, Councilmember Jerry A. Moore, the chair of the

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[278] Ibid., 128.
[279] The District of Columbia Office of Housing and Community Development, "The Developer's Handbook," 1975, 1. Box 5 Department of Housing and Community Development records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records.
[280] Wells, "A Housing Crisis, a Failed Law, and a Property Conflict," 11; Stephen J. McGovern, *The Politics of Downtown Development: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 210.

Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, which had the most say in alley closings, received more than three quarters of his 1976 re-election campaign funds from builders, contractors, bankers, attorneys, and real estate developers.[281] The City Council had strong incentives to keep the real estate industry happy. Alley closings, which had been on the books for decades, were suddenly a politically and economically easy way to do so on a case-by-case basis.

III. "The Implications Involved are Substantial": Protesting Alley Closures to Defend Affordable Neighborhoods

Alley closings may have been a win-win for some developers and some members of the City Council, but many residents vehemently opposed the trend of alley closings. In the downtown neighborhoods of the West End and Dupont Circle, residents had already seen real estate speculation and investment displace longtime African American residents and bring an influx of higher-income white professionals. They knew that alley closings were a legal loophole that allowed developers to acquire more land, further altering the neighborhoods they called home. If residents were organized or lucky enough to learn of alley-closing applications in time to petition their City Council members, then alley closings presented an opportunity to protest what they saw as land grabs that would further change the density and character of their neighborhoods. They objected not only to the acquisition of public land for private development, but to the use of alley closings as a backend way to bypass typical channels for land use changes and public approval. Specific cases of alley closures reveal how residents struggled to mount a defense in which their objections to alley closures lined up with requirements to keep an alley

[281] Karlyn Barker, "Old Apex movie is demolished amid dispute over closing of alleys," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1977.

open—that an alley was "useful" and "necessary." This was especially difficult when they faced a City Council already inclined to favor a real estate developer's proposal.

The West End

The West End typified the demographic and landscape changes of D.C. neighborhoods in the 1960s and early 1970s. These changes are important context for understanding why residents so strongly opposed alley closures in the mid-1970s. LaBarbara Bowman reported in the *Washington Post* in 1977 that what happened in the West End "is the story of change that has come to several once predominantly black neighborhoods here in recent years….In the case of the West End, many of the Victorian town houses were bought, demolished and replaced with parking lots until the time came for the redevelopment."[282] In the 1950s and 1960s, Black families that had rented had no choice but to leave when their houses were bought, and many African Americans who owned their homes in the West End sold them for high prices offered by speculators. In leaving their neighborhood, they also left a close-knit community in segregated Washington, with an African American school, church, movie theater, restaurants, barbershops, and pool rooms. Most of their houses were torn down and businesses closed. In addition, many of the light industries in the neighborhood left for the suburbs, leaving more empty buildings and vacant lots. By 1973, twenty-nine percent of the land in the West End was parking lots.[283] In 1969, when former resident Colby King drove his family through the neighborhood where he grew up, he hardly recognized it. The only parts of the built environment he could place were

[282] LaBarbara Bowman, "Ex-Resident Finds Old Neighborhood Gone," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1977.
[283] District of Columbia Office of Planning and Management, *A Plan for the West End*, 10. Box 40 Department of Housing and Community Development records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records.

"the fire hydrant that stood in front of our house and the utility pole in the alley where I played my first basketball game."[284]

In addition to demolishing houses for vacant lots and parking lots, speculators had also allowed some houses to sit vacant. In the early 1970s, they began flipping these properties and remodeling them to sell to more affluent—and mostly white—residents. In 1976, for example, a builder named Lawrence N. Brandt bought three houses for $70,000 each, renovated them, and sold them less than one year later for $147,000 each. Another three row houses around the corner had been bought for $68,000 and were selling for between $168,000 and $211,000. Meanwhile, an African American family down the street was paying $160 a month in rent, as much as they could afford.[285] In 1977, Barbara Williams, an elderly African American woman who had lived in the West End for thirty-seven years, succinctly summarized the change: "Colored people used to live along here but they were moved out and the houses were remodeled and white people moved in."[286]

Developers also constructed several high-rise apartment buildings in the 1960s for singles, childless couples, and small families. In fact, this increase in density meant that already by 1973, seventy-nine percent of West End's population, approximately 1,800 people, lived in high-rise apartments while the remaining twenty-one percent lived in row houses and walk-up apartments. There were strong race and class divides between those in older row houses and walk-up apartments and those in the new high-rise buildings. African Americans comprised the

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[284] Bowman, "Ex-Resident Finds Old Neighborhood Gone"; Mireya Navaro and Doug Podolsky, "West End's Businesses: Things Won't be the Same," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1978.
[285] Stephen J. Lynton, "Area 'Has Taken Off' Developer Says," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1977. The *Washington Post* reported in 1976 about the "rehabilitation and interior modernization" of the West End's Victorian homes, noting that "In recent years the 18-foot-wide, three-story dwellings have been rooming houses…. The townhouses are being restored for resale, probably in the $100,000 range." See "Intown Change," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1976.
[286] Bowman, "Ex-Resident Finds Old Neighborhood Gone."

majority of low- and moderate-income residents and lived almost exclusively in the former, either as renters or as homeowners. They constituted less than five percent of the tenants in the high-rise apartments, who were, according to the city's Office of Planning and Management, "almost exclusively middle/upper income." In other words, within a decade the neighborhood had flipped from a low- and moderate-income African American community to a majority-affluent and white community. From 1960 to 1970, the median income nearly doubled in the two census tracks that covered the West End.[287] Not all longtime residents and businesses left, however. In the mid-1970s, those who remained continued to celebrate their long ties to the quiet neighborhood and their small businesses, even as outsiders bought up property around them.

It was on the heels of these major changes that developers began applying to close alleys in the West End in 1975. Alleys had never been a controversial part of residents' lives before; they were simply part of everyday life, used by adults for parking cars, by children for playing basketball, and by city workers to collect garbage or fix utilities. As Bessie J. O'Neal, a resident of the West End for fifty-three years, wrote of the alleys in 1976, "traffic, noise and pollution have been minimal."[288] While residents may not have given their alleys much thought, they knew that these attempts to acquire public land were far from benign. As one resident of the West End, Lucille G. Duprat, wrote to the City Council in 1976, "Although the alley closing, as I understand it, only involves a few feet of space, the implications involved are substantial."[289] Residents surmised quickly that they would not be the ones to benefit from these land acquisitions. Some residents feared alley closings would usher in new developments that would

[287] District of Columbia Office of Planning and Management, *A Plan for the West End*, 7-9, 17. s
[288] "Affidavit of Bessie J. O'Neal," in Jerry A. Moore, *Street and Alley Closing Report No. 1 on PR 1-142*, 3 September 1976. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[289] Letter from Lucille G. Duprat to Mr. Rachel, 21 July 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

require the demolition of existing buildings, exacerbating the lack of affordable housing in the neighborhood.[290] Many believed new developments would add noise and congestion to the quiet area and would displace services essential to the remaining longtime African American community.

In July 1976, the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), a group of local commissioners elected to represent neighborhood concerns to the City Council, learned of an application to close an alley in square 15. They learned of the alley-closing application only one day before the decision would be made by Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, the government body empowered by D.C. code to review all alley and street closing applications. Neither the ANC nor neighbors had received the required 30 days' notice of the committee's meeting. When the meeting was postponed, they had one week to put together a response. Ann Hume Loikow, the elected ANC commissioner for Foggy Bottom and the West End, summarized neighborhood concerns regarding the proposed alley closing in a letter to City Councilmember Jerry Moore. She noted in particular that the alley closing would allow a larger structure, which would likely put longtime neighborhood services out of business:

> Residents of the neighborhood do not want to see the buildings and shops on these lots demolished and replaced with the higher bulkier structure this increase in the FAR [floor-area ratio] would allow because this would mean the closing and loss of the various services and shops located there. It is the presence of these kinds of services and small businessmen—the local dry cleaners, shoe repair shop, barber shop, key shop—which makes this area an attractive one in which to live. Most of these small businessmen cannot afford to relocate in new buildings in the area.[291]

[290] Letter from Robert F. Alcorn and Harold V. Pini to Councilmember Jerry Moore, 8 November 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[291] Letter from Ann Hume Loikow to Councilmember Jerry Moore, 22 July 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

This loss of local business would be especially detrimental to the many elderly residents and those with disabilities, who would find it very difficult to travel for these services. [292]

West End residents also believed that the alley closing was an abuse of D.C. code and a way for the developers to circumvent zoning regulations through the acquisition of large parcels of land that they could not otherwise acquire. Loikow noted that "what on the surface appears to be a rather innocuous closing of a small piece of public alley space" was in fact equivalent to a zoning change for the area. Such a change, she argued, required a much more rigorous public input process and a more thorough assessment of the benefit of the development to the neighborhood and the city.[293] In another letter of opposition to the D.C. Councilmembers, residents wrote that closing the alley in square 15 would be "the effective negation of current zoning regulations by allowing what is, in effect, an end-run around them."[294] Furthermore, residents saw alley closings as the loss of public land for private benefit. In the case of square 15, in which the alley was District of Columbia land, they expressed concern that the city would receive no compensation while the private developer would receive "the transfer of valuable development rights which couldn't otherwise occur." [295]

Despite all the last-minute scrambling residents had done to oppose the alley closing, the City Council ruled quickly in favor of development and ordered square 15's alley closed.[296] Residents were outraged that the council members did not even read their concerns into the record. It seemed that the members of the Committee on Transportation and Environmental

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[292] Letter from Robert F. Alcorn and Harold V. Pini to Councilmember Jerry Moore, 8 November 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[293] Letter from Ann Hume Loikow to Councilmember Jerry Moore.
[294] Letter from ANC Commissioners and residents of the Foggy Bottom and West End area to Chairman Tucker and Councilmember Moore, 28 July 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[295] Letter from ANC Commissioners and residents of the Foggy Bottom and West End area to Chairman Tucker and Councilmember Moore, 28 July 1976, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[296] Letter from Jerry A. Moore, Jr., to Ann Hume Loikow, 3 August 1976, Series 3, Box 40 Folder 1. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

Affairs had already made up their minds to allow large-scale development, no matter what residents said. However, it is also important to note that nowhere in their letters of opposition did residents or ANC commissioners mention how residents used the alley or what role the alley played in their lives. While residents made many compelling arguments about wanting to prevent change in their neighborhood, they neglected to explain why their alley was useful and necessary. Thus, the Council could breeze through the case because they encountered no legal challenge to the alley closing.

Around the same time, in nearby square 14, just one block north, a developer named Oliver T. Carr, Jr. applied to close portions of an alley to build a mixed residential, commercial, and retail development on the block.[297] In this case, residents were already familiar with Carr's plans. Three years earlier, Carr had made clear his intentions to transform the entire neighborhood. In 1972, he had founded a private nonprofit organization called "West End Planning, Inc." with the explicit purpose to "provide for the master planning of a neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C., known as the West End."[298] The next year, Carr presented a master plan for the West End to the city's Zoning Commission. It featured drawings of a high-rise dominated landscape in place of the existing mixed land uses of mid-rise apartment buildings, parking lots, and nearly one hundred row houses.[299] He wrote of his desire to see the principles of the plan extended beyond the West End, stating in his introductory letter to the commission, "The plan might also serve as an important prototype for the renewal of similar sections adjacent to or a part of the central business district."[300]

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[297] Jerry A. Moore, Jr., Street and Alley Closing Report No. 1 on PR 1-142, 3 September 1976, Series 3, Box 39 Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; Tom Precious, "West End Undergoes a Building Boom," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1986.
[298] Angelos C. Demetriou, A.I.A. for West End Planning, Inc. *The West End Washington, D.C.*, 1973, 2. Box 40 Department of Housing and Community Development records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records.
[299] Ibid., 10.
[300] Ibid., 3.

Later that year, the D.C. Office of Planning and Management produced its own plan for the West End, which adopted many of Carr's suggestions.[301] One key difference was that Carr proposed a building height limit of 130 feet, whereas the city's official plan reduced this to ninety feet. Still, as one reporter noted, "The two concepts are largely the same, a rare and intriguing meeting of the minds between planners and developer." He went on to note that Carr "by all accounts stands to make the most money if the plan is carried out."[302] In December 1974, in a move in line with the Office of Planning and Management's new plan for the West End, the Zoning Commission changed sections of the West End from light industrial to zone C-2-B, mixed residential and commercial use, which allowed buildings up to ninety feet high.[303]

Carr moved forward with his vision of a downtown landscape of dense high-rise office and residential development. He bought several properties in the West End and proceeded to acquire larger parcels according to the existing legal means to do so: alley closings. By 1976, when he proposed to close the alley in square 14, Sylvia Kohrn, a square 14 resident and property owner, angrily wrote to the City Council of Carr's intentions to "deprive poor people of their homes for speculative profits." She added that Carr was notorious for abusing the process of alley closings: "He is a promoter of alley closings. He has been aptly called 'Alley Ollie' Carr."[304] Carr was in fact already becoming famous for buying properties across downtown Washington, D.C. and building high-rise office buildings. By 1979 he would be called "the undisputed leader in Washington's booming downtown development market."[305] By 1986, he

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[301] District of Columbia Office of Planning and Management, *A Plan for the West End*, 3-4.
[302] Thomas W. Lippman "Action Scheduled on D.C. West End Renovation," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1974.
[303] District of Columbia Office of Planning and Management, *A Plan for the West End*, 4; Corrie M. Anders, "D.C. 'West End' Rezoned for Residences Offices," *The Washington Star*, 13, December 1974.
[304] Statement of Mrs. Sylvia L. Kohrn, Secretary, West End-Washington Circle Associates, to the City Council Transportation Committee RE: S.O. 74-48, 12 December 1975, Series 3, Box 39 Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[305] Patrick Tyler, "Oliver T. Carr, Jr." *Washington Post*, March 18, 1979.

would own three office buildings in the West End alone, totaling over one million square feet of space.[306] In 1975 though, he was taking full advantage of the city's alley closing process. At the same time that he was applying to close parts of square 14's alley, he was in District Court battling an alley closing dispute in the Dupont Circle neighborhood.[307]

Kohrn and other square 14 residents waged a battle against Carr's plans to close their alley.[308] This group was better prepared than square 15's residents; it hired a lawyer, attended public hearings, and wrote letters to City Councilmembers. To make their case, residents had to convince the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs that their alley was useful and necessary. Yet proving the usefulness and necessity of the alley proved harder than it might seem. Like the residents of square 15, square 14's residents shied away from describing how integral the alley was to daily activities, possibly because these activities seemed so mundane as to be unimportant. Instead the group focused on the more spectacular potential impacts of alley closings. They predicted new developments would put local stores out of businesses, and that the increased density would bring traffic and noise beyond the alley. Their lawyer, George F. Bason, argued that Carr was trying to make residents' homes unlivable so that he could ultimately force them out.[309] This fear was understandable given the demographic changes already occurring in their neighborhood. While concerns about the impacts of increased density and displacement were not unfounded, these predictions did not prove that the alley in its current material form was useful and necessary—the legal requirements to keep an alley open. In focusing on the spectacular instead of the mundane, square 14 residents likely thought they made a more

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[306] Tom Precious, "West End Undergoes a Building Boom," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1986.
[307] *Carr* 1974 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 12280.
[308] Every resident on the block and every property owner, except one developer who lived elsewhere, opposed the alley closing. Letter from George F. Bason to Jerry A. Moore, 18 May 1976, Series 3, Box 39 Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[309] Ibid.

compelling case. However, they were failing to address the language of the law that would determine control of their alley.

Even the West End Foggy Bottom ANC commissioners, the elected representatives of resident concerns to the City Council, admitted that resident concerns were not all grounded in evidence.[310] The ANC commissioners wrote in a letter to Councilmember John A. Wilson, "it is difficult to accurately assess the impact of the development on the use of the alley and determine how much merit these concerns have in reality." They wrote that Carr had been forthright with residents about his plans for the area, and that they hoped "the residents and their backers will direct their criticisms to the impact of the development actually being planned."[311]

When residents turned their attention to the specifics of Carr's proposal for the alley in square 14, their arguments gained more traction. This is because this narrowed focus forced them to directly engage the language and logic of the alley closing law. Carr did not actually plan to remove the alley completely, but instead would use the sections he acquired—having deemed them "useless and unnecessary"—to straighten and relocate the alley. Residents opposed his plan to straighten part of the existing alley, which they claimed would bring more traffic to the alley, creating noise and blocking access to their own garages.[312] With these arguments, they implicitly sought to prove that their alley in its current condition was *useful* for maintaining a calm residential environment and *necessary* for accessing garages, though they didn't emphasize these words.

These were the appropriate arguments for the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, yet they still were not successful. Carr responded to these objections by

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[310] Letter from Ann Hume Loikow, Harold David, Marthlu Bledsoe to Councilmember John A. Wilson, 17 May 1976, Series 3, Box 39 Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid.

working directly with the disgruntled neighbors to make accommodating adjustments. He changed the width of his proposed straightened alley to provide ample access to a resident's garage and he provided a buffer area between his proposed development and another resident's property.[313] He even offered to record a covenant with the Register of Deeds prohibiting loading docks and vehicular entrances where access could already be gained from the alley. Carr's cooperation in providing distance from noise and providing resident access to what would become private land essentially negated residents' claims that their existing public alley was necessary.

Without a compelling legal reason to keep the alley open, the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs recommended that the full City Council approve the alley closing. Carr could close the alley and build a mixed-use development up to ninety feet tall on the site. The City Council estimated that Carr's new development on square 14 would raise property taxes from $50,000 per year to $385,000, a fact most telling of why the Council was inclined to accept Carr's proposal.[314] Like other alley closures, the closing of the alley in square 14 was used as a way to bring about land uses that would not otherwise be approved. It also demonstrated how easy it was for the Council to dismiss concerns—no matter how legitimate—that would not result in outcomes that were mutually beneficial for the city government and real estate industry.

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[313] Letter from Oliver T. Carr, Jr. to Jerry A. Moore, 24 May 1976, Series 3, Box 39 Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

[314] Jerry A. Moore, *Street and Alley Closing Report No. 1 on PR 1-142*, 3 September 1976. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

Dupont Circle

The Dupont Circle neighborhood, just north of the West End, saw similar contestations over the power of alley closings to facilitate high-rise development and dramatically change the character of neighborhoods. In Dupont Circle, however, residents were better organized and had experience engaging with the multiple city agencies that controlled land use.

Like the West End, Dupont Circle had also seen widespread demolition. Between 1968 and 1975, 123 residential buildings, many with multiple units, were demolished.[315] In their place was a boom in high-rise office and residential buildings. As in the West End, these buildings catered to a more affluent population. Whereas about half of the whole area had rents higher than the city average, 80 percent of these higher-rent units were located on blocks of high-rise apartment buildings. In other words, expensive units were consolidated in the new buildings, whereas units with rents lower than the city average were concentrated in older multi-unit row houses.[316]

While the West End had been seeing a gradual racial transition from majority African American to majority white beginning in the 1960s, Dupont Circle had racial diversity that had been relatively stable until the early 1970s. Between 1960 and 1970, Dupont Circle had not become markedly more white or more Black, unlike other parts of the city. One study from 1970 found roughly equal proportions of white and black owners and renters in in the neighborhood. In its 1976 neighborhood profile, the North Dupont Community Association (NDCA) proudly reported on the neighborhood's diversity, noting that the area was 34.6 percent Black, 42.6 percent white, 6.6 percent Spanish-speaking, and 16.2 percent foreign born. Crucially, the

[315] North Dupont Community Association, "Dupont Circle Profile," March 1976, 62. Box 32. Department of Housing and Community Development records, District of Columbia Office of Public Records.
[316] North Dupont Community Association, "Dupont Circle Profile," 22.

neighborhood was not just diverse but integrated; less than one percent lived on blocks that were either all Black or all white. Not only was the community racially diverse; it had a mix of social classes, as indicated by a roughly even split between those with a college education and those without. The occupational diversity also indicated a mix of social classes: nearly 40 percent were professionals and managers, 42 percent salespeople, clerks, craftsmen, and 18 percent laborers, service workers, and household workers.[317]

The NDCA was the group most vocal in promoting Dupont Circle's diversity and fighting against new development, which they believed threatened this diversity. The group formed in 1973, largely in response to anticipated development pressures as a Metro station was being constructed nearby. While some longtime residents were included in its membership, many of the active members were middle-income newcomers who had bought and rehabilitated homes in the area in recent years. Between 1971 and 1973, at least thirty homes had been purchased by owner-occupants.[318] Unlike speculators who were flipping properties, these homeowners differentiated themselves by the sweat and money they put into the houses and community where they continued to live.

The NDCA celebrated this kind of moderate investment, meant to enhance but not transform a neighborhood. Among the NDCA's goals for neighborhood housing were to maintain the supply of low- and moderate-income housing, but also to increase owner-occupancy at all income levels.[319] In other words, in fighting development, the NDCA was concerned not

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[317] North Dupont Community Association, "Dupont Circle Profile," 5-7; Dennis E. Gale, *Washington, D.C.: Inner-City Revitalization and Minority Suburbanization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 62.
[318] Draft letter from Paul D. Crumrine to Katherine Graham, 20 August 1973. Box 1, Folder 2. Dupont Circle Community Association, 1972-1978, Washingtoniana Collection, D.C. Public Library Special Collections (hereafter cited as Dupont Circle Community Association records); Draft letter from Paul D. Crumrine, 20 August 1973. Box 1, Folder 2, Dupont Circle Community Association records.
[319] "North Dupont Community Association Status Report," February 1974, Box 1, Folder 2, Dupont Circle Community Association records.

just with providing for longtime, low- and middle-income residents—as anti-development advocates were in the West End. The NDCA also wanted to maintain the area's economic and racial diversity, which included higher-income whites. While one could argue this group of mostly newcomers fought demolition and displacement to protect their recent investments, they were also "attracted by the idea of living amidst a mixture of people of different classes and color," as one *Washington Post* editorial described them in 1974. The editorial author went on to note that "many of them militantly defend their new urban frontier against the threat of both fast food chain outlets and highrise structures."[320] In this sense, anti-development interests in Dupont Circle—whether rooted in protecting long-established homes or newly diverse communities—aligned across economic and racial lines.

NDCA members saw the demolition of their neighborhood's residential buildings and the construction of high-rises in their place as contributing to the ongoing city-wide housing crisis. It joined forces with other groups, including the City Wide Housing Coalition and Don't Tear it Down, to organize against demolition. Together, the groups proposed a change to zoning regulations to require a more thorough review of demolition permits, which they believed were granted without enough oversight. Between January and September 1974, the Department of Economic Development had issued 555 permits to demolish at least 697 housing units.[321] The groups wrote in a joint letter, "We know that no one can afford to build low income housing to replace the houses which are being levelled every day. We have to stop the demolition now."[322] They noted that while city politicians all spoke about wanting to revive deteriorated buildings to

[320] "Zoning for People," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1974.
[321] Letter from Mary Helen Goodloe-Murphy and William H. Merigan to The Zoning Commission, Box 1, Folder 7, Dupont Circle Community Association records.
[322] Letter from William H. Merigan, Larry Weston, and Carol Bickley, 30 October, 1974, Box 1, Folder 7, Dupont Circle Community Association records.

address the housing crisis, in reality demolition was proceeding at a far faster pace than rehabilitation, let alone rehabilitation that would result in homes affordable for low-income people.

The biggest win for the NCDA came not with more restrictions on demolition, but with a change to zoning in the northwest part of the Dupont Circle neighborhood. On May 21, 1974, the Zoning Commission responded to intense neighborhood activism to "downzone" parts of the Dupont Circle neighborhood to prevent high-rise development. According to the city's 1958 zoning code, the area had been designated a mix of zone R-5-C, which allowed medium density and high-rise apartments up to ninety feet high, and zone S-P, a high-rise apartment or office zone, also with heights up to ninety feet. Acknowledging that up to that point little high-rise construction had occurred, the Zoning Commission agreed to change the zone to reflect the current use of the neighborhood: R-5-B, a low-density zone with height limits of six stories for low-rise apartment buildings and existing townhouses.[323]

The zoning change was the kind of action legal geographers have argued is necessary for urban residents to defend their right to the city; Dupont Circle residents challenged the zoning law itself, not simply its unfair implications. The zoning change was widely celebrated by neighborhood residents as a halt on the northward creep of developer-led high-rise construction, and a *Washington Post* editorial proclaimed "Zoning for People."[324] As Polly Shackleton, a City Councilmember, argued in support of the zoning change, the rezoning would stabilize the neighborhood and prevent speculation. It would maintain, and possibly even increase, the

[323] Government of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, "Order No. 90, Case No. 73-23." 21 May 1974, Box 2, Folder 8, Dupont Circle Community Association records; Government of the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, "Case 73-23 Dupont Circle Rezoning Statement of Reasons," 21 June 1974, Box 2, Folder 8, Dupont Circle Community Association records; North Dupont Community Association, "Dupont Circle Profile," 61.
[324] "Zoning for People," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1974.

"desperately needed housing for moderate-income families who choose to live in our city rather than to flee to the suburbs."[325] Walter Fauntroy, the civil rights leader and first representative to Congress for Washington, D.C., testified that the rezoning "will insure [sic] that the residents who have worked to establish a life style of integrated socio and economic interest will not have that interest destroyed for some short-run tax gains."[326] Resident Ida Fox was most explicit that the zoning change would have the positive effect of preventing displacement of the neighborhood's low-income African American residents, an outcome seen elsewhere across the city. In her testimony before the Zoning Commission, Fox noted:

> When an area becomes largely high-rise, rents also rise, and too often rise beyond the means of even middle-income people like myself who have lived and would like to continue to live in the area. And, of course, the lower-income people—and too often that means our black neighbors—are the first, automatically, to be squeezed out.[327]

The down-zoning in 1974 was a victory for diversity and anti-development advocates, but it did not apply across all of Dupont Circle. In 1976, the NDCA would still argue that the rest of the neighborhood was still "overzoned," meaning zoning regulations allowed for high-rise apartments and offices in areas that were dominated by low-rise residential use. In overzoned areas, the acquisition of property could be particularly lucrative. Developers could acquire property, demolish existing structures, and rebuild as large as the zoning would allow, thus multiplying the number of units and profit on a given lot. As a result, particularly along the neighborhood's main streets like Connecticut Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue, developers

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[325] "Statement of Polly Shackleton to D.C. Zoning Commission on Case #73-2, Dupont Circle Rezoning," 28 November 1973, Box 3, Folder 1, Dupont Circle Community Association records.
[326] "Statement of Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy in Support of the Proposal by the Zoning Commission to Re-zone Certain Areas North of Dupont Circle Before the D.C. Zoning Commission," 28 November 1973, Box 3, Folder 1, Dupont Circle Community Association records.
[327] Ida Fox, "Testimony before the Zoning Commission on Case 73-23," 28 November 1973, Box 3, Folder 1, Dupont Circle Community Association records.

continued to buy and demolish Victorian townhouses to replace them with high-rise buildings.[328] Through the process of lobbying for the downzoning and critiquing overzoning, the NDCA became experts on the power of zoning to protect or make vulnerable large areas of land.

When developers in Dupont Circle began using alley closings as a quiet way to increase landholdings and build even larger structures, the NDCA knew that alley closings exacerbated the problems of overzoning that Dupont Circle residents so passionately fought: increased density, traffic, noise, and most importantly, the loss of affordable housing. Debates over an alley closing on square 132, at 18th and Swann Streets, in 1975, reveals how the NDCA tried to leverage its expertise on zoning to influence the outcome of the alley closing proposal. Instead of focusing on general impacts on neighborhood character or on specific functions of the alley in question—as West End residents had tried—the NDCA tried to get the City Council to see the bigger picture: that alley closings not only caught residents off guard, but could catch the city government off guard as well.

In the case of square 132, the applicants, Samson Associates and Barrett M. Linde, owned parking lots on either side of an alley, and they applied to close the alley in order to consolidate these lots. On this land, they proposed building nine new three-story townhouses of similar size and form to existing townhouses, providing an additional twenty-seven units. The Municipal Planning Office and the federal National Capital Planning Commission approved of the proposal as being in line with city's objectives to increase housing supply. [329] This development proposal would have seemed like the exact kind of proposal residents would

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[328] North Dupont Community Association, "Dupont Circle Profile," 1.

[329] Municipal Planning Office, Government of the District of Columbia, "S.O. #75-152 Item #3 on Agenda," 12 December 1975, Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; National Capital Planning Commission, "Street and Alley Closing—Part of Public Alley in Square 132, 18th and Swann Streets, N.W. (S.O. 75-152)," 26 November 1975, Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; Samson Associates and Barrett M. Linde, "Statement of Applicants," public hearing, closing of portion of public alley in square 132, S.O. 75-152, 12 December 1975, Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

welcome in the midst of a housing crisis: more low-rise, low-density housing in place of parking lots. However, the NDCA was skeptical that the developer actually intended to build housing. Members noted that under the current overzoned zoning, C-2-A, the developer would actually be allowed to build a six-story office building. The NDCA urged the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs to consider that "We have no guarantee that once this alley is closed, we are going to get housing." They cited another case in which "a property owner promised neighbors one thing to get the alley closed. Then, two hundred of our friends were forced out and 11 townhouses destroyed. The owner wanted to do something entirely different from what was promised to get the alley closed."[330]

To the NDCA, alley closings were simply a means to cheaply acquire public property. They did not hold a developer to the land use proposed in the application. In fact, once the developer acquired the land, he or she (though almost always he) could legally apply for a building permit to build something else. In other words, if a developer could convince the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs that an alley was not "useful" and "necessary," he could acquire the public land to build whatever he wanted, limited only by the area's zoning.

In the case of square 132, the developers did in fact keep their promises and build low-rise housing. This alley closing worked in favor of both residents and the developers. Whether the developers responded to residents' demands or truly intended to build housing all along is less significant than the NDCA's distrust of a housing proposal they otherwise would have celebrated. The NDCA's certainty that the developers would not use the alley closing to build what they promised illustrates just how contentious alley closings were. The happy ending of this

[330] Letter from Mary Helen Goodloe-Murphy to Transportation and Environmental Affairs Committee D.C. City Council, 16 December 1975, Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

particular case was not the end to the saga of alley closings in the 1970s, but merely an anomaly. For the rest of the decade, Dupont Circle residents would continue to distrust alley closings and defend their alleys against developers.[331] As in the West End, most alley closures in Dupont Circle were used by developers to rush land acquisitions and quickly usher in larger developments than would not otherwise be approved. By the late 1970s, alley closures were widely known as a developer-friendly tool with little oversight and public accountability. In 1980, after a particularly contentious alley-closing case went in favor of a developer who had notoriously disregarded city laws, an opponent wrote to sympathetic Councilmember John A. Wilson, "Once again the City Council displayed its true colors. … Your opponents on the Council are intent on destroying this city and pumping still more profits into the pockets of the philistines."[332] Despite their many tactics to prevent alley closures—whether explaining the implications for neighborhood services and affordable housing; outlining the necessity of particular alley uses; or pointing out how alley closures could be abused to counter the city government's own goals—residents largely failed to prevent alley closures.

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[331] Two contentious alley-closing cases in the late 1970s concerned the Antonelli family. In 1975, Dominic F. Antonelli, a prominant developer and parking lot magnate, planned to close an alley as a backend way to change the zoning of a Dupont Circle block from residential to commercial. In another case, in 1978, his stepson John O. Antonelli used an alley closing to acquire public land he had already been using illegally as a parking lot. In this case, Antonelli was able to bypass a court case that residents had filed against him, because the alley closing rendered their claims moot. See Statement of John A. Wilson, Councilmember, Ward 2 Before Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, 16 May 1975. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 16. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; Mary Helen Goodloe-Murphy, on behalf of North Dupont Community Association, Statement Before the Transportation Committee of the District of Columbia City Council, 16 May 1975, Series 3, Box 39, Folder 16. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; Letter from Sophia Menatos to Councilmembers, 3 October 1979, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 10. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers; "Bill 3-105 Alley Closing, Square 159, Fact Sheet," Series 3, Box 40, Folder 10. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

[332] Letter from Alvin Rosenbaum to John Wilson, 5 March 1980, Series 3, Box 40, Folder 10. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

IV. "A Very Limited and Crude Tool": Navigating Municipal Bureaucracies

In fighting development in their neighborhoods, residents of the West End and Dupont Circle had to justify the existence of their alleys, mundane features of their everyday built environment that they likely had never given much intentional thought. While it was obvious to residents, developers, and Councilmembers that the issues at stake with alley closings were comprehensive land use issues, not actually concerns about alley use or necessity as thoroughfares, D.C. code dictated that alley and street closing applications went to the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs. Residents were upset that this committee, which should have had nothing to do with comprehensive planning, could effectively dictate their neighborhood's character.

The committee agreed that it was inappropriately being asked to decide matters of neighborhood land use via a policy that was designed to be a localized street-closing procedure. In the case of square 14 in the West End, Councilmember Moore reported that the committee had reviewed all of the resident objections, despite the fact that many of the concerns should have been directed to the Zoning Commission, at the time when zoning decisions were made, not raised in a discussion about street and alley function.[333] This comment reflected the fact that residents had highlighted zoning issues such as neighborhood character and categories of land use, not the particularities of square 14's alley.

In a letter to Marion K. Schlefer, president of the influential and anti-development group the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, Councilmember Betty Ann Kane acknowledged outright that it was wrong that the City Council was being asked to decide land use via alley closings:

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[333] Jerry A. Moore, *Street and Alley Closing Report No. 1 on PR 1-142*, 3 September 1976. Series 3, Box 39, Folder 17. MS2190 John A. Wilson Papers.

> I share your desire to see that neighborhoods are protected against inappropriate development, and to channel needed projects to compatible areas. I have been concerned for some time that current planning and zoning mechanisms often don't work toward this end. In the absence of a Council-enacted comprehensive land use plan, the official involvement of the Council in such decisions usually occurs only when an alley closing happens to be involved. Alley closings are a very limited and crude tool out of context of all considerations that go into such matters.[334]

As a former aid to the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs explained in 1975, "the Council is being asked to exercise land use control," when the committee was only tasked with examining alley closing requests on case-by-case basis. The committee's charge was to assess whether individual alleys were "useless or unnecessary" and whether closing a particular alley would be in the public interest.[335]

If the residents could have argued against alley closures to the Zoning Commission, they perhaps could have been more successful in preventing development. They could have argued that the presence of public alleys was necessary to prevent changes that would be counter to the intent of the city's formal plan for the West End, the city's Comprehensive Plan, or the city's goals for affordable housing. However, the legal procedure for objecting to alley closings and the committee and divisional structure of the new D.C. government obliged residents to sidestep arguments about comprehensive planning. They instead had to rely on weaker arguments that individual alleys were necessary for transportation and environmental purposes. In failing to convince the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs, residents were unsuccessful in convincing the City Council to keep their alleys open.

By the early 1980s, developer-initiated alley closures had become so common and controversial that Councilmember Jerry A. Moore, the chairman of the Committee on

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[334] Letter from Betty Ann Kane to Marion K. Schlefer 7 April 1980, Box 23, Folder 5. MS2017 Committee of 100 records.

[335] Karlyn Barker, "Old Apex movie is demolished amid dispute over closing of alleys," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1977.

Transportation and Environmental Affairs, introduced a new act to curtail alley closure abuse. Effective in 1983 as D.C. Law 4-201, the "Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982" still allowed the City Council to "close all or part of any street or alley which it determines is unnecessary for street or alley purposes." However, it rectified some of the tension between the previous law and political economy of alley closures. First, it empowered the District of Columbia to charge fair market value for the alley property that would revert to abutting property owners. Money received for the land would be deposited in the General Fund of the District. No longer could developers acquire District land for free.[336]

Second, the law remedied some logistical barriers to resident opposition. Most significantly, it strengthened requirements for announcing public hearings to oppose alley closures. Applicants for alley closures now had to notify by mail every property owner on both sides of a block adjacent to the alley, and they had to post notices on all entrances to the alley. With this second provision, block residents who did not own property would be notified. To ensure these notices were mailed and posted, applicants also had to submit post office receipts and photographs of posted notices to the City Council. The City Council was still required to publish announcements of public hearings in the *D.C. Register,* and they now also had to give notice to the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions in whose area the alley closing would occur.[337] These provisions in the new law helped ensure that affected members of the public would be notified and be given an opportunity to object. In doing so, they helped direct residents to the proper avenues for voicing their concerns about land use changes in their neighborhoods.

[336] Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, D.C. Law 4-201 (1982).
[337] Ibid.

V. Conclusion

In the West End and Dupont Circle in the 1970s, it was obvious to both residents and to developers like Carr that contestations over alley closings were simultaneously all about alleys, and yet weren't about alleys at all. Legally, an alley closure was a simple procedure that privatized a very small slice of the city's public space, a space whose value even adjacent residents—the space's most regular users—had trouble articulating. Socially, economically, and politically, however, alley closures could have cascading effects with indelible effects on the future of downtown Washington, D.C. neighborhoods. Residents knew that the existence of public alleys would halt the spread of high-rise development, ideally preserving the scale and character of their neighborhoods and keeping small businesses, affordable housing, and community institutions intact. Developers, on the other hand, knew that the removal of public alleys would allow them to acquire control over the built environment of these neighborhoods, turning them into dense landscapes of office and mixed-use development. Both parties had their own visions of who downtown neighborhoods should be for: lower- and middle-income families with strong ties to their communities, or higher-income newcomers and corporations that would bring wealth to a struggling city.

To realize their visions, the parties had to navigate the tension between the written laws attached to specific landscapes and the realities of enacting those laws. Even when residents did attempt to engage the language and logics of land use law by proving the "usefulness" and "necessity" of one tiny part of their existing built environment, developers could easily rebut their arguments with the resources to modify the details of garage access or buffer zones in their building plans. The developers did not have to prove their new land uses would be useful or necessary, just that the former alleys were not.

Most resident arguments, however, addressed what residents truly cared about: bigger changes to their neighborhood that would result from new development. However, once residents ignored the written law and the built environment of alleys, they found themselves presenting arguments to the wrong audience; the Committee on Transportation and Environmental Affairs was not designed to rule on comprehensive land use. The divisions of municipal government that did have jurisdiction over comprehensive land use and that could have heard these arguments, such as the Zoning Commission, were not present nor were they legally relevant to the procedure of alley closings. Thus, finding themselves making the wrong arguments in the wrong forum, residents faced the political will of a largely unsympathetic audience. For a financially strapped City Council eager to remake the capital city, developers closing alleys could promise re-election contributions and future tax revenue. They therefore won the contests over who and what downtown Washington, D.C. alleys, blocks, and neighborhoods would be for.

Chapter Four: Alley Transformations in the Twenty-First Century

Thus far, this dissertation has highlighted groups that strategically claimed the landscapes of D.C. alleys in order to initiate or counter political and economic changes affecting the city as a whole. In claiming alleys, these groups—residents, activists, and representatives of public and private interests—revealed the power of small, taken-for-granted places. Their stories demonstrate how the fate of one small element of the built environment can have citywide social, political, and economic implications. In recognizing the value of alleys in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, these groups were the exception, rather than the norm. In the twenty-first century, however, more and more parties are turning toward alleys. This is not because the physical or cultural landscapes of alleys have fundamentally changed. In truth, most of the alleys in Washington, D.C. in 2019 are not so different from how they were in mid-century. Repurposed alley dwellings still house middle- and upper-middle-class white professionals; predominantly African American sanitation workers still collect garbage in alleys where rats proliferate; and residents of all races and ethnicities still battle developers over who should be able to build what and where. However, the city as a whole has changed dramatically.

Washington, D.C. is a younger, whiter, and wealthier city than it has ever been. From 2000 to 2017, the city's population increased by approximately 18 percent, with an approximate 54 percent increase in the number of people age 24-35.[338] Whereas the city's African American population reached its peak in 1970, at 71 percent of the city's population, Washington D.C. is no longer a majority-African American city. In 2011, for the first time in over fifty years, D.C.'s

[338] These percentages are based on U.S. Census Bureau, Profile of General Demographic Characteristics, 2000, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF; and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates, 2017, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF.

Black population dipped below 50 percent. Today, the city's white population is nearly as large as its Black population, and comparing the two reveals a city of stark extremes. As of 2019, whites are 42 percent of the city's population and their median household income is close to $132,500, among the highest in the United States. African Americans, on the other hand, comprise 45 percent of the city's population and earn a median household income of close to $42,500.[339] Economic disparity across racial lines is not unique to Washington, D.C., but it is particularly extreme in the city. In March 2019, the National Community Reinvestment Coalition released a report which claimed that between 2000 and 2013, Washington, D.C. had the highest percentage of gentrifying neighborhoods among cities nationally. It estimated that over 20,000 people—mostly low-income people and people of color—have been displaced as result.[340]

Driving the changes are local and national trends. In the late 1990s, the city government shifted its priorities from housing for the poor to attracting middle-class residents and businesses to the city. This move coincided with national developments including the ebbing of crack epidemic and a drop in urban violent crime; a wealth boom in the Washington metropolitan area, stimulated by the expansion of lobbying in the 1990s and early 2000s; and the growth of regional, federally contracted defense and information technology industries after 9/11.[341] As investment poured into Washington, D.C., neighborhoods closest to downtown were among the first to experience massive demographic change in the 2000s and early 2010s. In recent years gentrification has moved steadily eastward.

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[339] These numbers on 2019 population and income come from DC Health Matters, an NIH-funded public health data portal. http://www.dchealthmatters.org/demographicdata. The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates for 2017 have similar population data.
[340] Jason Richardson, Bruce Mitchell, and Juan Franco, "Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and Cultural Displacement in American Cities," National Community Reinvestment Coalition, 2019, https://ncrc.org/study-gentrification-and-cultural-displacement-most-intense-in-americas-largest-cities-and-absent-from-many-others/
[341] Derek Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Hyra and Prince, *Capital Dilemma*; Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, "'We Are Headed for Some Bad Trouble': Gentrification and Displacement in Washington, DC, 1920-2014," in *Capital Dilemma*, 107-35.

In this context of capital accumulation, the historic devaluation of alleys has not disappeared. Instead, it has become cautiously desirable. It marks alleys as a blank slate, a new "frontier" for city initiatives and profit-driven development and, paradoxically, a stage for experimenting with new forms of resisting gentrification. In the last decade, both public and private interests in Washington, D.C. have turned to alleys, assessing them as overlooked spaces with untapped potential to meet an array of city goals ranging from sustainable infrastructure, housing density, and commercial development.

Chapters One, Two, and Three of this dissertation demonstrate the role of alleys in transforming racialized and classed meanings of urban space; in launching movements for social, economic, and political change; and in facilitating property ownership and rights to dictate land use. This chapter assess how alleys are playing similar roles in Washington, D.C. today. Understanding how alleys have historically informed the social, political, and economic trajectory of Washington, D.C. is essential for critically evaluating who is making decisions about alleys in the present day and how their decisions may affect the future of urban neighborhoods.

I. "We Were More Experimental in the Alleys": Alleys for Sustainable Infrastructure

In the residential neighborhood of Chevy Chase, near the city's northwest border with Maryland, is an alley that runs parallel to Quesada Street to the south and Rittenhouse Street to the north. In many regards, this alley is typical of alleys in this upper-middle-class neighborhood; it is separated from the backyards of single-family houses by wooden fences and garages, and leafy branches form a shady canopy overhead. City-issued green trash bins and blue recycling bins line its edges. However, a closer look at this alley's pavement reveals that it is sets apart

from its neighbors. Unlike the concrete or asphalt alleys nearby, this alley has a center line paved with light-colored gravel.

Figure 12. A green alley in the Chevy Chase neighborhood. Photo by author, 2016.

The gravel is the result of D.C.'s Green Alleys project. This particular alley was repaved in 2014, and it was one of the first alleys to be given a makeover by the D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT). DDOT began its Green Alleys project in 2011 with the goals of reducing the quantity and improving the quality of stormwater in the city's right-of-ways. The Green Alleys project is implemented through a series of changes to the physical condition of individual alleys, which involves removing non-permeable asphalt or concrete and replacing it with permeable materials. The permeable pavement, like that in the Chevy Chase alley, is designed to filter and treat stormwater run-off. In essence, water filters through the pavement into the ground, rather than overwhelming the city's storm sewer system and having adverse effects on streams and wildlife.[342] DDOT carries out its Green Alleys project in neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, like Chevy Chase, because peripheral neighborhoods have separated storm and sanitary sewer systems, which is essential for the Green Alleys project

[342] District Department of Transportation, "DDOT Green Alley Projects FAQs," last modified November 16, 2011, https://ddot.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ddot/publication/attachments/ddot_green_alley_project_faqs.pdf

to work.[343] If residents in these areas experience regular flooding they can put in a request for a green alley. However, it is DDOT that assesses the grade and condition of alleys and selects those that qualify. Ultimately the Green Alley project helps the city reach its broader goals to make the city's infrastructure and operations more sustainable. [344]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, groups like Pride, the War on Rats, and sanitation workers took control over the physical spaces of alleys to achieve social, economic, and political reforms, processes described in Chapter Two. They took advantage of alleys as both public infrastructure and private domestic space to simultaneously connect with wide audience and directly affect the experiences of individual households. Tracking the public and private nature of alleys helps explain how the Green Alleys program has become so popular that it gets more requests for green alleys than it can accommodate.

D.C.'s Green Alleys project is just one of many similar projects nationwide that seeks to bring about change by controlling the physical spaces of urban alleys. In the last decade, several American cities have experimented with "green alleys." The term "green" implies that these projects are initiatives to reduce environmental impact, and programs like those in D.C. and Chicago are explicit in these goals. Chicago's green alleys program, for example, has become a model for many others with its aims to reduce stormwater runoff and mitigate urban heat island effect.[345] Other green alley programs, however, are more focused on social and economic

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[343] The original city, now composed of downtown neighborhoods, has a combined sewer system. Newer neighborhoods, on the outskirts of the city, have separate systems for sanitary sewage and stormwater.
[344] "DDOT Green Alley Projects FAQs."
[345] Chicago Department of Transportation, "The Chicago Green Alley Handbook." With 1,900 public alleys, the City of Chicago estimated it had 3,500 acres of impermeable paved surface, just from alleys. Over the past decade and a half, the Chicago Department of Transportation has replaced alley pavements with permeable pavements to reduce flooding; it has replaced dark pavements with light pavements, to reduce heat absorption and heat island effect; it has used recycled materials to construct new alleys; and it has replaced overhead light fixtures with "dark-sky," energy-efficient lights that focus light downwards, therefore reducing ambient light. While most of the program's objectives are environmental, its success means it has been integrated in broader citywide initiatives. These include People Alleys, a project to use Chicago's alleys as community spaces and economic development.

benefits. In Seattle, for example, alleys have been converted to small parks, pedestrian corridors, community gathering spaces, and commercial enclaves. Like other features of contemporary urban planning, like parklets and pedestrian plazas, these green alleys aim to promote broader public use in spaces currently used primarily for vehicles.[346] In a 2015 joint study, the Trust for Public Land and the UCLA Luskin School for Public Affairs created a green alley typology, teasing apart the environmental, social, and economic benefits of different green alley projects across the United States. A key takeaway is that the goals of green alley projects are often economic, social, and environmental all at once; stormwater mitigation may bring economic benefits or economic activity may bring about safe, attractive community spaces.[347]

The expansive definition of green alleys means that the scope and outcomes of green alley projects nationwide differ substantially, as do the processes by which alleys are chosen for retrofitting. Projects may be led by actors as different as a group of neighbors, community organizations, city agencies, or business-led public-private partnerships. Some projects are designed as one-day interventions, while others are semi-permanent infrastructure. The flexibility in definition, design, and implementation has made green alley programs popular. In

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Started in 2006, Chicago's Green Alleys program was the first city-wide alley program and has become a model for other cities.

[346] Fialko and Hampton, "Activating Alleys for a Lively City." In 2008, the International Sustainability Institute (ISI) implemented the Alley Network Project, designed primarily to transform Nord's Alley, the alley adjacent to ISI's offices in Seattle's Pioneer Square neighborhood. ISI acquired street use permits and hosted public events including film screenings, parties, and lighting installations in the alley. The success of this public programming prompted collaborations with the City of Seattle, which has provided funds to replace dumpsters in Pioneer Square with trashcans, which clear up alleys for pedestrian access. The city has also provided funds to restore alley surfaces and install new lighting. Inspired in part by the ISI's success in Pioneer Square, the University of Washington's Green Futures Lab partnered in 2011 with an architecture firm and a design firm to lay out a proposal to transform alleys citywide. This collaborative projected that converting underused downtown alleys to inviting and accessible spaces could double the amount of public space in downtown Seattle. They proposed that this transformation could happen simply, by inviting people into alleys with signage, lighting, public art, and events. While the proposal focused on community-building activities and aesthetics, it also proposed making alleys green spaces, with plants and permeable paving.

[347] "The Avalon Green Alley Network Demonstration Project." It is worth noting that these goals are likely more idealistic than practical. D.C.'s Green Alleys project, for example, can only be implemented in peripheral residential neighborhoods because of the separate sewer system. Economic benefits of green alleys, such as commercial use, will not happen in these spaces, which are zoned for residential, not commercial use.

the last decade, green alley projects have also been implemented or proposed in cities including Austin, Los Angeles, and Baltimore.[348] What unites these disparate projects is the same belief that Pride, the War on Rats, and city sanitation workers held: what happens in alleys will lead to wider citywide changes.

Despite the larger unified vision for change, the fact that green alley programs differ in their goals and practices can make "green alleys" a confusing term. A DDOT employee who works on the Green Alleys program explained that "green alleys" is not really an appropriate name for the work they do. When the D.C. program started around 2011, she said, it modeled itself on the Chicago program—as many cities did. The phrase "green alleys" was popular then, but it is no longer completely accurate or specific enough for the work that DDOT does.[349]

While the modifier "green" can be misleading for some of these projects, the prominence of "alley" in the program names is essential. The goals of green alley programs are not necessarily novel; cities have been working to improve pavement, traffic flow, lighting, trash pick-up, and public spaces for decades. Alleys provide a new way to engage the public in questions about infrastructure. All of these programs depend on the fact that most alleys have been overlooked and neglected for decades. Turning the public's attention to alleys is based on a prediction that residents will feel excited to discover the potential of something that has been hiding just beyond their own backyards. One DDOT employee confirmed that when the Green Alleys team does outreach, residents are typically eager to engage in conversations about their alleys because they know what happens in them will affect them directly.[350]

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[348] City of Austin Downtown Commission, "Activating Austin's Downtown Alleys as Public Spaces"; "The Avalon Green Alley Network Demonstration Project"; Nathanson and Emmett, "Alley Gating & Greening Toolkit Baltimore."
[349] Employees of District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) (anonymized), interview with author, September 19, 2017.
[350] Employees of DDOT, interview.

This feeling of discovery and immediate impact is key to the success of green alley programs. Because residents are more likely to be interested in their alleys than in other infrastructure projects, D.C.'s Green Alleys program works as good public outreach for the city.[351] In fact, DDOT launched a second alley-focused program in 2015, called AlleyPalooza. AlleyPalooza is a program that quickly repaves alleys in poor condition (without permeable materials or techniques to improve stormwater). Like Green Alleys, AlleyPalooza is not a new kind of city initiative; city transportation departments have been repaving roads in poor condition for decades. The name, however, implies excitement and even a reason to celebrate alleys.[352] Mimicking the name of a famous party, AlleyPalooza invites residents to be involved in a fun, new way.

The status of alleys as public infrastructure is key to the success of these alley programs. The programs depend on resident familiarity with and reliance on alleys in the routine functioning of their lives. In this way, they mimic the strategies of the 1970 sanitation strike. Garbage collectors and street cleaners also recognized the impact that could be had by directing residents' attention to this ever-present but often-ignored physical space. While the 1970 sanitation strike and the Green Alleys program of the 2010s have radically different goals, both rely on capturing interest in alleys—whether negatively through letting uncollected garbage mount or positively through catchy campaigns with names like Green Alleys and AlleyPalooza. They both depend on the idea that when residents' attention is called to alleys, they are unlikely to be able to ignore this space that is present all over the city, but that they regularly take for granted. They are invited, and maybe even forced, to engage with the movement at hand.

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[351] Employees of DDOT, interview.
[352] District Department of Transportation, "AlleyPalooza," accessed April 20, 2019, https://ddot.dc.gov/alleypalooza.

The private nature of alleys is equally important. Because alleys are hidden from public view, they are ideal spaces to try new initiatives that can ultimately lead to bigger citywide changes. It is unlikely that those beyond the block will immediately notice what happens in alleys, because few people have reason to enter most alleys. For Pride, alleys were places to pilot economic enterprises that would expand beyond the alley. It could safely assume there would be little government oversight of the activities of Black men in domestic alleys of Black neighborhoods. DDOT similarly sees alleys as places for experimentation. In the alleys, it tests new paving materials and techniques that, if successful, may ultimately be used on front streets as well. The agency assumes little backlash because it is unlikely that anyone beyond neighboring residents—with whom they would have spoken and made traffic arrangements—would care about short-term disruption of access to resident parking spaces. For DDOT, alleys simultaneously provide the lowest risk for disruption and the highest reward for public engagement.[353]

Nooni Reatig, an architect in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C., is unaffiliated with the Green Alleys project, but echoed the idea that alleys are places to experiment with new designs and materials. Her firm has designed many residential units whose lots abut alleys in the rear. She explained, "we took creativity and were more experimental in the alleys. …I think that that kind of creativity gives character to the city. In our case it comes across as more contemporary and more experimental architecture [that] happens in the alley. If you go to Ridge Street, between Ridge Street and N Street Northwest, between 4th and 5th, if you walk in the alley there you'll see these all-glass curtain walls of rows of townhouses." This particular set of buildings, which are in a historic district, had strict design and preservation requirements for the

[353] Employees of DDOT, interview.

brick front facades. For the alley-facing facades, Reatig's firm could be more creative.[354] For Pride and for urban planners and designers today, the fact that alleys are hidden and private makes them protected spaces for experimenting with and refining tactics that are ultimately meant for implementation beyond the block scale.

II. "It's Relatively More Affordable": Alleys for Housing

In 2016, the District of Columbia Zoning Commission passed new zoning regulations for the city. The new regulations provided much-needed updates to the previous comprehensive zoning plan from 1958. While the former regulations were written for a city that was embracing cars, the update promotes development for a city that is becoming denser, rather than decentralized. Among the changes in the 2016 zoning rewrite, which took about eight years to complete, are provisions in residential zones for more accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and for more building on alley lots. ADUs are additional living quarters that can be within a residential home, such as a basement apartment. They can also be quarters in a separate building on a residential lot, such as an alley-facing apartment above a stand-alone garage. The key is that these units are on the same property as the main building in a residential zone. Alley lots, on the other hand, are separate parcels of property from those that face the street. They face on to an alley, which is their primary street address. The new zoning provision allows the owner of an alley lot to build a small house or convert an existing building—like a garage—into a residence.[355] These changes were designed to increase housing density and affordability.

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[354] Nooni Reatig (architect at Suzane Reatig Architecture), interview with author, January 14, 2018.

[355] There are many additional restrictions which dictate the size and massing of alley-facing units. Units on alley lots must have a five-foot rear buffer and five-foot side buffer from residential lots. Units which are accessed from the alley (alley lots and ADUs) can only be built alongside alleys that are at least 24-feet wide. They must be at least 12 feet from center of alley to allow for emergency vehicle access. If units are to be entered from the front street (ADUs), there must be a clear passage at least 8 feet wide. In addition, all units for residential use must have utility

In the 1970s, when residents in the West End and Dupont Circle opposed alley closings, they were forced to recognize the complexity of laws concerning alleys, as described in Chapter Three. Similarly approaching alleys as complex legal landscapes today helps clarify what new zoning regulations mean for housing density and affordability in Washington, D.C. The ability of property owners to take advantage of new zoning provisions for alley-facing residential use depends on their ability to meet requirements for building permits. Ultimately they must know how and when to navigate legal proceedings of municipal government. Looking to the experience of residents who opposed alley closings forty years ago is instructive. Their successes and failures navigating municipal bureaucracy illuminates the challenges and opportunities brought on by the recent zoning changes.

The 2016 changes for ADUs and alley lots were largely in response to demand for more and relatively affordable housing in downtown neighborhoods. One zoning expert at the D.C. Office of Planning explained that the 2016 zoning provision simply made official what many D.C. residents were already doing. Because living in Washington, D.C. had gotten so expensive, many people had informally created ADUs on their properties. Driven by economic concerns, homeowners could rent out ADUs as a way to make extra income and help with mortgage payments. Or, they were a way to provide housing for grandparents and child care providers. However, these ADUs were illegal under existing zoning.[356] The new zoning regulations responded to this demand by making these ADUs legal, but also by ensuring that they were built safely with proper occupancy permits and inspections. In allowing for ADUs in residential zones, the zoning shift seems like a straightforward response to a legitimate need. By

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hook-ups, such as electric, sewer, and water, and their height cannot exceed twenty feet or two stories. See DC Office of Zoning, "Zoning Regulations of 2016 (Unofficial Version)."

[356] Employee of District of Columbia Office of Planning (anonymized), interview with author, May 1, 2017.

encouraging housing density, this move was also in line with the city's goals to reverse the promotion in the 1958 regulations of automobile-based urban sprawl.

Unlike ADUs, which abut alleys but are located on property facing the street, alley lots are properties that face only on to the alley. These are the same lots that housed the infamous alley dwellings in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The 1958 zoning code, which passed only three years after the failed ban on alley dwellings, removed residential use from the acceptable uses of alley lots (though it grandfathered in existing residential alley use, including the recently won alley dwellings that remained on "courts" like Cherry Hill Lane and Pomander Walk). Until 2016, except for these few remaining original houses, the only legal uses for alley lots were parking, storage, and artist studios. The 2016 zoning rewrite reversed this.

To be clear, it is extremely unlikely that the 2016 zoning provision for alley lot construction would lead to alley dwelling communities like those of the past. First, there are fewer alley lots than existed in the late nineteenth century because over the past century, many lots have been absorbed into adjacent lots. Remaining alley lots are spread out, with sometimes as few as one alley lot per block. Thus, those who live in new alley lot buildings are unlikely to foster large insular communities. Second, building codes today have utilities and construction requirements, which would raise rents and eliminate the substandard and notorious building conditions of earlier alley dwellings. If anything, the alley-facing houses envisioned in the 2016 zoning rewrite are more analogous to the rehabilitated houses in alleys-turned-"courts," like Pomander Walk and Cherry Hill Lane in Chapter One, which housed singles and couples of the professional class in the 1950s. The houses would still be expensive, but like ADUs, they would be relatively affordable compared to houses on front streets.

Despite the small probability of reviving large alley dwelling communities, the decision to allow residential construction on alley lots would have made Progressive-Era reformers cringe. They believed it was the built form of the alley itself, not the people who lived along it or the physical conditions inside, that led to immorality. The D.C. government, however, dismissed whatever of these lingering sentiments remained in 2016 and instead had a straightforward motivation in allowing alley lot construction. As with the ADU provision, alley lot construction would allow more residential use in increasingly dense urban areas, thus relieving some pressure on the city's tight housing market.

While the alley lot provision is theoretically similar to the ADU provision, they have very different implications for who can take advantage of new building possibilities and how they go about it. ADUs share property with a front-facing house, and so they are most often looked after by the owners who occupy or rent out the adjacent structure. Alley lots, on the other hand, have more varied ownership and degrees of maintenance. Until 2016, if owned by a nearby resident, these lots might have been well-maintained or regularly used. If owned by someone far away, they might have been managed storage areas or parking lots. In other cases, these lots sat empty and not maintained, or their maintenance was taken over by neighbors. In one downtown neighborhood with several alley lots, a legacy of its time as one of the neighborhoods with the most nineteenth and early twentieth-century alley dwellings, a resident who had a neglected alley lot behind his property explained, "My sense is that [before the zoning change], because these alley lots were mostly worthless, people weren't paying much attention, so people owned them and just … kind of let it go. And if they moved away [they kept the lots]—I mean the property taxes are like $100. The ownership structure is strange and unusual in many cases."[357] As small

[357] Downtown resident (anonymized), interview with author, January 12, 2018.

pieces of land that could not generate much profit in lower-density residential areas, most of these alley lots had little value. They were cheap enough to hold on to, but garnered little investment or oversight from absentee owners.

Proposed as a way to offer more affordable housing options, the allowance of housing on alley lots has in fact had the effect of raising alley property values, sparking interest from previously absent owners. The resident told the story of his neighbor's purchase of an alley lot near his home. This case actually occurred just a few years before the zoning rewrite, but his neighbor received a zoning exemption to build a house on it, suggesting that the Board of Zoning Adjustments was already inclined to allow residential alley lots:

> [A neighbor] bought this lot, I think it was for $15,000, which is pretty good for an urban piece of land. It's not small. Then he went through the zoning process and got approved to build a house. And not literally, but more or less the next day, got a call from the lawyer of the previous owner who then filed a lawsuit against him to try to basically recoup the land. Because by getting that zoning permission [for housing] his lot probably went up in value by like four or five times. So it took him two years or three years to get through that process. He then did build the house but decided not to occupy it. So he sold that house just recently and that whole house sold for like, I don't know exactly, but like $1.1 million.[358]

The fact that this new alley-facing house sold for over one million dollars demonstrates how expensive the housing market in some downtown neighborhoods is. $1.1 million dollars may be *relatively* affordable compared to other homes in the neighborhood, but it is certainly not affordable to the average person, let alone a person with a low income. New alley housing adds to the city's housing stock so it may eventually lower prices in a tight market. However, in the short term none of this new housing will help ameliorate the disparities caused by extreme income inequality in the city. As this neighboring resident noted:

> Now, it's relatively more affordable than other houses on my street, and if I rented it out it would be a relatively lower price, because it's a little smaller, and it's on an alley,

[358] Downtown resident, interview.

> which may or may not detract from the value for some people. It's improving the stock of housing, which has indirect but important benefits in terms of housing supply and the price of housing. But we're not getting low-income housing out of alley lots. Full stop.[359]

Instead, housing on alley lots will likely facilitate home ownership for those who currently find the expensive neighborhoods just out of reach. This prediction closely follows the path taken by Mark Lawrence, an architect who lives with his young family in Naylor Court. Naylor Court is a residential alley that had been grandfathered in under the 1958 zoning code, and thus has been zoned for residential use for decades. Lawrence explained:

> The alley for us was an affordable way to move into this neighborhood. …We didn't really want a rowhouse but we also couldn't have—we'd have been less likely to be able to afford one. Whereas this building was empty, it was affordable, no one else—very few people—looked at it the same way we did and saw its potential.[360]

By the end of 2017, there had been few applications for building on the city's alley lots, despite the new prospects of profit brought by the 2016 zoning rewrite. The was partly due to the word getting out slowly about this possibility. This may also be due to lack of financing or urgency. However, a legal hiccup is what prevented much new construction. The resident of the downtown neighborhood summed it up succinctly: "You can't build on an alley lot until you have a permit, and you can't get a permit until you have an address, and you can't get an address until the alley has a name."[361] Most alleys in Washington, D.C. are not named. Or, if they were once named their names have been wiped from the D.C. Surveyor's records. Without a street name, alley lots have no addresses. Without an address, a property owner cannot apply for a building permit.

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[359] Downtown resident, interview.
[360] Mark Lawrence (Principal and Co-Founder E/L Studio, resident of Naylor Court), interview with author, May 8, 2018.
[361] Downtown resident, interview.

Because alleys must have names in order for property owners to acquire building permits, what has ensued is not a surge in building permit applications, but an increase in alley-naming applications.[362] Like alley-closing applications of the 1970s, alley-naming applications have become contentious. Those who succeed in naming an alley gain the right to build on their alley lots, just as those who successfully closed alleys won the right to build on their newly acquired alleys. In both cases, applications must be approved by the City Council, whose members must hear public opinion. It is at these moments that opponents to new land uses can try to convince the Council that the naming, or closing, should not be approved. The resident described how the process has worked thus far for neighbors who do not want construction in their alley: "Once neighbors find out that the alley naming is a required step, and that step goes through the City Council, they now have another avenue to put the brakes on potential development."[363]

Like alley closings of the 1970s, alley namings are a legal process being used in a way for which they were never intended: to initiate land use change at the scale of neighborhood blocks. As with alley closings, in which the property owners adjacent to alleys acquired more land on which to build, alley namings allow those who own alley lots to build. Stopping an alley naming could block an alley lot owner from building something unwanted by neighbors. However, it would also prevent all alley construction, whether deemed good or bad by local residents. The resident provided an example:

> Imagine we have two alley lots. And we have one really nice homeowner, who's lived in the neighborhood for thirty years, who wants to build a totally pleasant, pretty, small alley structure. And then we have some, you know, jackass developer who lives out in Virginia, wants to build some ugly monstrosity, and so if we imagine that the awful developer goes first to get the alley named, the neighbors come out and thwart it. This homeowner isn't going to get to build their thing either because the alley naming controls both of what they do…. To prevent the alley from getting named, you prevent all

[362] Employee of District of Columbia Office of Planning, interview.
[363] Downtown resident, interview.

development on the alley.[364]

He continued, "You know, we can discuss how we want to manage property developers we don't like that are doing things that are, we think, incompatible with our neighborhood. But alley naming is a really blunt instrument."[365] His comment mimicked Betty Ann Kane's, the City Councilmember in the 1970s who said of alley closings: "Alley closings are a very limited and crude tool out of context of all considerations that go into such matters [of land use]."[366]

Like alley closings, alley namings are approved by the City Council on a case-by-case basis, without an eye to comprehensive planning. They have become a tool used to control land use, despite never being designed to be a land use control. Because most applicants see naming as an obstacle to construction, little concerted effort or community input occurs in the process of choosing a name. In fact, the applicant—usually a single property owner—picks the name, sometimes with input from the Advisory Neighborhood Commission. As a result, new alley names are popping up around the city, with implications for sense of place and heritage recognition. At the moment, these names are chosen simply as a means to effect land use change in the alley.

As of 2018, there were few enough alley-naming applications that they had not garnered widespread opposition. As the resident noted, "I'm sure they'll be controversial. And we're starting to see cases where neighbors are understanding the naming process, starting to come out at that stage. The first few alley naming we had just sailed through, because no one was really aware."[367] If alley namings become as controversial as alley closings, the next few years may see

[364] Downtown resident, interview.
[365] Downtown resident, interview.
[366] Letter from Betty Ann Kane to Marion K. Schlefer 7 April 1980, Box 23, Folder 5. MS2017 Committee of 100 records.
[367] Downtown resident, interview.

more backlash to this process. Contestations over alley namings are simultaneously all about alleys and their names, and yet aren't about alleys at all. They dictate whether a block can be dense with housing or whether alley lots remain vacant and neglected by absentee owners.

Examining alleys as legal landscapes reveals how decisions about urban land use get made and by whom. Present-day contestations over alley namings, like 1970s contestations over alley closings, show that municipal ordinances—even those which are seemingly limited to impacts at the individual lot or block scale—can have far-reaching land use implications. Those who know which governing bodies to approach for permits and approvals, and in what order, can take advantage of the possibility for broader land use change. The cases of alley closings in the 1970s and alley namings in the present show that it is not only zoning regulations which dictate what gets built in urban neighborhoods, but also the ability of different parties to successfully navigate municipal bureaucracy.

III. "It's Sort of a Special Place": Alleys for Commercial Development

Two blocks north of the Mount Vernon Metro stop on 9th Street, in the northwest part of Washington, D.C., one can turn left to walk down a narrow, nondescript alley. Past a parking lot, dumpsters, delivery trucks, and strewn garbage, the narrow alley converges with similar narrow alleys coming from 10th, N, and O Streets. These form a larger H-shaped courtyard-like space lined with one- and two-story brick buildings, all of which are at least a century old. Some appear uncared for or neglected. Others, however, are carefully refurbished, housing high-end restaurants, a coffee shop, design firms, and an art gallery. This is Blagden Alley, one of D.C.'s hippest destinations, located in Shaw, one of D.C.'s most expensive neighborhoods. Blagden Alley is also home to the "D.C. Alley Museum," an officially christened collection of murals

Figures 13-15. Buildings in Blagden Alley. Top: The Dabney, a high-end restaurant. Middle: Murals, part of the DC Alley Museum. Bottom: A design firm in a converted stable. Photos by author, 2017 and 2018.

painted on garage doors. On any given day, young professionals walk through the alley frequenting businesses and posing in front of the Instagram-ready murals. Every now and then they step aside for cars or garbage trucks driving through; there are no sidewalks in the alley, and the open courtyard is still a city right-of-way.

In the 1950s, inhabited alleys in neighborhoods like Georgetown transformed from Black and poor spaces to white and wealthy ones, a process described in Chapter One. Examining how this transformation occurred—through displacement of low-income African Americans, restoration of historic buildings, and strategic aesthetics and signage—provides insight into how the racialized and classed meanings of alleys like Blagden Alley have similarly changed. In the last thirty years, and since the turn of the twenty-first century in particular, Blagden Alley and the neighboring alley Naylor Court, located just one block north,

have attracted both high-income young professionals and corporate investment. The classed identities of the alleys have shifted, from places of poverty to sites of upscale consumption. The racialized landscape has changed as well; once located in an almost exclusively African American neighborhood, the alleys now cater to a whiter clientele. How property owners and visitors to the alleys produce and celebrate the alleys' appeal today has significant implications for who is meant to belong in these spaces and the neighborhoods of which they are a part.

Some credit the built environment of the alleys for the popularity of Blagden Alley and Naylor Court. Mark Lawrence, the architect who works and lives with his family in Naylor Court, pointed specifically to the building materials and to the scale change. Few buildings in the alleys are higher than two stories and nearly all the buildings and streets are covered with red brick. He explained, "There's also a scale change that happens from the main street to the alley that is comfortable and maybe of a scale that you might see in a European city more commonly than here. And the road and the sidewalk are one. It's a lot of little things that build into people's enchantment when they're in here."[368]

A small-scale developer named Giorgio Furioso, who has owned a Blagden Alley building since 1988, pointed to a different aspect of the built environment: the fact that "blind" alleys, like the H-shaped Blagden Alley, are out of sight to those on front streets. They promise a maze-like space where one can wander and discover. He explained, "I think you come to the alley partly because you think you've discovered something more secretive and something more—I don't want to say illicit necessarily. I think it's sort of a special place, if you will. Rather than driving up to a building that everyone can see."[369]

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[368] Lawrence, interview.
[369] Giorgio Furioso (developer and property owner in Blagden Alley), interview with author, May 8, 2018.

These qualities of the built environment of alleys—small-scale, built for pedestrians, and hidden from front streets—are nearly universal for alleys all over the country. However, when considered in the context of the Shaw neighborhood in the 2010s, their appeal makes even more sense. Since the early 2000s, the Shaw neighborhood has seen massive gentrification, with glass-paneled high-rise buildings seemingly popping up on every corner. According to urban scholar Derek Hyra, between 2000 and 2010, the Shaw population increased by seventeen percent compared to a five percent growth rate citywide. Even more strikingly, property values increased in Shaw by one hundred forty five percent in this period, compared to only thirty five percent in the 1990s. The great majority of newcomers were young adults. More than five thousand people aged twenty to thirty-four moved to the area in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[370]

The alleys offer a contrast to this fast growth. Walking into Blagden Alley and Naylor Court, one feels like they are walking back in time, to a place that the construction cranes forgot. The alleys feel like spaces that have simply evolved on their own, unlike nearby new developments clearly designed with a target use and audience in mind. A project manager with Douglas Development, a firm that has owned three Blagden Alley buildings since 2009, explained that in neighborhoods like Shaw, which have been saturated with new development, the alleys allowed the firm to "differentiate their product."[371]

Furioso, who has been in Blagden Alley since the very beginning of gentrification of Shaw, put it a different way. He said, "[The alley is] probably the last vestige of grit and real people going against, whatever, the man, the corporate lifestyle." He was remembering his early years in the alley. In 1988, when Furioso bought his building, a twelve thousand five hundred-

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[370] Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City*, 65-67.
[371] Project Manager with Douglas Development (anonymized), interview with author, January 15, 2018; Douglas Development Corporation, "Blagden's Alley," https://douglasdevelopment.com/properties/1234-9th-street-nw/.

square-foot space built in 1909 as a community stable, the alley was quite different. It was full of auto repair shops that were operating illegally, it was used as a dump, and it was a center of prostitution. He remembered the months he spent clearing trash and auto parts from his building: "There was so much trash in this building that the only way I could get in was by climbing up to the second floor. I couldn't even get in. … It took me almost a year. It was a very big loss financially to go and get a front loader, get a dump truck, and clean it up."[372] When he finally cleared out the building, it became a hub for an underground arts scene. It was known as the Beta Punk Warehouse for the raves hosted by the Beta Punks band and arts group, his first tenant. A few years later, Furioso divided parts of the building into artist studios.[373] He remembered this time, laughing with disbelief, "They were all living here [in the building] and it was like, it was really scary. I'd go, some day I'm gonna get a call from somebody that my building is burned down and five people have died, you know. Because there was tents everywhere. It was definitely like, a scene, if you will."[374] Over the years, Furioso continued to rent to different artists and design groups. Unlike Douglas Development, which saw the alley as an opportunity to expand their Shaw market in late 2000s, Furioso saw the alley as the last holdout against fast-paced gentrification.

The appeal of the alley derives not just from the juxtaposition of the alleys' built environment with newer developments nearby. As Furioso's comments show, it comes from a longstanding perception that the built environment of alleys hides and facilitates illicit activity and other actions that aren't meant to be seen. This perception dates back to the late nineteenth century, when housing reformers and social workers in Washington, D.C. published dozens of

[372] Furioso, interview.
[373] Furioso, interview.
[374] Ibid.

reports explaining that the built environment of hidden alleys fostered immorality and bred criminal behavior. As described in Chapter One, these findings consistently identified the built environment as the culprit, yet racism in the Jim Crow era bolstered these accusations of immorality and criminality, since those who lived and worked in the city's alleys were almost exclusively African American.

By the late twentieth century, few still espoused the idea that that alleys *cause* crime, but as unmonitored and poorly lit spaces, they did often serve as sites for violence or intimidation. In the decades following World War II, when the city suffered from disinvestment and the population became majority African American, local media coverage of D.C.'s alleys, especially in the 1980s, focused almost exclusively on murder, rape, gun violence, and drug use and dealing. Like the reports from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this media coverage established alleys as sites of racialized violence and danger. Blagden Alley and Naylor Court were not exempt from this narrative. They were particularly notorious for illegal dumps, environmental waste produced by unlicensed auto mechanics, and prostitution, which often turned violent.[375] By the time new investment in Shaw first slowly began in the late 1980s—with gentrification by young white professionals buying homes and with investors like Furioso—D.C.'s alleys had been ingrained in public consciousness as dangerous and unmonitored landscapes, often at the heart of Black communities struggling economically.

Today, thirty years later, the perception of danger in the alleys lingers, even with advanced gentrification in Shaw and the commercial success of Blagden Alley and Naylor Court. For many, this is, interestingly, an essential part of the alleys' present-day appeal. When Furioso

[375] Carlos Sanchez, "The Sordid World of Blagden Alley," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1988; Linda Wheeler Washington, "Horse Barn in NW To Be City Archives: Cleanup Jolts Naylor Court," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1988; Furioso interview.

said that you come to the alley for something "I don't want to say illicit necessarily," he was not alone in expressing the sentiment that the alley exists in an "in-between" state between safety and danger, legal and illegal. Lawrence, who lives with his family in Naylor Court, also described this appealing tension. He said, "By day and by night the alley quality changes. I mean, you still see evidence of illicit activity. If you walk through in the morning, you're gonna see the remnants of last night's parties. … There are still prostitutes. But we play in the alley all day. On the weekends we have little umbrellas and things, and our children block the street off." He concluded, "If the alley loses its identity, if it becomes to sanitized, it won't have its appeal." Elizabeth Emerson, Lawrence's partner in the firm, agreed, and described the alley as "some kind of safe illicit place. It's something in between. And that's part of the allure, I think."[376]

The appeal of potential danger in alleys—whether real or imagined—comes from two places. First, it perpetuates an exclusivity among newcomers in the alleys. It marks the alleys as "cool" destinations, accessible only to the small subset of urban hipsters willing to explore and take risks. Secondly, and more significantly, the perceived danger of the alleys cannot be separated from an understanding of the alleys as sites once emblematic of disinvestment in African American neighborhoods. Spending time in the alleys of Shaw allows D.C.s young professionals—who are often but not always white—to feel they are accessing an aspect of African American urban life they've likely only seen in the media and popular culture, but have never experienced first-hand. They can imagine the violence that once took place, giving them a sense of an authentic urban experience. Yet at the moment they feel uncomfortable, they can duck into one of the alley establishments for a cappuccino or craft cocktail. The history of the

[376] Elizabeth Emerson (Principal and Co-Founder E/L Studio), interview with author, May 8, 2018; Lawrence, interview. Emerson and Lawrence are together working on the Washington Alley Project (WAP), an exploration of urban design aimed to get people back in alleys: https://www.elstudioarch.com/projects/wap-the-washington-alley-project/

alleys as spaces where D.C.'s African American residents suffered losses and struggled with a lack of infrastructure and investment has now been transformed into an amenity that attracts commercial establishments, consumers, and even home buyers.

Property owners who currently own residences, operate businesses, and lease out commercial space in Blagden Alley and Naylor Court face a paradox. They want to maintain the sense of authenticity and the feeling of discovery and lurking danger in the alleys. At the same time, they advocate zoning and design changes that will draw in more consumers and larger corporations. They want to keep the alleys hidden from all but those with the cultural competency to know where they are, while they simultaneously want to raise the value of their properties in order to see a return on their investments. For example, Furioso—the same person who claimed that alleys are about "real people going against the man"—also spearheaded an effort in the mid 1990s to switch much of Blagden Alley's zoning from residential to commercial, thus paving the way for more businesses and higher property values.[377] He recognized the inherent tension in his position when remarked, "this commercial zoning is gonna kill the golden gooses."[378] In other words, the commercial success of Blagden Alley and Naylor Court threatens the very appeal of the alleys as hidden, unmonitored spaces from another time and place.

Property owners are attempting to maintain the tenuous balance between the alleys as places to go back in time on the one hand, and, on the other hand, places that offer modern amenities that are attractive to a professional class. One way they are attempting to maintain this

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[377] Both Blagden Alley and Naylor Court are zoned for commercial use on their eastern sides, closest to 9th Street. While Blagden Alley is now zoned entirely for commercial use, Naylor Court remains mostly zoned for residential use. See D.C. Office of Zoning Official Zoning Map, http://maps.dcoz.dc.gov/zr16/#l=11&x=-8576100.80879499&y=4706465.769289769&mms=18!26!21!24!22!4!8!1!2&dcb=0

[378] Furioso, interview.

"in-between" state between past and present is through modification of the building facades with signage and public art. These aesthetic choices are not dissimilar from the choices made by the small-scale developers of Georgetown's inhabited alleys in the 1950s, who painted, changed place names, and installed details like wrought-iron railings. These superficial changes to Georgetown's alleys drew in newcomers who wanted a charming "historic" feel, but did not want to confront the people—African American alley dwellers—who were central to that history. In a similar way, what property owners in Blagden Alley and Naylor Court choose to celebrate or erase from the past has implications for belonging and exclusion today, not just in the alley, but in the neighborhood and city as a whole.

Figure 16. Signage for new and old businesses mix on the facades of Naylor Court buildings. Photo by author 2017.

Figure 17. A concrete wall painted to look like historic red brick in Naylor Court. Photo by author, 2017.

The lack of signage on front streets for the alley businesses and public art preserves the sense of discovery and uneasiness for those exploring Blagden Alley and Naylor Court for the first time. Once in the alleys, signage for new

businesses pays homage to the style of nineteenth-century signs—black and white painted directly on bricks. One concrete wall has even been painted to look like red brick, masking the building's more recent construction to fit in with an idealized past. In some locations, older signs—which until recently only had a ghost outline—have been repainted as well, mixing long-closed businesses with new ones. In resurrecting the memory of these nineteenth and early twentieth-century businesses, such as a stable, grocery, or hospital for horses and dogs, these signs are selective in celebrating the pasts of Naylor Court and Blagden Alley. The signage works in tandem with the buildings themselves, two to four-story brick structures, some of which date to the 1830s, and which are protected from significant physical change under a 1990 historic district designation.[379] Together, the buildings and signage maintain the sense of discovering a forgotten world and they preserve a feeling of unease at what might be around the corner, but they also present a sanitized past that allows newcomers to ignore the poverty, crime, and violence in the alleys, experienced primarily by poor African Americans.[380]

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[379] Katherine Grandine and Kimberly Prothko Williams, "Blagden Alley/Naylor Court Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1990.

[380] There is a tension between the designation of buildings and districts as "historic" and the gentrification that often follows that designation. Historic designation is based on the architectural significance or the past presence of a significant person of event, despite the fact that it is people with present-day motivations who decide that past significance. The designations stave off demolition and can prevent massive redevelopment. However, they often also bring cultural cache to an area, drawing in investors and higher-income consumers. Because the historic significance is rooted in the built environment, it is property owners that benefit, and only those property owners who can afford to make renovations over time that conform to historic standards approved by historic preservation review boards. Ultimately, it is the built environment that is protected and meant to remain static, not property values, rents, or people who inhabit that built environment. This tension is acute in the Blagden Alley/Naylor Court historic district, and it may emerge in other D.C. alleys as preservationists act on recommendations for preservation from a 2014 survey of D.C. alley buildings produced by the DC Historic Preservation Office, located within the DC Office of Planning. See Williams, "The D.C. Historic Alleys Building Survey." For another discussion about this tension in Washington, D.C. see Brett Williams, *Upscaling Downtown: Stalled Gentrification in Washington, D.C.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 129-133.

Figure 18. A mural that is part of the DC Alley Museum. Photo by author, 2017.

The murals in Blagden Alley also present a curated narrative of the alley. Painted on building facades and garage doors, these works of art were commissioned beginning in 2015 to celebrate the history of artists in the alley, a history that began in the late 1980s with people like Furioso. Partially funded by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the murals collectively form the DC Alley Museum. They are meant to expose alley visitors to local artists, and they themselves have become a draw to the alleys. In September 2017, for example, the DC Alley Museum collaborated with Shaw Main Streets, a neighborhood revitalization non-profit, to host a two-day event called "Alley-Oop Music and Murals Festival." The event was advertised in city newspapers and across social media and it involved live music, film screenings, and yoga in the alley, as well as a ribbon-cutting ceremony for new murals. Hundreds of visitors streamed through, taking refuge from the bright sun in the shadow of the brick buildings and taking photographs of the murals. While this

Figure 19. A sign for the DC Alley Museum in Blagden Alley. Photo by author, 2017.

public art has enlivened the space and exposes visitors to emerging artists, it celebrates a past that dates only to the beginning of the alleys' gentrification.

In addition to selectively celebrating the alleys' history as a hub for the arts, the murals work to transform the racialized and classed meanings of the space, in quite subtle ways. Many of the murals were painted by African American artists and many celebrate African American figures and culture. While this may seem to intentionally signal that these alleys—and Shaw more broadly—are still Black space, the murals also function to do what Joshua Inwood and Deborah Martin identify as deploying race strategically to create a progressive landscape narrative. Visitors are encouraged to consume and celebrate Black culture in the alleys. As Brandi Summers and Hyra both note in their studies of D.C.'s H Street and Shaw neighborhoods, the gentrification of historically Black D.C. neighborhoods often involves rebranding Blackness as a palatable and consumable attraction for newcomers, poorly repackaged as "diversity."[381] The murals work to mark the alleys as spaces where middle and higher-income consumers—both white and Black—can meaningfully interact with identities that are not their own. Yet like brick-painted signage, the artwork does not ask visitors to confront the history of racialized violence and disinvestment that is also a foundation of the alley's popularity today.

The signage and public art are part of a branding process that is transforming the cultural landscape of the alleys, including their classed and racialized meanings. Blagden Alley and Naylor Court are now they are branded as leisure spaces to consume fine food and drink and to enjoy art, design, and Black culture. Members of the D.C.'s increasingly young, white, and affluent population are now invited to belong in a space that has begun to exclude the very

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[381] Joshua F. J. Inwood and Deborah G. Martin, "Whitewash : White Privilege and Racialized Landscapes at the University of Georgia," *Social & Cultural Geography* 9(4) (2008): 373-395; Brandi Summers, "H Street, Main Street, and the Neoliberal Aesthetics of Cool" in Hyra and Prince, *Capital Dilemma*, 299-317; Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City*, 75-104.

people and activities whose marginalized histories are part of the appeal. Those who might still find the alley a safe refuge for shelter, drug use, or other out-of-sight actions are now the exception rather than the norm. In the newly classed landscape, these individuals are increasingly outsiders. Largely members of the African American poor, they are also more and more excluded from an alley, neighborhood, and city that gets whiter each year. History is still central to the appeal of the alleys, but that history is increasingly a generic, sanitized history, portrayed by an aesthetic that marks the alleys as places to wander back in time. The aesthetic and symbolic choices being made—just like the aesthetic and symbolic choices made in inhabited alleys of the 1950s—offer a window into how cultural landscapes are transformed.

IV. Conclusion

It has been over sixty years since Washington, D.C. tried to rid itself of its reputation for notorious alley dwellings. Urban renewal and historic preservation in the 1950s demolished or transformed most of the last alley dwellings, following the path laid out by the Alley Dwelling Authority in the 1930s and 40s, which built on findings from social workers and public health reformers of the early twentieth century. These groups all operated on the understanding that the physical form of alleys caused social and moral defects. Today, the D.C. government, private investors, designers, and residents not only sanction but encourage public use of alleys. This shift would have shocked those who fought so hard to convince policy makers that living and spending time in alleys was immoral and dangerous to the health and welfare of the city.

The embrace of urban alleys in the twenty-first century may seem abrupt to some. Yet the recognition of alleys as valuable urban space is not new. Alleys have always affected the trajectory of urban development, and looking to the past provides insights about the potential

impacts of today's alley projects. In Washington, D.C. from the 1950s through 1970s, the built environments of alleys were incubators for movements ranging from transforming neighborhoods into enclaves for white professionals, to securing economic and political rights for African Americans, to acquiring public land for private profit.

In the present, Washington, D.C. is changing rapidly, with a fast-growing population that is younger, whiter, and wealthier than it has ever been. The city's alleys are again cultural landscapes with racialized, classed, and legal meanings that are in flux. As in the past, present-day changes to alleys are building social and political movements, influencing land-use decisions, and facilitating processes of social exclusion. What happens in green alleys, alley lots, and commercial alleys will inevitably have far-reaching implications for who and what belongs in Washington, D.C.

Conclusion: When Alleys Change, the City Changes

In 1909, Charles Weller, the executive secretary of the Associated Charities of Washington, published a study called *Neglected Neighbors*. In this book-length report on health and housing in the nation's capital, requested by President Roosevelt, Weller detailed the slum conditions of Washington, D.C.'s inhabited alleys. He returned repeatedly to an alley he called "Average Alley," because it was so representative of poor housing conditions. As of 1905, when Weller and his team surveyed the alley, Average Alley had fifty-four occupied dwellings, a combination of narrow brick row houses and dilapidated wooden shacks. In these buildings, Weller estimated sixty-six household groups, for a total population of three hundred eighteen people. Introducing the alley to his reader, Weller described the scene of walking into the alley at night and finding children playing, a woman strumming a guitar, and men dancing. He wrote, "It is with some misgiving that one leaves the well lighted outer streets with their impressive residences and turns into a narrow passageway where he must walk by faith, not sight. … One sees no immediate cause for fear, but feels intuitively a suggestion of evil possibilities and latent danger."[382]

Weller's expectation of danger was typical among his peers, Progressive-Era reformers who perceived inhabited alleys as immoral and crime-ridden places. To study "Average Alley" further, Weller rented a room in an alley dwelling, which he noted was "a surprisingly wholesome home." While he disapproved of the single mothers and unemployed men he met, and was concerned by the crowding, presence of pests, and contagious diseases, the alley did not live up to its dangerous reputation. Weller noted this inconsistency with little reflection; he could

[382] Weller, *Neglected Neighbors*, 17-26; 59-60.

not move past the pervasive understanding that the built environment of inhabited alleys—homes to the poorest African American residents of the city—bred immorality, evil, and criminality.[383]

Weller's "Average Alley" was in fact none other than Blagden Alley, the alley whose transformation was described in Chapter Four. Over a century later, this same built environment—carefully preserved as a historic district—is not typical of the city's slums, but instead is the ultimate destination for D.C.'s young, wealthy consumers and commercial investors alike. How did a typical alley slum become home to the DC Alley Museum and a half-dozen high-end restaurants, cocktail bars, and coffee shops? How did the alley come to have such radically different meanings? This puzzle requires a deep look at Washington, D.C.'s history, the political and economic forces that over a century wiped alley slums—and other low-income areas—from the city, paving the way for real estate interests to invest in devalued urban space. Yet the impacts of resettlement agencies, urban renewal, white flight, suburban growth, stripping of city budgets, and neoliberal restructuring is not the full story. As this dissertation has shown, urban landscapes themselves have power to influence the trajectory of these political and economic forces. Alleys, as hidden, ordinary cultural landscapes, have played an important role in Washington, D.C.'s urban development. Those who have had the power to modify even these smallest and most overlooked city spaces have effected much broader change at the block, neighborhood, and even city scale.

In Washington, D.C., where alleys are present in every quadrant of the city, they are simply a fact of life. They are common cultural landscapes. They are also "back" landscapes, located on the interior of blocks where they are out of sight and ignored by those with no reason to enter. In back landscapes, people, activities, and changes can go unnoticed, at least for a while.

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[383] Ibid.

Thus, back landscapes like alleys have transformative potential. They can conceal and protect experimental initiatives that ultimately have impacts far beyond the blocks where they begin.

Like all cultural landscapes, alleys both produce and reify cultural norms. They are material spaces where cultural constructs like race and class intersect and become entangled. Overlapping with this entanglement are land-use laws. Yet conceptions of race, class, and the law are not static, and neither are alley landscapes. This dissertation has focused on changes to the cultural landscapes of alleys in the second half of the twentieth century and in the present day. It has demonstrated how the specific actions, debates, physical modifications, and engagements with law in alleys can both counter and perpetuate patterns of social exclusion. As Giorgio Furisoso, the developer who owns a Blagden Alley building, said, "I think as a mirror of society, sometimes the best of something and worst of something happens in places like alleys."[384]

In the 1950s, Georgetown developers and white professionals saw the potential of inhabited alleys as elite enclaves, spurring a process of racial displacement and cultural change. The displacement of African American tenants and the renovation of alley dwellings transformed Georgetown's inhabited alleys from spaces for multi-general Black families to spaces for young white professionals. In the 1960s, emergent Black leaders in Washington, D.C. saw the potential of rat- and garbage-filled alleys as sites to experiment with social, political, and economic movements. Centering their activities in the physical spaces of alleys made their impacts felt both citywide and in the intimate domestic realm of D.C. residents. In the 1970s, both real estate developers and neighborhood residents in the West End and Dupont Circle realized the potential of alleys as legal landscapes. They understood that their abilities to navigate the intricacies of

[384] Furioso, interview with author.

land-use laws and municipal bureaucracy concerning alleys meant the difference between residential communities or dense office and commercial landscapes.

In the present, Washington, D.C.'s alleys are again sites to experiment with effecting broader change. The D.C. Department of Transportation's Green Alleys program uses the physical space of alleys to test out new permeable paving materials, knowing few people will be affected beyond a single block. If successful, these paving techniques may expand beyond alleys to help the city reach environmental sustainability goals. To promote housing affordability and density, the 2016 zoning code allowed for housing on alley lots. To pursue or contest new construction, property owners must navigate complicated land-use law, and instead of blocking building permits, they have found themselves debating alley names. Finally, in pursuit of economic development, alleys like Blagden Alley and Naylor Court have become commercial destinations. This process has occurred not only through investment of capital, but through aesthetic choices and historic preservation, which brand the alleys as authentic urban spaces where one can wander back in time. This branding is subtly changing the racialized and classed meanings of these alley landscapes to cater to Washington's D.C.'s growing white, young, and wealthy population. In pursuit of citywide goals, each of these efforts affects and is affected by the cultural landscape of alleys. Each has cascading effects that influence who has access to urban space and what they can do with it.

This dissertation began with a question: What is the power of small spaces? In one sense, small indicates scale. Alleys are rarely more than thirty feet wide and extend only the length of a given block. Any physical modifications or changes in who uses the space are noticed by others in the alley, but rarely by those beyond. Small also means unremarkable, places that would never be in a tourist guide or on a list of architect-designed landscapes. Alleys course through the

interior of city blocks, traversed each day by ordinary people parking their cars, going to and from their homes, or by working-class employees completing deliveries, utility maintenance, or garbage collection rounds. They are so common in cities that they are taken-for-granted and rarely closely examined. Finally, small means marginalized. Because they are back landscapes, hidden from passersby on front streets, few people know or check the conditions of any given alley. Many are in need of paving or cleaning, yet these spaces are often the last to get physical upgrades. As neglected space, alleys also serve—at different times of night or day—as spaces for marginalized people and actions, such as drug users needing a hidden location or children wanting a place to play.

It is because alleys are small spaces—a fraction of a block, unremarkable, and marginalized—that what happens in them is overlooked. Yet this quality of being ignored also gives alleys transformative potential. When alleys change, the city changes. To track where a city is going and who is in control, it is not just large-scale metropolitan landscapes and processes that deserve attention. Small spaces like alleys—or front yards, sidewalks, or parking lots—do too. Close examinations of these too-often overlooked urban spaces offer insights we might otherwise miss. To discount them is to ignore the social movements, debates, struggles, and celebrations that push cities in new directions.

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