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Currents of Change: An Urban and Environmental History of the Anacostia River and Near Southeast Waterfront in Washington, D.C.

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**Currents of Change: An Urban and Environmental
History of the Anacostia River and Near Southeast
Waterfront in Washington, D.C.**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis,
2012-2013 Academic Year, Pitzer College, Claremont, California

Readers:

Professor Lily Geismer

Professor Brinda Sarathy

May 3, 2013

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If we want to continue to enjoy our rivers—to swim in them, walk beside them, even drink their water—we have to adopt the nondual perspective. We have to meditate on *being* the river so that we can experience within ourselves the fears and hopes of the river. If we cannot feel the rivers, the mountains, the air, the animals, and other people from within their own perspective, the rivers will die and we will lose our chance for peace.

- Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On a brilliantly clear day in January 2013, the Yards Park on the Anacostia waterfront in Washington, D.C. is bustling with bikers and dog walkers, families playing touch football on the lawn and friends sitting at picnic tables, their faces turned towards the sun. The river's surface gleams in the sunlight, and sea gulls turn through the sky above it. I have to squint when I look west past Nationals' Park, the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge, Southeast Federal Center, and all the way out to the Masonic Temple in Virginia. Behind me, the shoreline is lined with brick buildings—sanitation plants and old Naval factories built in a period when even industrial buildings were adorned with decorative masonry and ironwork. While the O Street Pumping Facility still functions as a sewage treatment plant, most of the other riverfront plants have either been abandoned as vacant lots or turned into residential, office, or retail space. What used to be a bustling industrial zone is quiet on this Sunday afternoon. The legacy of those years of heavy industry, however, can still be found in the paved, artificial shoreline, the turbid water, and shallow, silted river bottom. This legacy of abuse has left the Anacostia in a state of ecological stress, disrupting its ecosystem with a flood of pollutants and invasive species. The dock I stand on creaks as the river flows under it, green-brown water tossing old bottles and discarded plastic bags against the concrete sea wall. But even after years of decline, there is an enduring beauty to the Anacostia: a persistent wildness that drifts past the pavement and smokestacks. It is this beauty and wildness that continues to draw people to the river's waterfront, so that even in its state of ecological insecurity, the Anacostia provides an urban people with access to nature in the inner city.

The view I see from the dock on this balmy January afternoon is the product of over two centuries of industrial activity, decades of urban decline, and numerous attempts at neighborhood revitalization by both private investors and Washington's local government. The story of this river's decay operates within a complex narrative of environmental inequality and urban and environmental history. This thesis will explore the intersections between these narratives and examine how the historical processes of plantation agriculture, military industrialization, and discriminatory zoning policies produced social and ecological inequalities in the Near Southeast neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

The nation's capital remains one of the most residentially segregated cities in the country, laid out with a north-south divide between the primarily white and African American regions of the city. African Americans make up the largest representations of traditional minority groups in the District; therefore this thesis will focus on the social and environmental inequalities between the city's white and black neighborhoods. The District is divided into eight wards, which differ greatly in demographic layout. A short car ride from one end of the city to the other reveals significant changes in the quality of living standards, reflecting a move from the majority white ward in the north of the city to the majority black wards in the south. Washington is unique in that its population has historically been majority African American, earning it the nickname Chocolate City. Although it remains a majority African American city, housing in the District is segregated so that the best environmental quality is clustered away from the city's African American neighborhoods. Washington's sole majority white ward boasts the best social services, cleanest water and air, and safest streets.

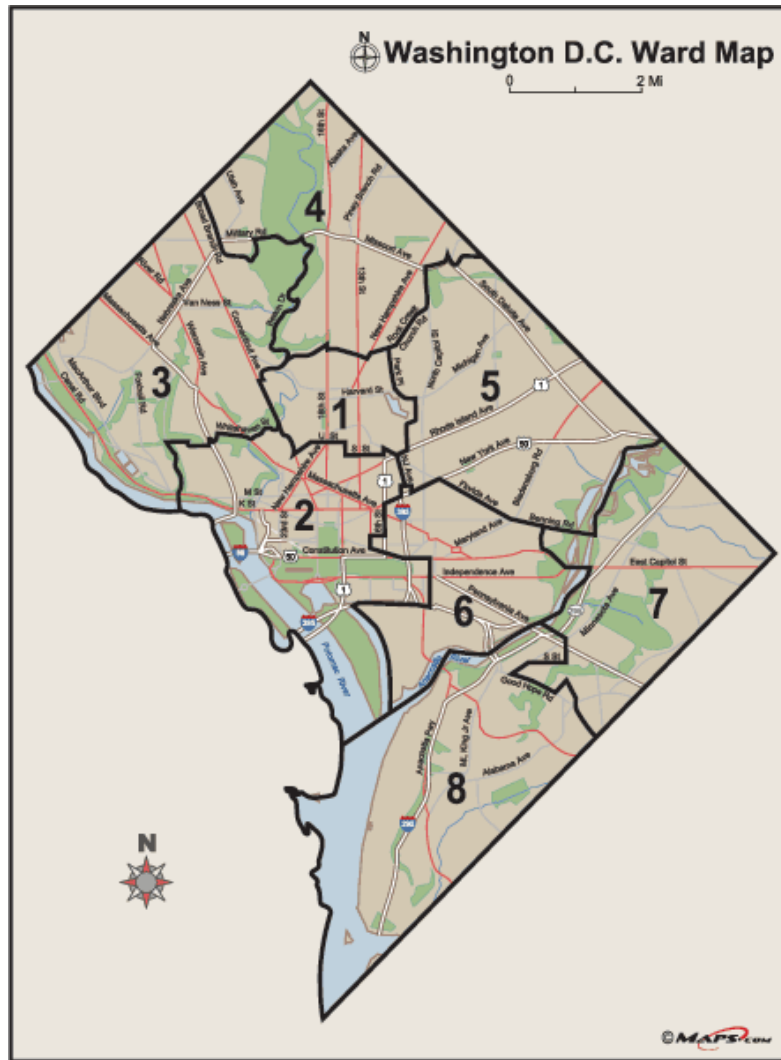


Figure 1: A map of Washington, D.C.'s neighborhood wards. The Anacostia River runs east to west, bordered by wards 5 and 6 on its north side and wards 7 and 8 on its south side. Source: http://media.maps101.com/SUB/dom_cities/uWashDCWardL.gif.

According to 2010 census data, 35% of the District's population is white, and mostly congregated in Wards 2 and 3 in the city's Northwest region.¹ In 2010 African Americans narrowly claimed a majority, comprising 50% of Washington's population.² Most of the District's Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest region, making up Wards 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, is occupied by Washington's African American population. Much of the

¹ "A Shrinking Majority," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2011, accessed March 31, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/local/dc-census-2010/>.

² *Ibid.*

District's industry remains concentrated in these majority African American regions; for example, Ward 6 is home to the Navy Yard, the O Street sewage treatment plant, and the D.C. Central Detention Facility, while Ward 7 houses the Benning Road garbage incinerator and the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) plant. While the city has long been split along a black-white demographic, 2010 census data reported that 9% of the District's population is Hispanic (mostly clustered in Ward 1 in Northwest), 3% is Asian, and 3% represents other ethnicities.³ The segregation of African American and white residents in the District is the result of complex causes including structural inequalities within both the federal and city government, as well as the decisions of private businesses to primarily cater to the District's whitest population. These actions have not only segregated the city, but have also caused its black majority to be disproportionately impacted by pollutants such as toxic air emissions and water contamination by relegating its African American residents to Washington's most polluted and industrial region. Within the District, it is clear that communities with safety, health, and stability are reserved for only a minority of the population.

Near Southeast is a neighborhood shaped by centuries of industrial activity at the Washington Navy Yard, as well as postwar highway construction, and recent attempts at redevelopment. Part of the District's "black belt," the neighborhood has long had a majority African American population that has been disproportionately exposed to effluence from the neighborhood's industries, and toxic pollution in the Anacostia River.⁴ Industry developed in Near Southeast as a response to Washington's growth as a city,

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Brett Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," *American Anthropologist* 103 (2001): 419, accessed March 27, 2013, doi:10.2307/683474, 419.

expanding out from the Navy Yard along the already heavily utilized Anacostia River. Filled with smokestacks and noisy manufacturing plants, the Near Southeast waterfront quickly transformed into an unpleasant and unsanitary place to live. As the city grew along racial lines, Near Southeast, with its undesirable environment, was relegated to minority and immigrant residents as the white working class moved across the river to Uniontown (now Anacostia), a rural suburb guarded by racial covenant. The environmental justice concepts of NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) and PIBBY (place-in-blacks'-backyard) are essential to understanding the establishment of industry along the Near Southeast waterfront.⁵ Using these principles, city officials located necessary but unsanitary and unsightly industries in disenfranchised communities that were far from the seat of power.

In Near Southeast, environmental concerns over the industrial exploitation of the Southeast waterfront came to a head in the mid-1990s after independent environmental studies revealed the presence of dangerous toxic substances, such as heavy metals and PCBs, in river sediment and soil samples. Local environmental activists partnered with leaders in the majority African American neighborhoods along the Anacostia waterfront to successfully pressure major polluters like the U.S. Navy to begin a process of meaningful river and waterfront cleanup, and adopt a policy of environmental sensitivity.⁶ As local and federal government and nonprofits and community organizations have prioritized the ecological restoration of the Anacostia, private investors have begun to see lucrative opportunities for waterfront development of

⁵ Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1994), 4.

⁶ John R. Wennersten, *Anacostia: The Death & Life of An American River* (Baltimore: Chesapeake Book Company, 2008), 206.

formerly industrial areas in and around the Navy Yard. The District government has encouraged private investment as a source of redevelopment for Near Southeast, most notably by funding the construction of the Nationals Park, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified baseball stadium completed for the Washington Nationals in 2008. In addition, the District partnered with the federal government and Forest City Enterprises to design a mixed-use waterfront development called The Yards, now under construction. Today, the Southeast waterfront is a maze of construction sites for high-end lofts in repurposed warehouses, and new retail or office space boasting sustainable designs and a connection to the river.

The concepts of environmental justice and urban political ecology inform my approach to understanding the complex set of social and ecological processes and relationships that are responsible for creating the Anacostia River and its Near Southeast waterfront as urban spaces. Environmental justice scholarship focuses on the disproportionate impact, on low-income and minority communities, of issues including highway construction, gentrification, and water pollution—all of which are at play in Near Southeast. An environmental justice perspective allows one to critically analyze the ways in which federal policies, local governments, and municipal zoning boards have created vast environmental inequalities between white and minority neighborhoods. Building on this analysis, urban political ecology further spotlights the political and sociological implications of structural inequalities and environmental policies. Urban political ecologists such as Melissa Checker and Chris Hagerman, for example, focus on the ways in which ‘green’ redevelopment has subverted struggles for justice. The lenses of environmental justice and urban political ecology provide critical tools for

understanding the federal and municipal policies that have shaped the Near Southeast neighborhood. Scholarship in environmental justice and urban political ecology provides a language with which to critically examine the processes of industrialization, deindustrialization, and redevelopment in urban neighborhoods. However, these fields are both relatively recent developments in academia, and are typically employed in the analysis of contemporary urban issues. Neighborhoods such as Near Southeast, however, have maintained such a long and complex relationship with their environment that a historical approach is necessary to understand how concerns of social and environmental inequality developed over time. Therefore, I will also be applying a focus in environmental history to analyze the changing relationship between humans and nature on and along the Anacostia River. This approach examines the evolution of a place in the context of social and environmental events. The Anacostia and its waterfront neighborhoods have had such a long legacy of human presence in and manipulation of nature that unpacking the historical relationship between people and nature in the District is critical to understanding the construction of Near Southeast as an urban place.

This thesis will analyze how social and ecological inequalities have interacted throughout Washington, D.C.'s urban and environmental history to shape Near Southeast as an industrial and undesirable space. After a literature review, I will begin with an examination of the role of urban rivers throughout American history, as well as the federal and economic forces that contributed to their collective demise. Chapter Three will move into an analysis of the three components of my case study: the Anacostia River, the Washington Navy Yard, and the neighborhood of Near Southeast. Considering the relationship between these spaces over time, I will examine how their links in the

broader urban ecological system were compounded by social and environmental inequalities. Finally, Chapter Four will take a critical look at present efforts at redevelopment in Near Southeast. In particular, I will examine the publicly funded construction of a new baseball stadium for the Washington Nationals, as well as the development of The Yards. Through this analysis, I will explore the social and environmental effects of the changing narrative about the Anacostia and its waterfront. This new narrative, touted by both private developers and the District's government, could potentially transform the neighborhood and the river into a tourist destination rather than an ecological entity. Washington, D.C.'s society and environment has long been obscured by its reputation as a city of stately monuments and halls of power, and through my analysis I hope to highlight the struggle and resilience of a community that has carved out a space for itself along a forgotten river.

African American Population 2010

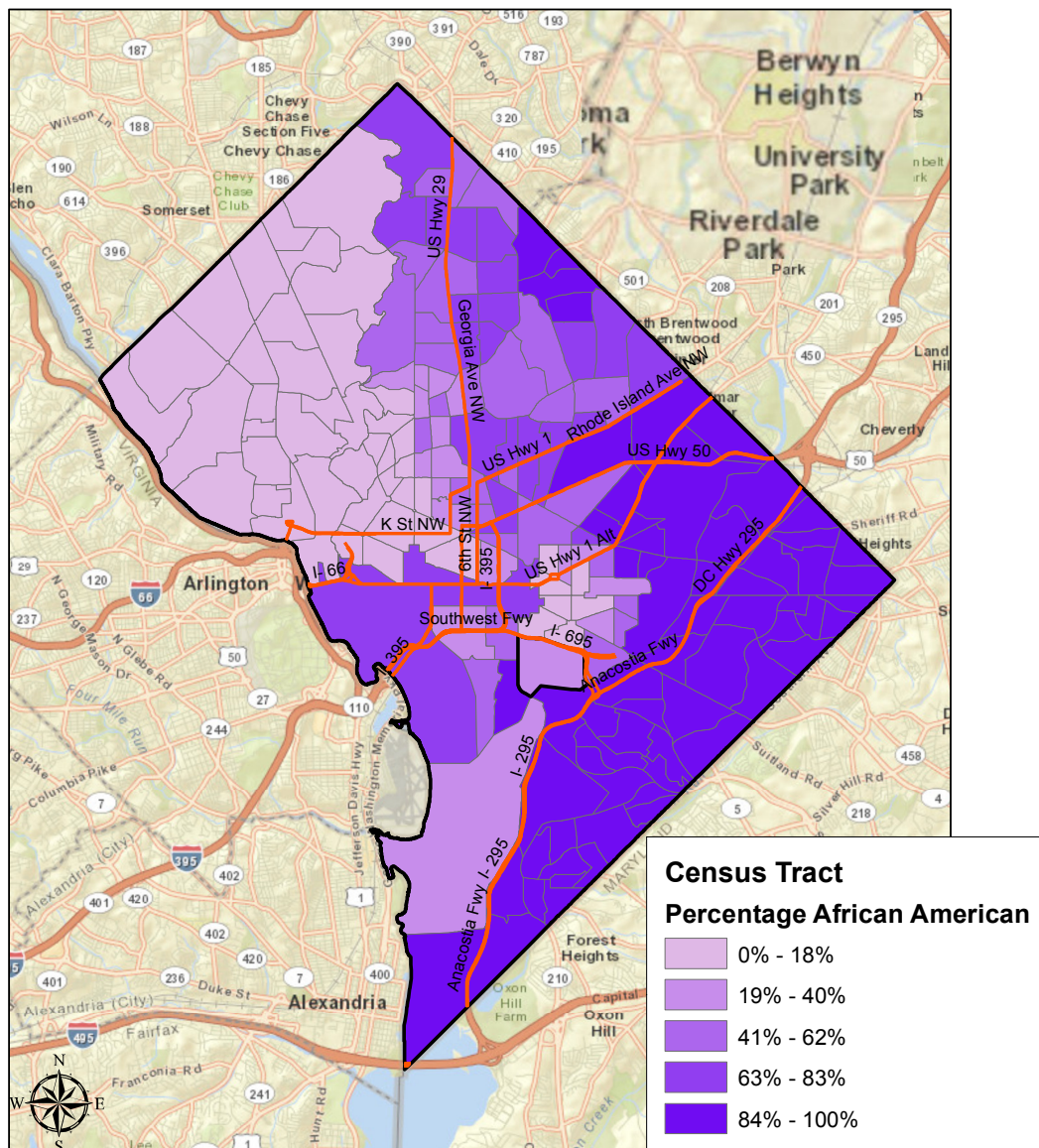


Figure 2: Washington, D.C.'s African American population according to 2010 census data. Near Southeast is outlined here in black. Map by author.

Median Household Income 2010

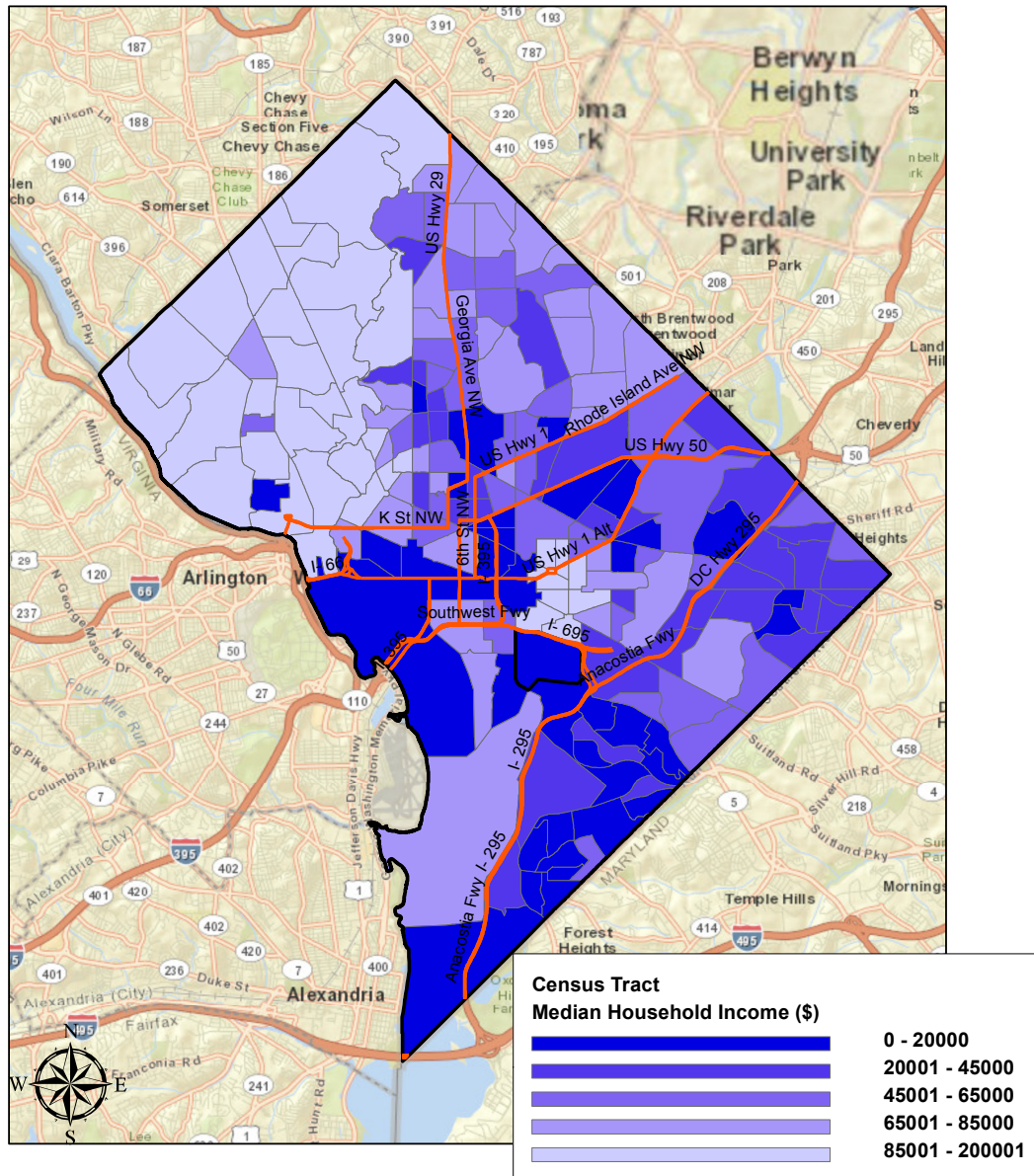


Figure 3: Median household income in Washington, D.C. according to 2010 census data. Near Southeast is outlined here in black. Map by author.

The Environmental Justice Lens

In the environmental justice movement, community activists and scholars have worked to create a place for minority communities within the broader environmental movement by unifying the language of civil rights and environmental protection. Sociologist and activist Robert Bullard pioneered scholarship on this subject, blending science, politics, sociology, and activism in a manner formerly unexplored by other scholars. Whereas scholars in environmental studies traditionally focus on science and ecology, Bullard widens the lens to include communities and justice. Scholars and activists in environmental justice adhere to a new definition of the environment as a place where people and communities “live, work, and play.”⁷ By linking environmental health to community health, the environmental justice movement seeks to simultaneously create equitable environments and communities. The focus of environmental justice, then, is not just an examination of environmental destruction, but also community destruction and the covert channels within politics and economics that encourage these processes.

Environmental justice scholarship focuses on the human and ecological impact of the production of place through race and difference. This production builds off of historical processes of structural inequalities within American government and society. Bullard links causes of environmental inequalities with historical perceptions of race, and argues that structural inequalities within local and federal policies have created an urban environment where clean air, clean water, and safe streets are luxury commodities available only to the wealthiest neighborhoods. “Historically, toxic dumping and the

⁷ Robert J. Brulle and David N. Pellow, “Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities,” *Annual Review of Public Health* 27 (2006): 110, accessed May 1, 2013, doi: 10.1146/annurev.publhealth.27.021405.102124.

location of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) have followed the ‘path of least resistance,’ meaning black and poor communities have been disproportionately burdened with these types of externalities,” Bullard explains.⁸ Focusing on the structural and environmental inequalities that disproportionately expose low-income and minority communities to toxins and pollutants, the environmental justice movement unifies community protests and environmental activism.

The environmental justice movement has been enormously successful in exposing the policies that maintain structural inequalities. Before the movement exploded onto the national radar, Bullard writes, “[f]ew environmentalists realized the sociological implications of the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) phenomenon,” through which those in power protected their own communities from land use allocations for unpleasant but necessary infrastructure such as, landfills, factories, sewage treatment plants, or hazardous waste dumps.⁹ Unnoticed by much of the broader public, NIMBY-ism made structural inequalities implicit within zoning boards and local and federal government. “Public officials and private industry have in many cases responded to the NIMBY phenomenon using the place-in-blacks’-backyard (PIBBY) principle,” Bullard argues.¹⁰ Environmental justice activists first exposed the links between movements for social justice and the broader environmental movement.¹¹

While the Supreme Court eventually outlawed racial covenants in 1948, Bullard emphasizes how the process of municipal land-use zoning perpetuated the same goals as the legal clauses. By placing value on certain spaces over others, municipal zoning has

⁸ Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

become a central tool and example of NIMBY-ism and links institutionalized racism to environmental inequality. Bullard demonstrates that zoning boards do not always plan development logically, especially with regards to minority communities. “Competition often results between special interest groups (i.e., racial and ethnic minorities, organized civic clubs, neighborhood associations, developers, environmentalists, etc.) for advantageous land use,” Bullard writes.¹² Given this competition, disenfranchised groups, such as minority communities, are most likely to lose out. Bullard argues, “exclusionary zoning, discriminatory housing practices by rental agents, brokers, and lending institutions, and disparate facility siting decisions have contributed to and maintained racially segregated residential areas of unequal quality.”¹³ Favoring more affluent and enfranchised communities, structural inequalities created by institutions such as zoning boards, local governments, and federal agencies, have exacerbated situations of massive environmental inequality in Washington, D.C. and other urban areas across the United States.

Approaches in Urban Political Ecology

Environmental justice movements to correct social and environmental inequalities are just one step in the process of creating equitable urban communities. Even after successful campaigns for environmental equity, redevelopers seeking to capitalize off of the improved environment continue to threaten marginalized communities. Scholarship in urban political ecology examines what happens to communities after LULUs have been mitigated. Ironically, the threat of exploitation of minority neighborhoods often

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

becomes even more pronounced after these spaces become healthier, more desirable places in which to live. Urban political ecologists such as Melissa Checker and Chris Hagerman explore the ways in which redevelopment of formerly derelict neighborhoods paves over community histories and can lead to displacement of the original community. An analysis in urban political ecology adds further depth to the ideas of structural inequality and institutionalized racism first exposed by environmental scholars.

Scholar Melissa Checker examines how successful environmental justice battles to stop further highway construction or limit pollution have made formerly marginalized neighborhoods more desirable and encouraged developers to view them as prime targets for redevelopment. Checker refers to the connections between environmental justice and redevelopment as “environmental gentrification,” which she defines as “the convergence of urban redevelopment, ecologically-minded initiatives and environmental justice activism in an era of advanced capitalism.”¹⁴ Focusing her study on the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, Checker examines how the gains of the community’s environmental justice movement created a healthier and safer community that ultimately made the neighborhood appealing to redevelopers. “Materially, the efforts of environmental justice activists to improve their neighborhoods (i.e. the removal of environmental burdens and the installation of environmental benefits) now help those neighborhoods attract an influx of affluent residents,” Checker observes.¹⁵ The long-term effectiveness of environmental justice movements, then, is negligible in the face of profitable business expansions and real estate investments.

¹⁴ Melissa Checker, “Wiped Out By The ‘Greenwave’: Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability,” *City & Society* 23 (2011), 212, accessed October 23, 2012, doi: 10.1111/j.1548-744X.2011.01063.x.

¹⁵ Checker, “Wiped Out By the ‘Greenwave,’” 212.

Checker warns that redevelopment's popular new focus on sustainability and the re-incorporation of nature into new designs ultimately silences important themes of the neighborhoods' historical narratives. Redevelopment policies that emphasize sustainability, Checker argues, "eclipse the long-standing issue of unequally distributed environmental burdens (i.e. toxic waste facilities, bus depots, waste producing industries) in low income neighborhoods and communities of color."¹⁶ The positive environmental effects of sustainable design and the abstract idea of community revitalization distract from the reality of housing displacement and deterioration of community resiliency.

Elaborating on this notion, Checker writes,

environmental gentrification operates through a discourse of sustainability which simultaneously describes a vision of ecologically and socially responsible urban planning, a "green" lifestyle which appeals to affluent, eco-conscious residents, and a technocratic, politically neutral approach to solving environmental problems.¹⁷

Just as attempts at redevelopment through highway construction after World War II were presented as a technocratic and modern solution to urban decline, 'green' redevelopment has emerged as today's technocratic panacea for ecological destruction and urban poverty. The danger of 'green' redevelopment is that it hides its inequalities behind a language of environmental sensitivity and modernity.¹⁸ While community residents were very much a part of the environmental justice campaign to clean up Harlem, Checker writes that they have been largely excluded from the plans for its redevelopment. "A rubric of sustainability then becomes part of a post-political project that sidelines questions of real political inclusion and justice in the name of technocratic, community-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

based deliberation,” Checker concludes.¹⁹ By imprinting a technocratic vision for a sustainable community upon a functioning, existing community, redevelopers can detract significantly from the equitable gains of the environmental justice movement.

Scholar Chris Hagerman also studies how redevelopment subverts environmental justice. Particularly focusing on sustainable design, Hagerman argues that the re-inclusion of nature into formerly industrial spaces alters communities’ historical narratives by covering up deep-seeded issues of race and social justice. Recent redevelopment trends have focused on sustainable design that incorporates the natural landscape back into urban space, as seen in Hagerman’s study of the North Macadam and River Districts in Portland, Oregon. Especially in vogue for urban waterfront regions, this ‘green’ redevelopment works to unify urban and wild spaces by emphasizing waterfront ecology through an incorporation of nature into architectural design plans. Hagerman writes,

The environmental restoration and economic redevelopment of waterfront industrial sites reflects not only a remediation of the legacies of industrial pollution, but also an attempt to replace legacies of social conflict and labour unrest, through a focus on imaginaries of post-industrial economies, ecologies and urban citizenship.²⁰

Just as highway construction cloaked slum clearing in a language of modernism and efficiency, ‘green’ redevelopment masks its subversion of community histories behind the appealing language of environmental sustainability.²¹ Referencing the current

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁰ Chris Hagerman, “Shaping Neighborhoods and Nature: Urban Political Ecologies of Urban Waterfront Transformations in Portland, Oregon,” *Cities* 24 (2007): 287, accessed October 23, 2012, doi: 10.1016/j.cities.2006.12.003.

²¹ Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004): 676, accessed January 30, 2013, doi: 10.1177/0096144204265180.

transitioning of industrial waterfronts, Hagerman describes “a shifting of spatial priorities by urban governance regimes, from a history of containing the urban poor and industrial uses to dispersing them in favour of destination-oriented retail and residential areas imagined as post-industrial or ‘creative’ economic spaces.”²² As factories morph into high-end lofts and warehouses are leveled into parkland, the history embodied in these spaces is hidden under a façade of redevelopment. By subverting certain historical narratives, redevelopment is another tool through which environmental inequalities are reinforced by social inequalities and perhaps vice versa.²³

While renewed interest in ecological health is certainly welcomed, Hagerman cautions that this interest should be closely examined so that it is not used to conceal other goals. The use of nature glosses over industrial legacies by hiding their negative impact under a progressive language of sustainability.²⁴ Heavy industrial use and years of neglect in these regions have destroyed the ecosystems of many urban waterfronts. “The ecological restoration and environmental rhetoric of livability bestows elements of ‘authenticity’ on developments while allaying fears of the loss of ‘nature’ and ‘community’ in the post-industrial world,” Hagerman writes.²⁵ The re-inclusion of nature into these formerly industrial spaces, then, is a two-sided coin where urban and wild spaces are unified on one side, while regional social justice issues are obscured on the other.

Much of the fanfare around the Navy Yard’s redevelopment in Washington, D.C. focuses on the reincorporation of nature into the built environment. One of the most

²² Hagerman, “Shaping Neighborhoods and Nature,” 287.

²³ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

publicized developments along the Southeast waterfront is The Yards, a mixed-use complex built on the grounds of the old Naval Gun Factory.²⁶ Here, the developers hope to create a community in which waterfront recreation is a major attraction: the Yards Park has already been completed, and a public marina is also slated for construction.²⁷ Environmental sensitivity has been incorporated into the redevelopment project, as the sidewalks are lined with bioretention planters to diminish storm water runoff, the Yards Park includes plantings of native species, and most new developments promise to be LEED certified. Frequently promoting their many riverfront views, developments like The Yards are directly invested in supporting ecological restoration to make its waterfront a healthy and desirable place to live. Contemporary redevelopment represents a shift in value around the neighborhood's waterfront land. Since people first inhabited the Anacostia watershed region, its human residents have shaped the river to reflect the values of the watershed's dominant class. The social and ecological changes that created Near Southeast as a place played out over a period of more than two centuries; therefore, a historical perspective is a necessary addition to the lenses of environmental justice and urban political ecology.

Perspectives in Environmental History

Environmental history teases apart the complex relationships between humans and nature responsible for creating landscapes, such as the Anacostia River and its waterfront, over extended periods of time. Of particular concern for environmental

²⁶ "History," The Yards, accessed March 31, 2013, http://www.dcyards.com/about_the_yards/history.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

historians is the artificial construction of space, whether it is called city or wilderness. Scholars such as William Cronon and Matthew Klinge have studied the demarcation of rural and urban space in places including, Chicago, Illinois, Seattle, Washington, and colonial and post-colonial New England. A historical perspective enables scholars to follow the arc of ecological change over time, and provides an insight to the man-made divide between natural and urban space.

Washington is a city held together by two rivers, yet its historical relationship with its natural environment has been anything but peaceful. I will use the lens of environmental history throughout this thesis to examine how ecological processes have changed over the course of history as a result of both human and natural forces. Cronon writes, “The great strength of ecological analysis in writing history is its ability to uncover processes and long-term changes which might otherwise remain invisible.”²⁸ Using the Anacostia’s ecology as an entry point into the District’s urban history, I will demonstrate how its environmental transformation follows the city’s path of industrialization and population growth.

Apart from its inclusion of ecology within the historical narrative, environmental history also facilitates a specific focus on place. Klinge describes his environmental history of Seattle as “an ethic of place,” which explains the creation of a city as a physical and conceptualized space.²⁹ Urban histories often exclude a discussion of nature from their chronicles of cities, and this exacerbates the popular notion that nature cannot exist in urban spaces. As Klinge writes, “[F]ew historians consider the role that nature has

²⁸ William Cronon, *Changes In the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), vii.

²⁹ Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xii.

played in forging the places urbanites call home, or how it has been an instrument to define and enforce the idea of community.”³⁰ Environmental history, however, provides an opportunity to shed light on the wildness within urban communities.

Traditionally, scholars in environmental history have focused their studies exclusively on a place’s ecological transformation. While human actors come in and out of the ecological narrative, they are rarely the primary subjects. However, the human dimension is necessary to present a fully ecological history of place. The Nacotchtank Indians built the first communities along the Anacostia and began a long history of human occupation that braided man-made and natural systems into a shared ecology. My thesis will put human subjects and social processes at the forefront of an environmental narrative, examining the role of people and societies as catalysts for ecological change on the Anacostia.

Conclusion

The lenses of environmental justice, urban political ecology, and environmental history provide the foundation for a multi-faceted analysis of the changing relationships between people and their environment along the Anacostia River. In this thesis I will examine in particular the social and ecological forces that have inspired land use changes in the waterfront neighborhood of Near Southeast. A long history of industrialization and urban decline altered the neighborhood’s identity over time, but also allowed for an ongoing revision of its social and economic value that continues today in Near Southeast’s redevelopment. Social issues, including racial segregation in city housing

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and NIMBY-ism on the District's zoning board, exacerbated the Anacostia's ecological problems such as erosion caused by intense agricultural activity and water pollution from municipal and industrial waste. In a pattern that was repeated in waterfront cities across the country, the simultaneous decline of both Near Southeast and the Anacostia River resulted from both social and ecological forces. Over a more than two centuries, urban social issues and environmental destruction along the Anacostia transformed the river's waterfront neighborhoods into forgotten swaths of pollution and poverty in the District's inner city. The following chapter will examine the historical role public entities, such as the federal government, and private entities, such as heavy industry, have had in the decline of urban rivers and waterfronts across the country.

CHAPTER TWO

Industry, the Federal Government, and the Making of Urban Rivers

The Anacostia River's banks along Anacostia Park are shady, and muddy. They are lined with riprap and trees, rather than native wetlands, and strewn with garbage in every form imaginable. Plastic water bottles and empty bags of junk food, used diapers and condoms, hypodermic needles and stray socks—anything littered on the street or flushed down a toilet can make its way into the Anacostia. Sometimes encampments are left along the riverbank, nestled into bushes or tucked under bridges, abandoned by people who went to the river to be left alone. Walking through this debris is like taking a tour of the city's trash cans: what would normally lie hidden in garbage trucks or burned in trash incinerators is laid out in the open along the riverbank. The river carries this refuse with it as it moves slowly through Washington's inner city, so that the stories of an urban people are blended into its currents and buried in its sediment.

As is the case for so many urban rivers, people shaped the Anacostia, but the river also shaped the people. While the river's ecology has been decimated by human manipulation, a process that began with plantation agriculture and continued with modern channelization, it has also inspired the persistence of riverfront communities who identify as boaters, anglers, or recreators. One of these communities is the Seafarers Yacht Club, which was founded on the Anacostia in 1965, when segregation made it impossible for the black boaters of the river's waterfront neighborhoods to join some of the District's established white boating clubs.³¹ In a city that is still deeply segregated, the Seafarers Yacht Club provides activity and association for boaters who have lived along the river

³¹ DeNeen Brown, "The Yachtsman," *Washington Post Magazine*, October 2, 2011, 19.

for years. For Club co-founder Charles Martin, his yacht is “a testament to the story of a boy who, because of his color, could not rent a boat” on the Anacostia during his childhood in the 1940s.³² For over fifty years, boaters like Martin have preserved a history of maritime culture on the Anacostia, despite the obstacles of racial segregation and environmental degradation. Besides boaters, anglers also have a prominent presence on the river. Most of these fishermen are African American or Latino, and many of them are immigrants from Latin America.³³ Despite the dangers of ingesting fish from the Anacostia’s polluted waters, these anglers persist. As the *Washington Post Magazine* wrote in 2011, “More than compensating for any risk is the magic of a Sunday afternoon on the bank of even a dirty river. While Mexican rancheras stream over a smartphone, [anglers] fish and joke, talk about work, talk about home.”³⁴ For many of these fishermen, the Anacostia provides a link between past and present, as well as an outlet for both nostalgia and stress. Although the Anacostia attracts few recreators from other parts of the District, it has served as a touchstone for waterfront residents who preserve cultural traditions and pastimes on its waters. Anglers, boaters, and recreators have been the primary actors in the river’s restoration, as they have demonstrated the Anacostia’s enduring value. However, it can be hard for people without an emotional connection to the river to understand the significance of its trashed and turbid waters.

The Anacostia’s transformation from resilient ecosystem to struggling, polluted river follows the path of so many American waterways whose ecology was sacrificed in the name of utilitarian values. These values were first championed by early foresters of

³² *Ibid.*

³³ David Montgomery, “The Fishermen,” *Washington Post Magazine*, October 2, 2011, 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the nineteenth century who sought to provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people, and emphasized efficient resource extraction above all else. Industry and the federal government acted as mutually reinforcing powers that redefined waterways in terms of functionality and reshaped rivers to meet the needs of a population that was rapidly growing and urbanizing. The following chapter will describe the national pattern of exploitation and mechanization of American waterways that caused the widespread decline of urban rivers such as the Anacostia. The chapter begins with an examination of the economic and social forces, including industrialization and population expansion, which created modern metropolises. Next I will move into a discussion of federal agencies, such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, and their role in rerouting and repurposing waterways across the country for the sake of navigability and flood control. As American cities became more established along waterfronts, they depended on agencies like the Corp to induce distance between rivers and cities that would protect urban developments from natural phenomenon such as floods and tidal fluctuations. Both industry and the federal government shared a utilitarian vision for American waterways that resulted in mechanized and urbanized rivers including the Anacostia, Androscoggin, Passaic, and Los Angeles.

Urbanizing Rivers: Industry and America's Waterways

Many Eastern cities grew out of colonial port towns that were founded because of their access to deep water where trading or military ships could dock. Indeed, almost as soon as Europeans landed on American soil, this country's rivers were reassigned a distinctly economic purpose. The main means of trade transport until the rise of the

railroad, rivers ran mills throughout colonial and post-colonial New England and they fueled factories up and down the Eastern seaboard after the Industrial Revolution. The redefinition of rivers as economic—rather than ecological—bodies was encouraged by early readings of the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which entrusted authority over navigable waterways to the federal government. As these waterways were valued for their importance in transporting trade goods, they were considered tools of interstate commerce and therefore subject to federal regulation under the Commerce Clause. In 1824, Congress furthered the federal government's power over navigable waterways by passing the Rivers and Harbors Act, which provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with considerable funds to straighten and dredge American rivers in order to free up interstate trade routes. Throughout much of the country's early history, rivers not only powered industry but also facilitated trade, and because of this role they were exploited and redefined by both industry and the federal government.

The industrialization of Eastern cities' waterfronts during the early twentieth century created the modern phenomenon that is an urban river. As historian Martin V. Melosi writes, factories "were often constructed near water courses, since water was needed for steam boilers or for other processes. Waterways also provided the least expensive means of disposing of soluble or suspendable wastes such as phenol, benzene, toluene, arsenic, and naphtha."³⁵ As politicians redefined rivers for their importance to trade, captains of industry valued rivers for their functional importance in providing both a fuel and a dumping ground. In many Eastern cities, factories replaced wetlands and pollution fouled the quality of countless waterways so that the ecology of urban rivers

³⁵ Martin V. Melosi, *Effluent America: Cities, Industry, Energy, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2001), 54.

quickly deteriorated in the process of resource extraction and transportation. Rivers became a kind of extension of the American factory as industrial plants sprawled across their waterfronts and polluted waterways.

The use of rivers changed from agriculture and commercial purposes to heavy industry, as their waterfronts industrialized. While modern factories produced valuable consumer items, the spaces in which they produced these items were devalued by the pollution, waste, and noise that factories emitted. American cities became increasingly undesirable places to live as factories sprang up along urban waterfronts and cities' populations exploded with laborers seeking manufacturing jobs. Indeed, Melosi argues that the rise of the industrial city was uniquely responsible for marking urban space as undesirable. He writes,

The presence of a factory often meant the deterioration of the surrounding areas. Factories usually adopted the simplest—not the most sanitary—disposal methods for garbage, slag, ashes, and scrap metals. Meatpacking, which concentrated in cities such as Chicago and St. Louis, inundated adjacent areas with foul smells and dumped animal wastes on vacant lots. Tanneries contributed more pollution by washing hides in nearby water sources.³⁶

The air, water, and noise pollution emitted by factories created isolated industrial zones within cities that were quickly forgotten by wealthier residents.³⁷ Highly industrialized waterfronts became the most unattractive feature of every modern city, and were usually occupied by the urban poor.³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The population explosions in American cities during the early twentieth century resulted in pockets of poverty in the industrial centers of most cities.³⁹ “Many workers had little choice but to live in the least desirable sections of the city, usually close to the factories where they worked or near marshy bogs and stagnant pools,” Melosi writes.⁴⁰ The hasty expansion of local residences into overpopulated slums compounded the difficulties already accrued by nearby factories’ air and water pollution, so that established sanitation and environmental services were inadequate.⁴¹ The creation of urban industrial space solidified the demarcation of urban space along racial and economic lines, crowding devalued people on devalued land.⁴²

Lewiston, Maine typified the process of industrialization of urban rivers and waterfronts. Starting in 1888, pulp and paper mills sprang up along Lewiston’s waterfront. These mills were incredibly productive; however, the effluence they routinely dumped into the Androscoggin River quickly destroyed the viability of the river as a municipal water supply.⁴³ Scholar Wallace Scot McFarlane writes, “Not only did the manufacturing of wood pulp contribute to pollution entering the Androscoggin, the logging necessary to provide the wood for pulp mills also contributed to deforestation and sediment entering the river.”⁴⁴ The exploitation of the surrounding resources as well as the industrialization of Lewiston’s waterfront set off a dramatic destruction of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴³ Wallace Scot McFarlane, “Defining a Nuisance: Pollution, Science, and Environmental Politics on Maine’s Androscoggin River,” *Environmental History* 17 (2012): 311-312, accessed April 9, 2013, doi: 10.1093/envhis/ems019.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.

Androscoggin's ecology. Between 1888 and 1927, industry built twenty-one dams outside of towns along the Androscoggin River to serve waterfront factories.⁴⁵

As the river was mechanized, its waterfront was transformed into a stretch of heavy industry. "Attracting thousands of French Canadian immigrants, the new industries changed the social makeup of the Androscoggin's largest urban center, the twin towns of Lewiston and Auburn, and brought new problems of filth and crowding," McFarlane writes.⁴⁶ These new residents were impacted by the river's ecological decline, as industrial and municipal pollution contaminated the river and further disrupted its ecology.⁴⁷ The river became an almost entirely industrial entity: water quality worsened dangerously, the surface was spread with foam, wildlife died out, and the city was permeated with the river's horrible smell.⁴⁸

More than anything, the stench drove residents to action, and by the 1940s the town began a plan to remediate the Androscoggin's pollution.⁴⁹ However, the pulp and paper mills were the largest industries in Lewiston's (and Maine's) economy, and city officials worried that less waterfront industry would send the state into economic depression.⁵⁰ "Rather than regulate the pollution directly, the state legislature decided to call for more research before taking action," McFarlane explains.⁵¹ Economic dependency on waterfront industry inspired a more lenient approach to environmental regulation that was only dismantled once the Androscoggin River Technical Committee

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

(ARTC) gave chemist Walter A. Lawrence sole authority over the river's ecological remediation.⁵² The widespread damming of the Androscoggin River, early industrialization of the Lewiston waterfront, rapid water pollution, and ongoing process of ecological remediation demonstrate the far-reaching effect of industrialization on both rivers and their waterfronts.

As demonstrated in Lewiston, much of the waste produced by waterfront factories and residents ended up in the nearby waterways, so that urban rivers became an extension not only of industry but also of the entire industrialized city. Not long after industry took root in urban centers, waterways up and down the East Coast were already being left for dead by cities that could no longer rely on them as water supplies. New Jersey's Passaic River followed a similar path of decline as Maine's Androscoggin River. Heavy industry on Newark's Passaic waterfront included factories producing dyes, paints, textiles, and pesticides, as well as manufacturing facilities for leather tanning and metalworking.⁵³ As was the case in Lewiston, Newark's factories also dumped their effluence directly into the river, so that the Passaic's ecology rapidly deteriorated.⁵⁴ By the late 1800s, the Passaic could no longer provide the city with clean water, and Newark was forced to search for a new water supply.⁵⁵ Across the country, urban rivers served as the sinks to the industries' faucets. However, the danger of this approach was made clear when cities like Newark lost their local waters supply. As Jenny Price writes about the Los Angeles

⁵² *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵³ S.J. Burton, B.L. Finley, S.L. Huntley, T.J. Iannuzzi, R.P. McNutt, and C.W. Schmidt, "Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) as Sources of Sediment Contamination in the Lower Passaic River, New Jersey. I. Priority Pollutants and Inorganic Chemicals," *Chemosphere* 34 (1997): 214, accessed Friday, April 26, 2013, doi:10.1016/S0045-6535(96)00373-6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Melosi, *Effluent America*, 55.

River, “[w]hen you use and change a landscape, then the place will respond. Nature is never passive.”⁵⁶ After only a few decades of industrialization, rivers such as the Passaic in New Jersey, were poisoned and left for dead, and by the 1960s, others, like the Cuyahoga in Ohio, were catching fire.

Environmental activists in the 1960s and 1970s seized on the dramatic image of burning water, and pushed for comprehensive remediation of water pollution, however little attention was given to the declining communities who lived along these rivers. Water pollution was only part of the problem, as the industrial utilization of rivers was enabled not only by the deregulation of industry but also by the Army Corps of Engineer’s mechanization of waterways. For centuries, Americans fixated on taming waterways to allow for the their industrial exploitation that only became national news when rivers burned. Not until the late 1980s did Congress seriously question the near limitless authority the Army Corps of Engineers had exercised over American waterways for over two centuries.

Flood Control and Navigability: The Federal Government’s Transformation of American Waterways

As technology advanced, the relationship between the industrialization of both cities and rivers became even more pronounced and followed the path of western expansion and the Industrial Revolution. Throughout the country, rivers, such as the Androscoggin or Passaic, were heavily exploited as municipal water supplies, industrial dumping grounds, and power generators for rural regions. Industry and federal agencies

⁵⁶ Jenny Price, “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.,” *The Believer*, April 2006, accessed March 11, 2013, http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price.

such as the Army Corps of Engineers placed such an intense utilitarian value on American waterways that they appeared tame: the American economy's beasts of burden. However, events such as the Los Angeles River's immense floods of 1914 and 1938 reminded exploiters of waterways that, deep down, these rivers were wild things, controlled not by economics but by Mother Nature.

No single organization is more responsible for subduing America's rivers than the Army Corps of Engineers. A branch of the U.S. Army, the Corps is almost as old as the country itself, and was originally established in 1779 to construct military forts and buildings. However, its responsibilities expanded in 1824 when the General Survey Act gave the Corps purview over the maintaining the navigability of the nation's roads and waterways. In a report released in 2000, Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) wrote that, for two centuries, the Corps devoted itself to "building and deepening more than 140 ports and harbors, constructing the nation's 11,000-mile network of inland waterway navigation channels, 8,500 miles of levees and floodwalls, and more than 500 flood control dams."⁵⁷ Employing the newest technologies and designing immense public works projects, the Corps reigned supreme during the technocratic age of the 1930s to 1950s.⁵⁸ "It did not take long for both [the Corps] and the Congress to realize that some form of Corps project, paid for by the taxpayers of America, could generate a lot of votes and contributions for a legislator's

⁵⁷ David Conrad, Steve Ellis, Peter Moreno, and Jeff Stein (Taxpayers for Common Sense and National Wildlife Federation), *Troubled Waters: Congress, The Corps of Engineers, and Wasteful Water Projects*, Washington: Taxpayers for Common Sense, 2000, accessed April 25, 2013, http://www.taxpayer.net/user_uploads/file/Reports/WaterResources/Water%20Res%20Corps%20Troubled%20Waters%202000%20PDF.pdf, 3.

⁵⁸ Daniel McCool, *River Republic: The Fall and Rise of America's Rivers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 3.

next campaign,” scholar Daniel McCool explains.⁵⁹ Congressmen, then, threw their support behind the Corps, essentially giving them a blank check with which to build dams and channels on waterways throughout the country.

It is no coincidence that the Corps’ heyday corresponded with American society’s reliance on modern technology for solutions to problems such as economic recession and massive unemployment. At the end of World War II, the Corps’ projects benefited from and represented the military-industrial economy responsible for pulling the country out of the Great Depression. As public works projects, the Corps plans were daring and impressive, providing resources and job opportunities to a nation in need. Despite the benefits of the Corps’ technocratic approach, the bureaucracy and sheer enormity of its projects often hindered their effectiveness. “The projects were sometimes in the national interest, occasionally in accord with sound economic principles, but rarely built in an environmentally sensitive manner, and sometimes a gross waste of money,” McCool writes.⁶⁰ However, immense public trust in and overall demand for the Corps’ projects allowed them to drastically alter the character of American waterways in a very short period of time.

The Los Angeles River is one of the most poignant examples of urban industry and federal agencies’ impact on waterfront ecology. Before it was manipulated by man, the river swelled and dried as winter turned to summer.⁶¹ However its expansion from winter rains became seen as flooding once development moved into the river’s flexible

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶¹ Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 111.

channel.⁶² After the First Transcontinental Railroad connected Los Angeles to the East Coast in 1869, the city's population boomed as droves of Easterners followed the uniquely American urge to go west. In compliment to a growing population, industry expanded along the Los Angeles River. "Railroad tracks and freight yards lined both banks. Warehouses and manufacturing plants were built nearby," Blake Gumprecht writes in a description of this period of expansion along the Los Angeles River.⁶³ The presence of railroads and the constant threat of flooding made waterfront land along the Los Angeles River suitable for few other ventures besides industry, and soon the river's banks were overflowing with industrial plants and warehouses.⁶⁴ As the city's built environment expanded, almost everything that was excluded from the idealized image of Los Angeles as a modern western city started making its way into the river, including effluence such as industrial waste, garbage, and sewage. Even people, migrants and down-and-outers from all over the map, found a home in the river's channel.⁶⁵ Gumprecht writes, "Not only was the river lined with industry, it became an industrial site itself, a use that remains prevalent today."⁶⁶ Gradually, the Los Angeles River completed its transformation into an urban river, and its use changed from agricultural irrigation to municipal water source to urban dumping ground, until "it was as much deplored as it was ignored."⁶⁷ Constantly viewed in terms of the resources it offered, the river ceased to exist for ecological purposes and instead was manipulated to serve the needs of a booming metropolis.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

The region's growing built environment meant that the Los Angeles River's natural floods caused considerably more damage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than they had ever previously caused.⁶⁸ As landscape architect David Fletcher explains, "[T]he river did not exist in the summers. Its flow was seasonal, dry in the summer and flooded during winter storms...Such extremes inspired settlers to view the river as a violent flood machine, something to be restrained."⁶⁹ Industries' intense dependence on these rivers led to a fear of their unpredictability, which was ultimately solved by the mechanization and control of these waterways through modern technologies including dams, locks, and channels. These tools have completely transformed the behavior and appearance of America's rivers so that mechanized waterways serve the economy but lose their ecological integrity. Arguments for flood control first surfaced after the flood of 1914, and additional damaging floods in 1926 and 1938 garnered further support for a series of expensive flood control projects. County engineers, and later the Army Corps of Engineers, devised an enormous flood control system that replaced the Los Angeles River's natural ecosystem with concrete channels and dams.

In the case of the Los Angeles River, the region, Congress, and President Franklin Roosevelt gave the Corps such strong support that there was little opposition to its transformation of the watershed. Much of this change occurred during the Great Depression, and the Corps' elaborate projects throughout Los Angeles and the Inland

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁹ David Fletcher, "Los Angeles River Watershed: Flood Control Freakology," in *The Infrastructural City: Networked Ecologies in Los Angeles*, ed. Kazys Varnelis (New York: Actar, 2008), 40.

Valley provided ample job opportunities for a region struggling with unemployment.⁷⁰ Essentially unchallenged by the citizens and the federal government, the Corps eventually devised a \$106.8 million-dollar plan in which the entire Los Angeles River watershed would be transformed and almost completely covered in concrete.⁷¹ What once was a fluctuating river that carried snowmelt through a dry valley and into the Pacific Ocean became a mechanized work of man, where concrete channels, reservoirs, and dams replaced natural washes and canyons. Fletcher observes,

The present day river functions mainly as a flood control system consisting of tributary debris basins that capture sediment from the mountains, dams and reservoirs that regulate and detain water, and a concrete riverbed engineered to conduct water to the ocean as quickly as possible.⁷²

The river's course has been straightened so that eighty-two percent of its length is now a paved channel.⁷³ Covering it in concrete and streamlining it into a highway, the Corps recreated the Los Angeles River in the image of the metropolis it runs through. As Fletcher writes, the river today "is an infrastructural ecology, opportunistic and emergent, one that lives off human excess, with many of its values and functions misunderstood."⁷⁴ Indeed, Fletcher argues that contemporary Los Angeles River can only be explained in terms of "freakology" rather than ecology because manipulation by the Corps, industry, and residents has created an environment devoid of natural ecology.⁷⁵ The Los Angeles River's long history of exploitation and manipulation has left the region struggling to

⁷⁰ Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 206.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁷² Fletcher, "Los Angeles River Watershed," 36.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

come to terms with the utilitarian and ecological values of a river buried under reinforced concrete.

Projects like the paving of the Los Angeles River occurred on waterways across the country: the Mississippi was channelized in the early 1900s, the Columbia River was locked and dammed in the 1930s, the Kissimmee River was straightened in the 1960s, and the list goes on. The extent of human influence over American waterways is so far-reaching that, the Census Bureau reports, “85 percent of the inland water surface in the United States is artificially controlled.”⁷⁶ Whether dammed up, diverted into reservoirs, or straightened into channels, American waterways are far from the meandering rivers, vibrant wetlands, and resilient estuaries they once were. McCool refers to the act of conquering these waterways as “water hubris,” a philosophy that drove the Corps for the better parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁷ By McCool’s definition, this philosophy relies on the assumption that rivers serve a purely functional purpose and humans are destined to control them.⁷⁸ With this philosophy in mind, the Corps set about transforming both access to water and the conceptualization of waterways in the United States.

The Bureau of Reclamation joined the Corps as part of a larger history of utilitarianism that has goaded environmentalists since preservationists first sparred with conservationists in the early twentieth century. Created in 1902, the Bureau is a federal agency charged exclusively with managing water in the American west. Like the Corps, the Bureau has focused on the resource value—rather than ecology—of American

⁷⁶ McCool, *River Republic*, 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

waterways, seeking to efficiently exploit western rivers to provide power and water to the greatest number by building dams and reservoirs. Government agencies such as the Corps and the Bureau “acted as though only benefits, free of costs, could be obtained by replacing nature with edifice.”⁷⁹ This technocratic approach was typical of much of the twentieth century, an age that began with progressivism and ended with military-industrialism. However, implicit within this approach was a dangerous, utilitarian conceptualization of nature. As TCS and NWF reported in 2000, “Although many of these projects have been critical to the nation’s economic development, numerous Corps projects have demonstrated an overreaching will to control nature, and a naïve belief that engineering has the capacity to fundamentally replumb and reshape the nation’s rivers, floodplains, and coastlines.”⁸⁰ Through agencies such as the Corps and the Bureau, the federal government was in the business of extracting the most resources out of its rivers as possible. As McCool writes, “[A] motto for the Bureau of Reclamation...[was] ‘Our rivers: total use for greater wealth.’”⁸¹ Heeding the Bureau’s motto, government engineers conquered America’s waterways without considering that their utilitarian, technocratic solutions might be ecologically damaging.

In Los Angeles, the Corps’s efforts at flood control on the Los Angeles River replaced the region’s ecosystem with concrete channels that allowed the city to sprawl, unchecked, into the nearby valleys. Nature writer Jenny Price explores the result of the city’s unique relationship to nature and determines, “[T]his is the reigning story we tell

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁰ Conrad et. al., *Troubled Waters*, 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

about L.A.: There is no nature here.”⁸² One of the Corps’ most ambitious and technologically sophisticated projects, the paving of the Los Angeles River completely transformed the city’s natural environment. With so many arroyos and canyons filled and covered with concrete, and so much wildlife lost to the mountains and desert, Price has to redefine the traditional idea of nature in order to locate it in her city. She writes of the Corps’ transformation of the Los Angeles River,

They recategorized it as infrastructure, with the freeways and electrical grid. To the public, in any case, the channel no longer looked wild enough to be a river or to count as nature at all. And this is how L.A. lost its river—not lost as in no longer had one, since L.A. actually still had it, but lost as in could no longer see or find it.⁸³

The Corps robbed Los Angeles of a connection to the wildness that once flowed through its city, so that many of its residents believe they live in a landscape devoid of nature. In this way, the Corps’ mechanization of the Los Angeles River transformed the city’s understanding of its own environment and identity. “Angelenos reimagined the river as nonexistent, and banished it from their collective imagination of history and place,” Price writes.⁸⁴ The Corps’ extensive flood control projects on the Los Angeles River replaced ecosystems with industrial and economic systems that perpetuated urban expansion but severed the region’s connection to its natural environment.

Forging a New Water Ethic

By the late 1980s, public trust in the Corps’ judgment had reached a tipping point. Massive water projects, once praised for their innovation and modernism, were

⁸² Price, “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.”

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

scrutinized for their inefficiencies and labeled a misuse of taxpayer money.⁸⁵ One of the most notable criticisms of the Corps came out of the TCS and NWF report in 2000 that investigated wasteful spending and environmental harm in Corps projects. In their report, the groups determined, “Countless ecosystems and billions of dollars continue to be wasted in the continuation of traditional Corps policies and programs, which often fall short of their objectives and too often disregard fundamental fiscal and environmental responsibilities.”⁸⁶ Of particular concern to both TCS and NWF was Congress’s unchecked spending for on-going environmentally damaging projects including the Eastern Arkansas Irrigation projects, the deepening of the Delaware River, and the Upper Mississippi Lock Expansions.⁸⁷ McCool writes that, during their most influential years, the Corps “allied with Congress and beneficiary groups into an ‘iron triangle’ of special-interest politics...[and] literally changed the face of riverine America.”⁸⁸ As TCS and NWF attest, special interest groups, such as developers and contractors, have historically had a great deal of influence over the Corps’ projects.⁸⁹ However, legislative support for the Corps’ public works projects was so strong that it took over a century for anyone to seriously question the agency’s approach, and by that time almost every American river had been mechanized.

With the passage of the 1986 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), Congress finally demanded a change.⁹⁰ Advocates for the environment and limited government spending pushed the bill through Congress, but had to make significant

⁸⁵ McCool, *River Republic*, 31.

⁸⁶ Conrad et. al., *Troubled Waters*, 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

⁸⁸ McCool, *River Republic*, 28.

⁸⁹ Conrad et. al., *Troubled Waters*, 4.

⁹⁰ McCool, *River Republic*, 31.

concessions to garner the needed votes.⁹¹ While these concessions included funding for 377 new Corps projects, the achievements came when “Congress agreed to a significant cost-sharing proviso—making special interests pay at least something for their benefits, and requiring the Corps to do fish and wildlife mitigation simultaneously with project construction.”⁹² Though this achievement was not a complete success, it nevertheless began the process of reigning in the Corps from the all-powerful technocratic agency it had matured into since the 1930s. TCS and NWF point out that the Corps found its new role confusing as federal politics didn’t always reflect the environmentalist zeal that inspired a revision of the agency’s mandate.⁹³ After 1986, McCool writes, “the Corps began a new life as a schizophrenic agency, tearing up rivers with one hand while restoring and preserving rivers with the other.”⁹⁴ Under this new approach, many projects that were built to last for centuries are now being reassessed.⁹⁵ However, TCS and NWF argue, “A gap remains...between the Corps’ purported commitment to environmental and fiscal responsibility and the reality of Corps projects.”⁹⁶ Once again, the Corps is leading the charge in a new field, using modern science and technology to address a man-made problem, and launching enormous ecological restoration projects.⁹⁷

Today, the Corps’ early projects and industry’s former waste disposal practices are generally regarded as irresponsible and shortsighted. Although the Corps has adopted new methods and approaches that focus on ecological restoration and demand meaningful

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Conrad et. al., *Troubled Waters*, 7.

⁹⁴ McCool, *River Republic*, 31.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁶ Conrad et. al., *Troubled Waters*, 7.

⁹⁷ McCool, *River Republic*, 11.

environmental impact studies, little has been done to remediate the impact that the history of mechanization and industrialization has had on urban society. The Corps has not yet officially connected the destruction of urban rivers with the destruction of waterfront neighborhoods, and so these places remain ignored—if not forgotten. A new approach to correcting past environmentally catastrophic projects must remediate both the social and ecological effects of the federal government and industry's manipulation of American waterways. These social and ecological effects are demonstrated by the decline of the Near Southeast neighborhood along the Anacostia waterfront in Washington, D.C. There, the river still serves a purpose for navigation and limited recreation, however its ecology has been deeply altered by a long history of waterfront industry and manipulation by the Army Corps of Engineers. National issues of urbanization, industrialization, and mechanization have played out on the small scale along the Anacostia River for well over two centuries.

CHAPTER THREE

A Case Study on the Anacostia: The River, The Washington Navy Yard, and Near Southeast

If you're willing to put on chest waders and waddle through the Anacostia's silt at low tide, if you're patient enough to fall a few times and steady yourself with muddy hands, and imaginative enough to squint just so at the river's turbid water, then you might catch a glimpse of what the river once was. Many Washingtonians think the Anacostia is too polluted to ever resemble the impressive, translucent river it once was, but after spending four months working on ecological restoration projects on the river, I've experienced enough of these glimpses of historical clarity to fill me with a deep appreciation of the Anacostia's enduring value and beauty.

Early one morning in July 2012, I went to the Langston Golf Course and Driving Range in Northeast Washington, D.C. to work on an ecological restoration project with the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) and the National Capital Parks-East division of the National Park Service (NPS). For decades, the two organizations have worked to rehabilitate the Anacostia's anemic ecosystem, and that morning our task was to install meshed metal fences throughout the river's tidal areas around Kingman Lake, so that young native plants could establish themselves without being eaten by the region's exploding population of non-native, resident Canada geese. My fellow AWS interns and I worked with the AWS staff conservation biologist and an NPS ranger and her interns to haul heavy rolls of metal fencing through the mud, measure out rectangular grids, and hammer iron supporting rods deep into the thick sediment until we established a patchwork of goose fences throughout the silty shoreline that once comprised a vibrant wetland.

Above the squelching, panting, and hammering, came the song of a red-winged blackbird, and I looked up to see a well-established stand of native wild rice dancing as a pair of birds flitted in and out of it. They lighted on the slender green stalks, nibbling on yellow grains that bulged with midsummer ripeness. Calling joyfully to each other, they flew over to the oaks on the riverbank, then back to the rice once more. Seven feet above the muddy riverbed, the tops of the rice plants swayed as the wind and birds rustled them. I rested for a moment, welcoming the wind on that scorching July morning, and reveling in the scene unfolding before me: native birds feasting on native plants, filling their bellies with an indigenous food source, and scattering more seeds into the mud as they shook the stalks in their eagerness.

This was how it used to—was supposed to—work, and in that moment I caught a glimpse of the self-sufficient, ecologically distinct river AWS and NPS were trying to revive. In moments like this, I can imagine what the river must have looked like before the city crept up to its banks. Turning back to work, I looked over at the Robert F. Kennedy Stadium in the distance and the smokestacks of the PEPCO power plant on nearby Benning Road—monuments of city life that now enclose the Anacostia. Much of the wetlands where the Nacotchtank Indians once collected wild rice in their canoes are gone, replaced instead by shipyards, golf courses, and factories. This once deep and clear river is now silted and polluted, running through an intensely urban region of Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast Washington, D.C. Ever since humans first inhabited the Anacostia's watershed region, they have shaped the river through use, navigation, and development; however, the river itself has likewise shaped the people in the region by inspiring development and culture that is deeply tied to its waters. Like that of the

Androscoggin and Los Angeles Rivers, the story of the Anacostia's decline is intricately entwined with the city's maturation as a metropolis, and the river's ecological destruction parallels the establishment of industrial and undesirable space within the city.

The Anacostia River

It has been decades since the Anacostia River has produced fish that are safe for humans to eat, or was even clean enough for humans to safely swim in its waters. The river's watershed is made up of a network of streams running through eastern Washington, D.C. and Maryland, an area totaling up to 176 square miles.⁹⁸ At Hains Point, a man-made peninsula dividing the Washington Shipping Channel from the Potomac River, the Anacostia finishes its 8.5-mile run and spills into the Potomac River. At this confluence, the two waters mix and eventually make their way to the Chesapeake Bay, where they continue onto the Atlantic Ocean.⁹⁹ In the years since the Anacostia became an urban river, its course, ecology, and character have been deeply altered so that today it is almost unrecognizable from the river encountered by early European explorers.

When navigated by Captain John Smith in 1608, the river was crystal clear with a depth of forty feet: an ideal port for the trading ships that imported slaves from Africa and exported tobacco back to the Old World.^{100 101 102} Like other tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay, the Anacostia is a tidal river, and its fluctuating waterline originally

⁹⁸ "FAQs," Anacostia Watershed Society, accessed April 25, 2010, <http://www.anacostiaws.org/explore/watershed-info/faqs>.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 16.

¹⁰² Author's note: Due to scarce scholarship and my own limited access to archives, I will rely on Wennersten's narrative of the Anacostia River's early history.

supported an incredible 2,500 acres of wetlands.¹⁰³ Immense populations of shad once spawned there, laying their eggs in the wetlands before making their way back to the Atlantic. Brown bullhead catfish foraged along the riverbed and herrings, white perch, and striped bass swam through stands of spatterdock and arrow arum, hiding from birds of prey like bald eagles, osprey, kingfishers, and egrets.¹⁰⁴ The region's native people, the Nacotchtank Indians, moved through these wetlands in canoes: fishing for perch and bass and harvesting wild rice. However, not long after Europeans landed on the river's shore, the use and ecology of the Anacostia changed dramatically.

As European colonists flooded to the New World during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, port towns such as Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, and Cottage City sprang up along the river's Maryland side. As historian John R. Wennersten remarked, "A moderate climate and an attractive landscape lured hundreds of colonists, who in turn made the region uninhabitable for its former residents."¹⁰⁵ Bringing with them very different philosophies of land use than had previously been practiced by the Nacotchtank Indians, European settlers immediately set about altering the landscape they encountered on the banks of the Anacostia. Arguably the most transformative practice the Europeans brought with them to the New World was tobacco farming.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, towns such as Bladensburg were completely dependent on the tobacco trade, and their development boomed while tobacco prices soared. However, although the monetary returns were significant, raising tobacco crop was extremely detrimental to the watershed's ecological health. Colonists could only expect a single tobacco field to produce viable harvests for

¹⁰³ "FAQs."

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

four years before its nitrogen and potassium levels plummeted.¹⁰⁷ The crop's intense nutrient extraction encouraged colonists to adopt wasteful land practices that drastically changed the watershed's landscape so that "[i]n less than a decade, land went from forest to tobacco fields to broom sedge and little pines."¹⁰⁸ Rather than wait twenty years for the soil nutrients to replenish themselves, colonists simply cleared more forested land and started over.¹⁰⁹ Depletion of forests, however, did little to discourage the crop's expansion, and tobacco farming continued to grow throughout the watershed as slavery arrived in the region.

The dawn of slavery in the mid-Atlantic encouraged the development of large tobacco plantations, so that land along the Anacostia was consolidated into ownership by the region's small but powerful planter elite.¹¹⁰ Protecting their authority through political clout, economic resources, and advantageous inter-marriages, ten elite families dominated life along the river.¹¹¹ As Wennersten argued,

The development of Chesapeake tobacco agriculture into a labor system based on caste, race, and severe social control encouraged the development of a patriarchy in which white planters controlled or sought to control nearly every aspect of agrarian life—from work to diet to social relations, religion, and sexual activity.¹¹²

The Anacostia's planter elite maintained its influence as settlements throughout the region expanded. With few checks to their power, they dictated port town politics and shaped the nature of the region's development. However, intense agricultural exploitation of the watershed region reached a tipping point by the late 1770s, setting off

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

a series of rapid ecological transformations.¹¹³ After over a century of heavy agriculture that all but deforested the region, the watershed's soils were steadily slipping into the river. "Thousands of tons of topsoil could be carried away in a single rainstorm," so that the Anacostia's once deep channel was so heavily silted that ships could no longer make it to the port at Bladensburg.¹¹⁴ The river that once served as a convenient highway between the watershed's tobacco fields and trading posts along the Chesapeake Bay had already undergone a significant environmental transformation by the time of the country's birth.



Figure 4: Cattle drink in wetlands along the Anacostia. Note the Capitol dome to the right of the tree in the background, n.d.. Source: <http://www.nps.gov/anac/naturescience/plants.htm>.

As Washington established itself as the nation's capital city, the Anacostia became central to its industrial and naval operations. Pierre L'Enfant, who designed much the District, had grand ideas for the river in his original renderings of the city. However influential landholders in the District's Northwest port of Georgetown and lack of investor interest cut short his plans.¹¹⁵ While the Southeast waterfront never became a bustling port like Georgetown, it was somewhat developed with the construction of the

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 34.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 50.

Washington Navy Yard in 1799. Manufacturing at the Navy Yard would continue until the 1960s and, although it changed from shipbuilding to ordnance creation, the Navy Yard's heavy industry had grave implications on the river's ecological health.

Apart from new industrial activity along the Southeast waterfront, the Anacostia River was also stressed by the District's population boom during the Civil War. In an effort to keep up with the District's growing size, city officials devised sanitation services to accommodate all the human waste that now needed disposing. Just as the Los Angeles River suffered as its city's population boomed and industry expanded along its banks, the Anacostia declined as Washington used it as a drain for its effluence.¹¹⁶ The resulting sewer system was disjointed so that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, Northwest, D.C. had an established networked of belowground pipes, while "a sizeable portion of Capitol Hill and the navy yard still resorted to gravity-flow pipe sewers that emptied directly into the Anacostia River."¹¹⁷ Around the time of the Civil War, the gravity-flow model was replaced with a combined sewer system that is still in use today. This system collects rainwater and raw sewage in the same pipes, which can only accommodate a certain volume of waste. As a result, heavy rains or snowfalls cause frequent overflows, which annually dump two billion gallons of raw sewage into the Anacostia through numerous outfalls. "By the late twentieth century the District had no less than seventeen CSOs [Combined Sewer Outfalls] dumping untreated sewage and storm runoff...directly into the river," McCool explains.¹¹⁸ Overflows can boost the populations of bacteria such as fecal coliform and also cause dangerous dissolved oxygen levels to form in the

¹¹⁶ McCool, *River Republic*, 205.

¹¹⁷ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 78.

¹¹⁸ McCool, *River Republic*, 205.

Anacostia, making its waters uninhabitable for many aquatic species.¹¹⁹ Writing about Washington's poor sewage system during the post-war period, anthropologist Brett Williams notes,

When the tide fell during these years, sewage choked the thick aquatic grasses, burbled and fermented, and welcomed malarial mosquitoes, especially during Washington's oppressive summers. Employees at the Navy Yard, along with inmates at the D.C. Jail and the Government Hospital for the Insane [St. Elizabeth's Hospital], suffered and died from malaria at alarming rates.¹²⁰

Once malaria was linked to wetlands in the early 1900s, the river—not the inadequate sewage system—was targeted as the problem, and Congress funded engineering projects that would not only dredge the river to enhance its navigability, but also reclaim the river's wetlands to staunch the spread of malaria. While the sewer system in Southeast was gradually improved, the sewage outfalls still exist and continue to dump raw sewage and storm water runoff directly into the river whenever the system overflows. The storm water in these overflows can be equally detrimental to the river's health, as runoff from well-trafficked city streets brings with it heavy metals and oils spewed from cars as well as any trash littered along the sidewalks.

Although the District's antiquated combined sewer system has had a lasting ecological impact, the most devastating environmental change to the Anacostia was the reclamation of its wetlands during the twentieth century. Like the Los Angeles River and so many other waterways throughout the country, the primary actor in the Anacostia's process of mechanization was the Army Corps of Engineers. As the nation's capital grew into a metropolis, the river's ebbing tides and flexible course became a threat to new

¹¹⁹ Norris McDonald (African American Environmentalists Association), *Our Unfair Share 3: Race & Pollution in Washington, D.C.*, 2000, 26.

¹²⁰ Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," 416.

housing and business development. By 1913, spring and summer flooding prompted Congress to provide the Corps with \$400,000 with which to tame the river.¹²¹ Using this money to drastically transform the course of the river, the Corps “laid 33,158 cubic yards of riprap along the river’s banks and constructed a sea wall 1,465 feet in length between the Anacostia and Pennsylvania Avenue bridges.”¹²² The Corps’ efforts to control the river continued into the following year as they covered more wetlands with masonry and dredged silt from the river’s channel.¹²³ Just as the Los Angeles River’s mechanization emerged as an effort to protect residents in its watershed from damaging floods, the channelization of the Anacostia marked an effort to prevent the spread of malaria from the river’s polluted wetlands into Washington.¹²⁴

Despite its lofty goals, the project advanced haltingly. In 1916, when engineering costs finally became too high to justify, the Corps’ goal changed from increasing making navigability to repurposing it “as a massive public park.”¹²⁵ However, even this watered-down goal failed when drained wetlands flooded and heavy silt deposits foiled further dredging.¹²⁶ The one park that did come out of this project was Kingman Island, a man-made island that was never developed as a commercial venue and today is operated as a recreation site by a local environmental non-profit. With so many obstacles in the way of the river’s reclamation, the Corps turned its attention elsewhere, and the Anacostia was once again abandoned. “To see the Anacostia in the 1930s was to see a river completely subjugated by rip-rap, sea walls, dredge spoil, and sewage outfalls,” Wennersten

¹²¹ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 110.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ “FAQs.”

¹²⁵ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 111.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

writes.¹²⁷ After years of engineering and experimentation, the Anacostia joined a long list of American waterways that had been manipulated and subdued by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps' mechanization of the Anacostia transformed the river's winding wetlands into a straight channel, replacing its ecosystem with a shallow, muddy canal. The removal of the river's wetlands took away an important ecological mechanism that not only cleaned the river but also sustained it by preventing erosion and supporting wildlife. With this final blow, the Army Corps of Engineers reshaped the Anacostia into something utterly unnatural. As river reclamation projects on the Anacostia fell in and out of vogue throughout the twentieth century, the Army Corps of Engineers and Civilian Conservation Corps removed an astonishing ninety-six percent of the Anacostia's wetlands.^{128 129} By the time this period of mechanization ended, the Anacostia had been developed and channelized, and today its riverbanks support only 150 acres of riparian wetlands.¹³⁰ Overtime, stressed by years of intense trade, agricultural erosion, and riverside occupation, the Anacostia's depth shrank to an incredibly slim three feet, and the water became an opaque, muddy brown.¹³¹ According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), over 20,000 tons of litter—discarded tires, plastic bags, organic matter, or plastic bottles—enters the Anacostia on an annual basis.¹³² Much of this litter ends up in the water after routine combined sewer overflows, but a significant portion is directly left by people who regard the river as a dump. Everything

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹²⁸ McCool, *River Republic*, 205.

¹²⁹ Brent Bolin, personal communication, April 2010.

¹³⁰ "FAQs."

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

from Styrofoam containers to ATM machines and dead bodies has been found in the Anacostia, abandoned by people who believed this long forgotten river would conceal litter, theft, and even murder.



Figure 5: A Black-crowned Night Heron catches a fish amidst litter on the Anacostia, n.d.. Source: <http://www.examiner.com/slideshow/anacostia-river-pollution>.

Relentless pollution of the river, caused by storm water runoff, sewer overflows, and illegal dumping, has wreaked havoc on the Anacostia's ecosystem. In 1993, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin reported, "the sediments of specific areas of the tidal Anacostia River contain substantially higher concentrations of lead, cadmium, zinc, PCBs, chlordanes, hydrocarbons, and other contaminants than the Potomac River, the Washington Ship Channel, and the Tidal Basin."¹³³ The river's ecological destruction is best exemplified by the decline of the brown bullhead catfish, a keystone species in the Anacostia. Catfish forage in the polluted sediment, eating almost anything that falls to the river's bottom, whether it's organic matter, small fish, insects or even man-made garbage. As a result of their contaminated diet, an incredible two-thirds

¹³³ Norris, *Our Unfair Share* 3, 25.

of the Anacostia's population of bullhead catfish now suffer from tumors.¹³⁴ Issues with the river's wildlife also impact humans, as angling is still popular among many District residents, despite the river's severe pollution. "Fatty tissue of fish eaten by anglers can contain harmful heavy metals and toxics," the African American Environmentalists Association (AAEA) warned in a report released in 2000 on the District's environmental justice issues.¹³⁵ Despite efforts by the D.C. government and local environmental nonprofits to post signage and warn anglers about the dangers of ingesting fish from the river, fishing remains a popular pastime along the Anacostia. Although the river has historically had great cultural importance to residents of waterfront neighborhoods, contact with the river today can lead to serious health effects. According to the AAEA, "[E]xposure to toxic pollutants can cause immediate short-term human health effects such as respiratory irritation, and permanent health problems such as cancer, heart failure, kidney and liver damage, and anemia."¹³⁶ As the residents living in the neighborhoods closest to the Anacostia are predominantly African American, the river itself presents a serious environmental injustice.

By the late 1980s, ecological and environmental justice concerns led to a period of litigation between concerned citizens and local and federal governments that resulted not only in publicizing the river's anemic ecosystem, but also in the formation of important advocacy groups. One of these groups, the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS), has focused its attention on the river's ecological restoration since 1989.

Founded by watershed resident Robert Boone, AWS drew attention to the river's plight

¹³⁴ "FAQs."

¹³⁵ Norris, *Our Unfair Share* 3, 25.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

through a series of minor law suits and the establishment of working relationships between environmental activists and community members in impacted neighborhoods.¹³⁷ One of the group's most significant victories came in the mid-1990s when AWS and concerned community members came together to prevent the construction of a new riverfront football stadium for the Washington Redskins.¹³⁸ This development threatened not only to increase storm water runoff into the river by creating more impervious surfaces such as parking lots, but also its construction could have changed the neighborhood into a tourist destination rather than a community.¹³⁹ These social and ecological problems were avoided by AWS's partnership with local community leaders.¹⁴⁰ Following up this victory with a number of major law suits, including one against the U.S. Navy, AWS solidified its reputation as a leader in local environmental politics. Today, AWS continues to rely on relationships with waterfront communities, and they write in their vision statement, "AWS seeks win-win solutions through strong partnerships and coalitions, with all parts of the community, government, and other stakeholders."¹⁴¹ Through community relationships, public protest, and political and legal activity, AWS has successfully changed the language about the Anacostia from remembering the river to 'rediscovering' it.

Groups like AWS have brought the Anacostia's ecological deterioration to the forefront of local environmental politics. Successful legal battles and media campaigns have led to achievements such as holding the designation of the Washington Navy Yard

¹³⁷ McCool, *River Republic*, 208.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ "Purpose," Anacostia Watershed Society, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.anacostiaws.org/about/purpose>.

as an EPA Superfund site and establishing the D.C. bag tax, a five-cent tax on plastic bags that contributes to a clean up fund for the Anacostia. However, as the river exclusively flows through the city's inner core, responsibility for its ecological health still seems abstract to many of the District's residents who live far from the Anacostia waterfront. Running along the city's most industrial, impoverished, and ignored region, the Anacostia is still considered an extension of these neighborhoods—a kind of ecological slum. While environmental education, stewardship, and restoration programs have flourished throughout Washington in recent years, activists and advocates working to clean up the Anacostia continue to fight an uphill battle as political and economic power is still clustered away from the river.

The Washington Navy Yard

In 1799 the federal government acquired a thirty-seven-acre parcel of land along the Anacostia River at the cost of \$4,000, and designated it the Washington Navy Yard.^{142 143} Selected by President George Washington, the site became the Navy's first shipyard, and Congress initially funded the building of six large wooden warships there.^{144 145} "In a short time it became both shipyard and the repair facility for the entire fleet," so that it was quickly fully staffed and functioning as the city's largest industry.¹⁴⁶ During its early years, the Navy Yard was remembered for "[i]ts high ship houses, [and]

¹⁴² Duffy Gilford, "Mammoth Washington Navy Yard Has Developed From Small Plant: This Week's Observance of Navy Day Calls Attention to Great Changes Which Have Taken Place in Scope and Character of Work," *Sunday Star*, n.d.

¹⁴³ Wolf Von Eckardt, "Ghost of America Past," *Washington Post*, July 10, 1971.

¹⁴⁴ Duffy, "Navy Yard Has Developed."

¹⁴⁵ *Navy Day Program*, "History," Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C., October 27, 1941.

¹⁴⁶ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 52.

its immense anchor shop, whose molten fires and inky clouds of smoke reminded one of Dante's Inferno."¹⁴⁷ However, the centrality of the Navy Yard fluctuated as presidential notions of military preparedness shifted. Thomas Jefferson, for example, was responsible for shutting down nearly all activity at the Navy Yard because he thought military preparedness implied a need for perpetual war.¹⁴⁸ Jefferson's philosophy had a profound impact on the Navy Yard so that, even during the War of 1812, the shipyard's strategic value was largely ignored. Although the presence of war certainly increased production at the Navy Yard, the importance of the shipyard itself was not considered in military defense plans.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, when the British invaded Washington in 1814, there were no soldiers mustered to protect the Yard from invasion.¹⁵⁰ As the British advanced, the Navy Yard's inaugural commandant, Commodore Thomas Tingey, ordered that the shipyard be set ablaze rather than overtaken by the British army.¹⁵¹ Like the many fires the British had set throughout the city during their siege of Washington, Tingey's act of arson burned this Washington establishment to the ground. "Not only were the buildings burned and the shipping ravaged, but the...[commandant's] own provisions, loaded on an old gunboat, were ransacked by plundering neighbors," the *Sunday Star* reported of this significant event in the Navy Yard's history.¹⁵² After the Yard was torched, the first chapter of its long history came to a close.

¹⁴⁷ "Old East Washington: The Days When the Navy Yard Was Looked Upon as Out in the Country," *Washington Evening Star*, December 23, 1893.

¹⁴⁸ Duffy, "Navy Yard Has Developed."

¹⁴⁹ "Navy Yard History Given By Duhamel: Shipbuilding Here During War of 1812 Described to Society of Natives," *Washington Evening Star*, October 22, 1932.

¹⁵⁰ Duffy, "Navy Yard Has Developed."

¹⁵¹ *Navy Day* Program, "History."

¹⁵² Duffy, "Navy Yard Has Developed."

Rebuilt after the War of 1812, the Navy Yard again came of importance during the Civil War as both a shipyard and a holding place for Confederate prisoners.¹⁵³ Military officials in the Civil War learned from their predecessors' mistakes and recognized the Yard's strategic importance. "The ships and stores were often threatened by attacks from the South and employees were required to take the oath of allegiance to their country every night before going home," reflected a 1971 *Washington Post* article on the Navy Yard's history.¹⁵⁴ Jumpstarted by military demands during the Civil War, industry expanded along South Capitol Street, which bordered the shipyard, and soon the area hosted factories producing goods including processed sugar, natural gas, pottery, and beer.^{155 156} Despite the expansion of other factory jobs, "[t]he navy yard continued as the city's largest single employer," further solidifying its important relationship with the District's residents.¹⁵⁷ Heavy industry at the Navy Yard nevertheless had its drawbacks, as "factory waste" was thoughtlessly dumped in the Anacostia throughout this period of Civil War shipbuilding.¹⁵⁸ While wartime needs caused industry to boom at the Navy Yard, the development of larger, deep draft iron and steel ships, such as the USS *Monitor*, at the close of the Civil War changed the use of the Navy Yard once again.¹⁵⁹ As noted earlier, a long history of poor agricultural practices on tobacco plantations throughout the watershed caused substantial soil erosion that overtime silted up the

¹⁵³ Duffy "Navy Yard Has Developed."

¹⁵⁴ Von Eckardt, "Ghost of America."

¹⁵⁵ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 74.

¹⁵⁶ "History," The Yards, Washington, D.C., http://www.dcyards.com/about_the_yards/history, accessed April 24, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Navy Day Program, "History."

Anacostia, so that the Navy's new warships could no longer make it upriver to the shipyard.¹⁶⁰

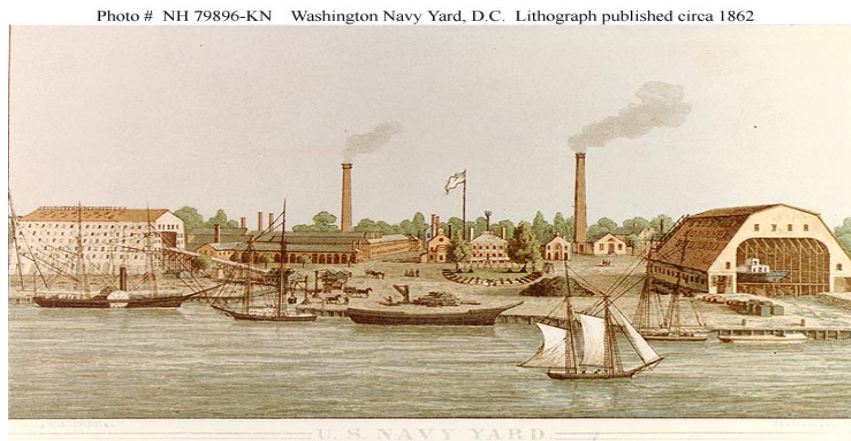


Figure 6: Colored lithograph of the Washington Navy Yard, 1862. Source: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/images/h79000/h79896k.jpg>.

Unable to accommodate modern warships, the Navy Yard underwent its second transformation, this time from shipyard to gun factory in 1883.¹⁶¹ As modern warships were equipped with guns, rather than antiquated cannons, the Navy retrofitted the Yard into a factory designed to build specialized ordnances for new Navy ships.¹⁶² “For a decade the new guns were fired on the water front,” the *Washington Times-Herald* remembered, “but the city grew too big for that.”¹⁶³ Eventually, test facilities were moved to more remote locations on the Potomac River, but manufacturing continued at the Navy Yard.¹⁶⁴ Besides ordnances, factories at the Yard also produced, “steam engines, propellers, and other types of hardware to be used for refitting the remaining

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Duffy, “Navy Yard Has Developed.”

¹⁶² Chalmers M. Roberts, “Force of 15,000 Plays Vital Role At Navy Yard: Washington’s Heavy Industry Is Busy 24 Hours Every Day,” *Washington Times-Herald*, June 8, 1941.

¹⁶³ Roberts, “Force of 15,000.”

¹⁶⁴ “The Navy Yard,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 1921.

ships in the fleet.”¹⁶⁵ In 1893, ten years after the Yard completed its transition from shipyard to gun factory, the *Washington Evening Star* reported, “The large ship house has disappeared. The old war ships come here no more and many branches of work have been transferred to other yards.”¹⁶⁶ Although the shipyard and gun test facilities moved elsewhere, industry grew at the Navy Yard as the United States became a leading world power and naval technology advanced. Wennersten writes, “A military behemoth had arisen on the banks of the Anacostia that would transform modern warfare while polluting the river with its industrial waste.”¹⁶⁷ Supplanting environmental forethought with technological advancement, the U.S. Navy was responsible for solidifying the Anacostia’s identity as an industrialized river.



Figure 7: Aerial photograph of the Washington Navy Yard, 1918. Source: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/images/g450000/g454990.jpg>

The Anacostia continued to take in the Navy Yard’s effluence as the Navy grew, and industry at the Yard peaked during World War II. Even before the United States officially entered the war, the gun factory at the Navy Yard was operating on a twenty-

¹⁶⁵ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 74.

¹⁶⁶ “Old East Washington.”

¹⁶⁷ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 74.

four-hour schedule and employing 15,000 men.¹⁶⁸ In June 1941, the *Washington Times-Herald* boasted, “It’s about time to kill that old saw about Washington having no heavy industry.”¹⁶⁹ By 1942, in the thick of World War II, the Navy seized additional land across M Street, uprooting five neighborhood blocks to make way for more manufacturing plants.¹⁷⁰ Although the Navy Yard expanded its factories, industrial activity slowed after the close of World War II, and eventually stopped all together in 1961. While half the land remained under Navy operation, the other half was deeded to the Government Services Administration (later General Services Administration), who eventually turned it into a now-demolished mixed use complex called Southeast Federal Center.¹⁷¹



Figure 8: Workers operate lathes in the Naval Gun Factory, 1943. Source: <http://www.practicalmachinist.com/vb/antique-machinery-history/naval-gun-factory-d-c-1943-pic-192009/>.

¹⁶⁸ Roberts, “Force of 15,000.”

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ “Navy Yard Condemnation Bewilders Tenants,” *Washington Daily News*, April 4, 1942.

¹⁷¹ Von Eckardt, “Ghost of America.”

The Navy Yard's third and final transition from gun factory to offices led to a major shift in land use that resulted in countless proposals for redevelopment in the area, Southeast Federal Center among them. However, by the 1960s the Yard's legacy of heavy industry had forever changed the character of both the neighborhood and the river. "Sometimes a stiff breeze comes upriver, and there is a faint smell of the salty ocean far away, but the stronger taint comes from the dead fish floating belly-up in the channel," the *Washington Post* wrote of the Navy Yard in 1965.¹⁷² Over a century of manufacturing and poor waste management practices at the Navy Yard sickened the river so that it came to function more as a sink into which the Navy flushed its effluence, rather than a thriving, resilient ecosystem. While residents in the surrounding neighborhoods had been concerned about the Navy Yard's impact on the health of the river and their communities, few politicians were willing to challenge the Navy to change its ways.¹⁷³ Meaningful investigation into the Navy's exploitation of the Anacostia didn't begin until the 1990s, when environmental activists finally took matters into their own hands. The environmental organization, Greenpeace, conducted one of the first of these investigations in 1995 to alarming results.¹⁷⁴ Heavy industrial activity at the Navy Yard's waterfront factory dumped toxins including polycyclic biphenols (PCBs), lead, mercury, chromium, copper, nickel, silver, and zinc into the Anacostia River over a period of nearly eighty years.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps the most startling revelation from the Greenpeace investigation was that, in clear violation of the Clean Water Act, "[a] number of federal

¹⁷² Richard Corrigan, "Bills Consider Navy Yard's History," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1965.

¹⁷³ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 206.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Vernon Loeb, "EPA Orders Cleanup of Navy Yard," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1997.

agencies, most notably the U.S. Department of the Interior, had long been aware of the [Navy's dumping practices] but had done nothing with the information in their possession.”¹⁷⁶ The Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, outlaws the kind of direct dumping that the factories at the Navy Yard had engaged in for decades. During this period of thoughtless contamination along the Anacostia, pollution from industrial runoff and sewer overflows soiled the river to the extent that it became unswimmable and unfishable.¹⁷⁷ Smelly, muddy, and dotted with litter and dead fish, the Anacostia was a hard sell for redevelopers looking to make a profit off of waterfront shops or condominiums.

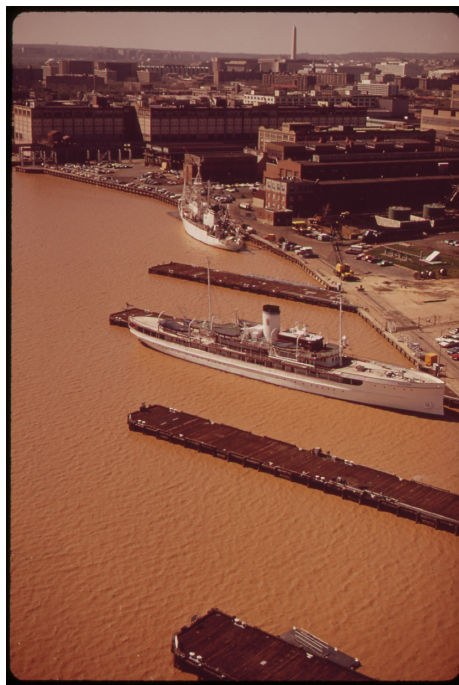


Figure 9: An aerial view of the Washington Navy Yard showcasing heavy silt from erosion into the Anacostia, 1973. Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dd/AERIAL_VIEW_OF_THE_WASHINGTON_NAVY_YARD_AND_THE_ANACOSTIA_RIVER_EXCESSIVE_SILT_CAUSES_THE_BROWN_COLOR_OF_THE_WA

¹⁷⁶ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 206.

¹⁷⁷ Loeb, “EPA Orders.”

Following a national trend of environmental activism and litigation, a coalition of environmental and community organizations seized on the Greenpeace study to set river restoration in motion by suing the U.S. Navy in the mid-1990s. The suit brought much needed attention to the plight of the Anacostia, finally pegging the U.S. Navy as responsible for much of the river's ecological decline. The plaintiffs in the case were AWS and Earth Justice, an environmental law nonprofit, as well as the Barry Farms Residents Association and the Kingman Park Civic Association, which are both community organizations from predominantly African American waterfront neighborhoods.¹⁷⁸ Together these local stakeholders sued a powerful arm of the federal government for emitting pollutants in types and quantities outlawed by the Clean Water Act.¹⁷⁹ Ruling in the plaintiffs favor, the court required the Navy to begin an investigation and clean up of the Navy Yard's toxic emissions.¹⁸⁰ Through these investigations, the Navy "discovered a number of contaminated waste sites dating back to the yard's days as an armaments facility and containing PCBs, mercury, lead, mineral spirits, paint, batteries, spilled fuel, adhesives, and acids among other things."¹⁸¹ The Navy designed a rigorous clean up program of these pollutants that included removal of lead paint, contaminated soil, and oil storage tanks, redesign of the drainage system to prevent further runoff, and creation of neighborhood outreach programs in environmental stewardship.¹⁸² Though these efforts were significant, they were simply one part of a long process of pollution remediation and ecological restoration on the Anacostia. As

¹⁷⁸ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 206.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 208.

Wennersten wrote, the Navy's environmental investigations during its clean up process "simply confirmed the fact that for over a century the navy yard had considered the Anacostia as nothing more than a convenient repository for waste."¹⁸³ While the Navy's initial quick fixes were valuable, the real challenge persists in changing the military and the city's conceptions of the river from a dump to something to be cherished and restored.

The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund continued the fight to restore the Anacostia, and ended a two-year legal battle with the U.S. Navy and General Services Administration (GSA) in 1998 when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated the Navy Yard as a Superfund hazardous waste site.¹⁸⁴ This distinction is given to locations, such as illegal dumping or chemical spill sites, where hazardous waste and contaminants are "uncontrolled."¹⁸⁵ According to the EPA, presence of Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), lead, dioxins, and other heavy metals within soil, groundwater, and building samples were the main contaminants responsible for landing the Navy Yard on the agency's Superfund list.¹⁸⁶ The Navy, the District Department of the Environment (DDOE), and the EPA have collaborated since 1998 to remediate the site's legacy of toxic waste by sampling soil and groundwater throughout the various shops and industrial buildings, removing contaminants, and retrofitting storm drains to prevent further toxic runoff.¹⁸⁷ Now some fifteen years later, the clean up process is still incomplete and,

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Steve Vogel, "Navy Yard to Go on EPA List: 2 Military Sites in Prince George's Are Proposed for Superfund," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1998.

¹⁸⁵ "Cleaning Up the Nation's Hazardous Waste Site," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/index.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ "Washington Navy Yard: Current Site Information," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/npl/DC9170024310.htm>.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

according to the EPA's website, bureaucratic disagreements between the three agencies have put the process at a standstill.¹⁸⁸ The Navy Yard Superfund site's webpage projects that the clean up will be finished in 2015, however bureaucratic hold-ups could push the date back even further.

After more than two centuries of operation, the Navy Yard completed a remarkable transformation from shipyard to Superfund site, and its changing land use left a significant mark on the health of both the waterfront neighborhood and the Anacostia River. As an establishment almost as old as the nation itself, the Navy Yard is a perfect example of the bureaucratic processes and single-minded approach that so often stymies the federal government. "From its inception," Wennersten writes, "the navy yard was the most significant employer on the Washington waterfront, and it had a major impact along the Anacostia River."¹⁸⁹ Land use at the Navy Yard reflected the needs of the age, as operations there shifted from shipbuilding to ordnance manufacturing, and finally to environmental remediation. Just as tobacco plantations exploited the land along the Anacostia with little thought of erosion or deforestation, the U.S. Navy industrialized the river's waterfront with few considerations for the industry's long-term impact on the river's ecology.

Near Southeast

When the Navy Yard broke ground in the 1799, its surrounding neighborhood was actually quite established. The neighborhood across M Street from the Navy Yard was home to Stanton Town, an active community occupying the land now called Near

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 52.

Southeast.¹⁹⁰ In Stanton Town, “[t]he houses were primitive in the extreme,” and life had the character more of a rural village than a bustling city.¹⁹¹ In December 1893, the *Washington Evening Star* noted that District residents had long conceptualized the Navy Yard as separate from the rest of the city.¹⁹² When first established, the reporter reminisced of the shipyard, “it was regarded as a sort of caudal appendage to the city, while our ‘city’ brethren in their vanity were wont to look upon the dwellers therein as akin to country cousins...and the place a rural hamlet.”¹⁹³ Created only a few years after Washington itself, the Navy Yard mapped out a new kind of space in which urban industry and rural living converged. Since the establishment of the Navy Yard began a history of industrial presence along the Southeast waterfront, Near Southeast has struggled with its own relevance as a residential neighborhood nestled in a heavily industrialized region.

While the Anacostia was still relatively untamed when the Navy Yard began operation, the river’s ecology and the neighborhood’s identity grew increasingly urban as industry expanded at the Navy Yard. At the end of the eighteenth century, “wild ducks were...plentiful in the Eastern branch, and other game could be found in abundance near by [*sic*] and where the rollicking [shipbuilder] got in his fine work.”¹⁹⁴ Though legally established as a part of the city, the Navy Yard and its surrounding neighborhood were essentially wild spaces—in every sense of the word. In 1893 the *Washington Evening Star* recalled, “[A] trip to the Navy Yard was a thing not to be entered into lightly or

¹⁹⁰ “Old East Washington.”

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

inadvisedly [*sic*], but with the fear of the Lord and the pugnacious Navy Yard boy before our eyes.”¹⁹⁵ The short streetcar ride from the established port of Georgetown to the Navy’s fledgling shipyard in Southeast brought visitors to a rough and disorderly neighborhood where shipbuilders resided and recreated.¹⁹⁶ In the 1890s, many Navy Yard employees lived in the surrounding neighborhood, and “with rod and gun whiled away the hours along the bright waters of the Anacostia; or regaled...friends at the Union House...with many a fish story or told of marvelous shots made with [a] single barrel shotgun ‘across the branch.’”¹⁹⁷ By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, increased industrial activity along the waterfront distanced Near Southeast from its previous rural identity.

The first years of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a chain of industrial developments along the Anacostia’s Southeast waterfront. “Increasingly, the riverfront was being defined by the industrial processes established there,” Wennersten writes.¹⁹⁸ While the neighborhoods of Fairlawn, Union Town (later Anacostia), Barry Farms, and others across the river from the Navy Yard in Far Southeast remained rural well into the twentieth century, Near Southeast’s proximity to the Navy Yard and its fast industrializing waterfront quickly turned it into an urbanized neighborhood. In a very short period of time, the land use around the Navy Yard went from recreation to heavy industry. While the Navy Yard churned out more advanced ordnances from its immense gun factory, other manufacturing plants sprang up along the river, including a sewage treatment plant, as well as, “a grid of steam brick works, lumber yards, coal yards, ice

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 121.

houses, scrap yards, saw mills, and the sprawling Washington Gaslight Company between 12th and 13th Streets, SE and the river.”¹⁹⁹ Residents of Near Southeast became literally tangled in industry by the early twentieth century, as smokestacks dotted the waterfront and railways threaded through the neighborhood and along the river’s edge.²⁰⁰ As a neighborhood that had historically identified with the river, Near Southeast suddenly found itself in the midst of a drastic transformation. Wennersten writes,

The Washington Gaslight Company put in large coal piers north of the navy yard, while other companies like Smoot Sand and Gravel, a sewage disposal plant, and the Columbia Granite and Dredging Company wharves, together with the railroads, cut off the river from the community it had once served.²⁰¹

However, while the development that fanned out along the waterfront from the Navy Yard set the neighborhood’s industrialization in motion, it also provided the region with stable manufacturing jobs that drew more residents to the area.

Throughout its transition from “rural hamlet” to industrial waterfront, Near Southeast maintained a working class population.²⁰² Historian David Passonneau writes of the rise of manufacturing in Near Southeast, “Its demand for unskilled labor helped a new immigrant group establish a foothold in America, and the old buildings near the yard provided affordable housing.”²⁰³ Many of the immigrants who settled near the Navy Yard were Eastern European, and helped establish what was, for a time, a thriving Jewish community in Near Southeast. According to Passonneau, these immigrants “sold kosher food, opened haberdashery stores, and formed the Southeast Hebrew congregation, all

¹⁹⁹ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 122.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² “Old East Washington.”

²⁰³ Joseph Passonneau, *Washington Through Two Centuries: A History in Maps and Images* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2004): 88.

within four blocks of the Navy Yard's main gate."²⁰⁴ While industry and small-scale commercial ventures flourished in Near Southeast throughout the early twentieth century, the neighborhood remained a working class enclave, frequented mostly by those who lived and worked there. In 1932, District historian James F. Duhamel observed, "Despite its comparatively large population...the Navy Yard section never had a theater of its own, a newspaper or even a 'circus grounds.'"²⁰⁵ Near Southeast became one of the most established communities in the District, however its lack of cultural attractions speaks to its identity as an industrial, working class neighborhood.

For much of the beginning of the twentieth century, Near Southeast was shared by Eastern European immigrants and working class African Americans. "Many middle-class blacks...held blue-collar jobs with good wages at the Navy Yard," Passonneau writes, and opportunities expanded there as World War II increased demand for the weapons it manufactured.²⁰⁶ Though many of Near Southeast's residents were middle class, their race prevented them from moving out of the District's downtown. While Near Southeast's white residents eventually had the mobility to join other white urbanites in their flight to the streetcar suburbs that spread along the District's northwest border during the early 1900s, African American urbanites remained trapped in the city because of housing segregation. As anthropologist Brett Williams writes in her study of Southeast, Washington, "African American residents of the city had been crammed by streetcar suburbs' restrictive covenants into a tiny black belt stretching north of the

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ "Navy Yard History Given."

²⁰⁶ Passonneau, *Washington Through Two Centuries*, 176.

governmental/monumental core up to Florida Avenue Northwest.”²⁰⁷ Many neighborhoods within this region were crowded slums with improper sanitation.²⁰⁸ Although Near Southeast was never reduced to slumland, it was impacted by the poverty in other African American neighborhoods throughout Washington.

Working to clean up its downtown during the 1930s, the District created the Alley Dwelling Authority and charged it with providing subsidized housing to homeless people and those who had lived on cleared slum land.²⁰⁹ As many of these dislocated residents were African American, segregation and lack of economic mobility left them with few housing options, and Near Southeast was a possibility for some “families [that] were crowded out of other areas by alley clearance and slum reclamation projects.”²¹⁰ However, the neighborhood’s proximity to federal land meant that, even in Near Southeast, housing was not always secure.



Figure 10: An alley near the Capitol building (dome visible in the background), 1935. Source: http://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/carl-mydans/.

²⁰⁷ Williams, “A River Runs Through Us,” 419.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ “Records of the National Capital Housing Authority,” National Archives, accessed March 24, 2013, <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/302.html>.

²¹⁰ “Navy Yard Condemnation.”

While the Navy Yard was a major employer in the area, African Americans in Near Southeast nevertheless had a complex relationship with the plant, and these complexities came to a head during the early years of World War II. In 1942, the relationship between the Navy Yard and African American residents of Near Southeast strained when the Navy seized a swath of land across M Street that housed five residential blocks, railroad tracks operated by the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railroad Company, and a few working factories.²¹¹ Hoping to expand the gun factory to accommodate wartime needs, the Navy selected this region across the street from its operating plant. Part of this area consisted of “solidly built small houses, occupied by Negro families and swarming with children.”²¹² The residential blocks within the region the Navy seized contained 156 families who were “all Negro families in low-income brackets,” making an average monthly income of one hundred dollars.^{213 214} Although the residents fought against this use of eminent domain by working with the Department of Justice to file a condemnation suit against the Navy, they were ultimately unsuccessful. The Housing Association determined, “[H]ousing for Negroes has reached saturation in this area and there is no place to go.”²¹⁵ The families were eventually relocated to rented mobile homes on cleared parkland a little over a mile away, in Southwest, Washington. Because of its location in the midst of waterfront industry, city and federal officials often ignored Near Southeast’s significance as a residential

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ “Another Housing Problem Solved,” U.S. Department of Housing, 1946.

²¹⁴ “Month to Move Given Tenants In Yard Area.” *Washington Post*, April 15, 1942.

²¹⁵ “Another Housing Problem Solved.”

neighborhood, resulting in moments such as the Navy's 1942 seizure of neighborhood land for industrial expansion.

After the Navy Yard closed down its factories at the end of World War II, Near Southeast lost most of its manufacturing jobs. While some industries, such as the sewage treatment plant at the O Street Pumping Facility and the Washington Gas Light plant, remained in Near Southeast, urban industry gradually fell out of vogue as a postwar America attempted to create modern cities. Williams writes,

As the capital's imperial ambitions sought lifelines outside the waterways, the city turned its back on its rivers and the affluent moved along streetcar and trolley lines up out of the river flats to the north and west. Left behind were the poorer, mostly African American, residents of the District.²¹⁶

By 1950, the U.S. Census reported that Near Southeast was 89% African American, 10% white, and less than 1% "Foreign Born."²¹⁷ With government as the city's main industry and so many of its employees living outside of the city in suburbs, the District spent much of the postwar years focusing on urban planning.

During this planning period, city officials overhauled the District's existing structure by rezoning its downtown and redesigning access points into the city by constructing new highways and bridges across the river.²¹⁸ Out of these efforts came the 11th Street Bridges, completed in 1965. Designed to ease the commute between Maryland's growing suburbs and the offices downtown, one of the 11th Street Bridges ferries in-coming traffic from Interstate 295 across the Anacostia and off to the Southeast Freeway which runs through Capitol Hill. Meanwhile, a tandem bridge carries out-going

²¹⁶ Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," 417.

²¹⁷ *U.S. Census of Population, 1950*, Final Report, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952).

²¹⁸ Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," 419.

traffic back to Interstate 295. While they freed up traffic for commuters, the 11th Street Bridges have had a major impact on Near Southeast's access to the rest of the District.

The construction of the 11th Street Bridges fell in line with the nation's postwar tendency to build freeways through its inner cities. The American Interstate Highway System developed throughout the 1940s and 1950s as a vehicle for urban redevelopment and modernization with the support of major power players in urban politics such as mayors, urban planners, and business and real estate owners.²¹⁹ Washington, D.C. was no exception to this pattern, as the postwar period saw the completion of highways and bridges such as the Anacostia Freeway in 1945, the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge (or South Capitol Street Bridge) in 1950, and the Southeast and Barney Circle Freeways in 1958. These freeways and bridges linked the District to the nation's growing highway infrastructure, while also improving commuter access to Washington's downtown. Since its conception, highway construction was tied to plans to revitalize central business districts (CBD) and redevelop inner-city slums, meaning that zoning for highway infrastructure specifically targeted minority areas within the inner city.²²⁰ In most American cities, the CBD was located downtown, in areas that had become surrounded by low-income and minority communities after middle class white residents left the city during the white flight of the immediate postwar years. Throughout the drafting of the Interstate Highway System, many city planners maintained that revitalization of the CBD was crucial to reestablishing the relevance of American cities within a modern, suburban nation. "Virtually all the powerful interests involved in urban America shared these widely held views about the links between expressways and 'reconstruction' of the

²¹⁹ Mohl, "Stop the Road," 676.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

postwar city,” Mohl writes.²²¹ However, this urban reconstruction came at the cost of immense disruption of minority communities living in inner cities across the nation. New roads and bridges sliced through established minority communities as urban planners and developers targeted downtown regions as the epicenter of redevelopment and attempted to streamline commuter traffic patterns and increase access to the CBD.

Although postwar highways were very often successful in streamlining traffic flow and improving access to the CBD, they were also incredibly detrimental to the health and integrity of the communities through which they were built. Furthermore, the addition of so many new impervious surfaces exacerbated problems with storm water runoff in waterfront cities like Washington. “Pushing expressways through the social and physical fabric of American cities inevitably resulted in housing demolition on a large scale, the destruction of entire communities, severe relocation problems, and subsequent environmental damage,” Mohl writes.²²² Environmental justice activists have long been concerned with the national pattern of highway construction, as it typically exposes low-income and minority communities to higher levels of automobile related pollutants such as nitric acid and carbon monoxide. While traffic moved freely in and out of the downtown area, minority communities across the country were left reeling from the loss of homes and communities.

In Near Southeast, the 11th Street Bridges and their corresponding Southeast Freeway formed a literal barrier that cordoned off the neighborhood from the rest of the District, barreling through Near Southeast’s south side, and cutting up along its western border with Capitol Hill. The construction of the South Capitol Street Bridge increased

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 678.

²²² *Ibid.*, 674.

traffic down the existing South Capitol Street that makes up the neighborhood's northern edge, so that well-trafficked highways eventually enclosed Near Southeast on both sides. With its eastern edge bordered by the polluted and neglected Anacostia River, Near Southeast exemplifies the incredible isolation that post-war city planners imposed on minority neighborhoods in cities across the country. Williams writes,

In Washington, these highways demolished poor neighborhoods, quarantining poor people from trendy Capitol Hill on the west and from the Anacostia River on the east. D.C. blues musician Nap Turner told me, 'The Anacostia Freeway went up the same year as the Berlin Wall. It meant about the same thing.'²²³

Cut off from the rest of the District by highways, and abandoned as Washington's industrial hub, Near Southeast was easily forgotten by a city that already largely ignored the river running through it.

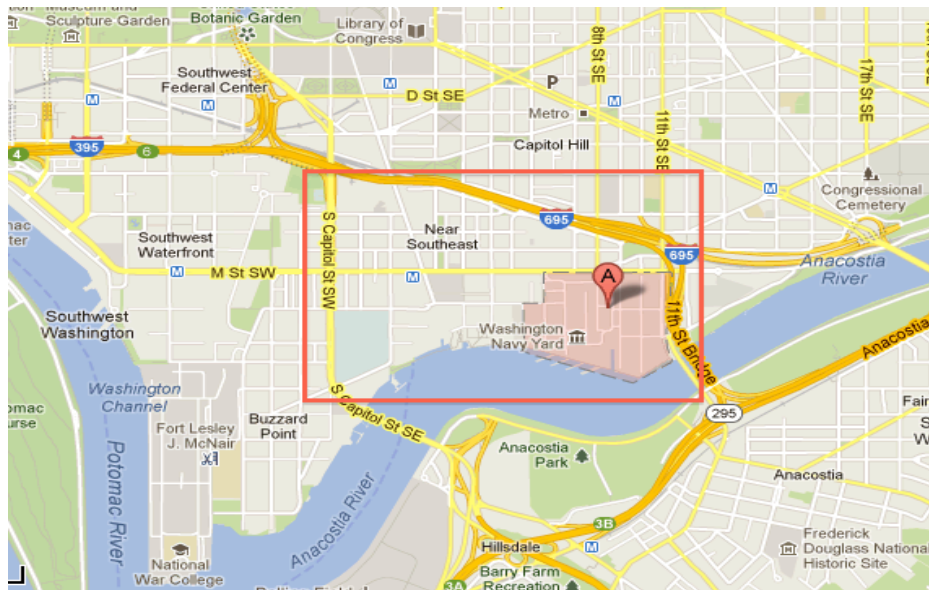


Figure 11: Near Southeast, outlined in red, and the highways bordering it. Source: <http://maps.google.com/>.

Starting in the 1950s and becoming increasingly popular by the 1970s and 1980s, city planners changed their focus from infrastructure construction to direct neighborhood

²²³ Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," 420.

redevelopment projects, often referred to as urban renewal.²²⁴ While previous redevelopment attempts to increase CBD access through highway construction had damaged neighborhoods like Near Southeast by isolating them from the rest of the city, redevelopment plans sought to bring business and real estate investors back into neglected neighborhoods to raise their standards of living. The housing project developments that came out of this period of city planning are still contested spaces today. After the Housing Act was passed in 1949, city planners set about transforming the landscape of the inner city by razing slumland to construct modernist skyscrapers in which to house the urban poor.²²⁵ Like highway construction, however, these high-rise housing projects were typically devised bureaucratically with little community input.²²⁶ Although redevelopment is rarely ethical, it still remains the tool of choice for city planners hoping to revitalize impoverished areas.

City planners' top-down approach to redevelopment was evident in 2001 when the city's plans and residents' wishes clashed over the demolition and redevelopment of the Arthur Capper Dwellings in Near Southeast. Constructed in the early 1960s, the housing projects at Arthur Capper make up two city blocks between the Southeast Freeway and L Street, Southeast. These projects were constructed simultaneously with the highways that enclosed Near Southeast, so that the 700 people who lived at Arthur Capper joined a neighborhood community that was harshly isolated from the rest of the

²²⁴ Alexander Von Hoffman, "High Ambitions: The Past and Future of American Low-Income Housing Policy," *Housing Policy Debate* 7 (1996): 431, accessed May 1, 2013, <http://content.knowledgeplex.org/kp2/img/cache/documents/2336.pdf>.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 431.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 432.

city.²²⁷ The residents at Arthur Capper represented a range of income brackets and ages and, for a time, the project was seen as a progressive approach to public housing.²²⁸ An established community grew there, utilizing the projects' baseball diamond and basketball courts, and enjoying its proximity to schools, churches, and businesses.²²⁹ However, in 2001, the projects were caught in the crosshairs as the federal government's Housing and Urban Development agency granted the District's Housing Authority \$34.9 million to demolish Arthur Capper and replace it with mixed-income housing as well as retail and office space.²³⁰ The demolition of Arthur Capper fell in line with a larger national trend to tear down postwar public housing projects and replace them with developments for "mixed-income tenancy," which by the 1990s, scholar Alexander Von Hoffman argues, became "seen as a road to uplifting the poor."²³¹ While Arthur Capper was certainly in need of repair by the early 2000s, the higher target income for new residents implied that the projects' current residents would not be able to afford units in the new complexes, and had no choice but to move elsewhere.²³²

It was a story that had played out all across the District, and was reminiscent of the Navy Yard's use of eminent domain on Near Southeast residents during World War II. Just as slum clearings had originally brought more residents to Near Southeast in the

²²⁷ Jason Cherkis, "The Cost of Leaving: Left in the Rubble of the Arthur Capper Exodus: Bags of Cloths, Rusting Grills, Children's Toys, and a Cautionary Tale," *Washington City Paper*, May 20, 2005, accessed March 31, 2013, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/30614/the-cost-of-leaving>.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ "Development/Hope VI: Arthur Capper/Carrollsborg Dwellings," District of Columbia Housing Authority, accessed March 31, 2013, <http://www.dchousing.org/?docid=9>.

²³¹ Von Hoffman, "High Ambitions," 439.

²³² Cherkis, "The Cost of Leaving."

1940s, some of Arthur Capper's residents had come to Near Southeast after their previous homes had been razed in the pursuit of redevelopment.²³³ "Residents knew each other and had carved out a life at Arthur Capper," the *Washington City Paper* wrote.²³⁴ "Moving out meant picking either the dicey prospects of a Section 8 voucher [for private housing] or braving another public-housing development."²³⁵ Publicly funded redevelopment in Near Southeast imposed an environmental injustice on the residents of Arthur Capper, as the environment in which they lived, worked, and played was destroyed in the name of urban revitalization.

As the District imagines a new role for the industrial spaces along the waterfront, the working-class African American community that has historically resided in Near Southeast is discovering that it isn't included in the District's new vision. Williams writes, residents "imagine a great sweep, a pernicious master plan to tear down Arthur Capper and Carrollsborg and move people to far Southeast. Their visions are rooted in history when that happened before and in the reality of growth politics today."²³⁶ By the early 2000s, a neighborhood that created a space for itself during a time of industrialization and segregation was undergoing a transformation that threatened to redefine Near Southeast's identity.

Ringed by highways and closed off by a polluted river, Near Southeast embodies the kind of isolated, undesirable land on which urban minority residents were so often crowded in American cities. The neighborhood's historic population of low-income and minority residents were constantly exposed to environmental injustices beginning with

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Williams, "A River Runs Through Us," 427.

waterfront industrialization in the early 1800s that continued through the 1900s. After World War II, the federal and local governments' modernist experimentations with highway construction dramatically increased residents' exposure to toxic emissions from automobiles and trapped residents in an isolated built environment. Threats to environmental justice continue today as the communities in which Near Southeast's residents live, work, and play are threatened by changes in public housing policy and emerging trends of redevelopment targeting higher-income residents. Today, redevelopment is everywhere in Near Southeast, and has had a mixed impact on the neighborhood. As lower income residents, such as those at the Arthur Capper Dwellings, are pushed out of the neighborhood, Near Southeast is being redefined as a hip, waterfront neighborhood. While past municipal attempts at redevelopment merely served to isolate the neighborhood from the rest of the District, it remains to be seen what kind of impact this new era of redevelopment will have on Near Southeast.

CHAPTER FOUR

If You Build It, They Will Come: Redevelopment in Near Southeast

On a sweltering evening in July 2012, the stadium at Nationals Park is filled from the dugouts to the nosebleeds. After eight years, baseball in Washington has finally taken off, and people commute from all over the District and its suburbs to watch Washington's only winning professional sports team play. Fans pack into the ballpark like sardines in a can, cheering for unlucky Teddy in the Presidents' Race during the fourth inning, and eating chilidogs from Ben's Chili Bowl, a local institution with a concessions booth at the stadium. From my view high up in the cheap seats, the whole city unfolds before me. The Capitol building is ablaze as the hazy sunset illuminates it with a pinkish glow, and behind the stadium's scoreboard, construction cranes rest above the open pits being transformed from factories to upscale commercial and real estate venues. A great blue heron flies over the stadium, a reminder of the Anacostia River that's just steps from Nationals Park. The bird's wings shimmer in the stadium lighting as it flies upriver.

Down on the field, the Washington Nationals lead the Philadelphia Phillies. Left fielder Michael Morse hits a grand slam and the Nats score another three runs. The crowd roars and jumps to its feet—strangers and friends hug and high five, and serious fans make marks in their scorecards. An intense energy surges throughout the stadium as spectators from across the city and its suburbs come together in the excitement of an impressive hit, a winning season, and the rebirth of baseball in the nation's capital.

The game ends and the Nats pull through with another victory. Fans funnel quickly out of the stadium, heading below ground to the parking lots and the Navy Yard Metro stop. Some spectators mill about on Half Street, buying discounted t-shirts and

baseball caps from the vendors who hawk unofficial merchandise outside the stadium grounds. Most people, however, are focused on getting home; for the reality is that the majority of the game's spectators don't live in the neighborhood. During home games, Near Southeast swarms with fans making their way to the stadium, but when the ballpark closes, the neighborhood is more or less untraveled by anyone apart from its residents. In 2004, city officials picked the site for Nationals Park as a means to revitalize Near Southeast and reconnect it to the rest of the city. Unlike previous redevelopment attempts, contemporary plans for the neighborhood are marketed for their sustainable design and livability. These recent plans embody the kind of environmental gentrification that Checker studied in Harlem, in which modern narratives of sustainability gloss over redevelopment's realities of displacement and community disruption. Yet while city officials touted the Anacostia waterfront as the District's last frontier and inspired a flurry of redevelopment plans around the stadium, only a handful of those projects have been completed at the time of this writing, and the neighborhood still attracts few visitors outside of baseball season.

Despite the slow start of current redevelopment plans for the Near Southeast waterfront, city officials continue to use the Anacostia River as a selling point to commercial and real estate investors. The District's re-envisioning of the Near Southeast waterfront is best demonstrated through the plans for The Yards development, a public-private partnership to reclaim and redesign forty-two acres of formerly industrial land. Since the Navy Yard closed its plants and other factories withdrew from the waterfront, the neighborhood has limped through several revitalization attempts, some of which were more realistic than others. The following chapter will examine the contemporary period

of redevelopment in Near Southeast, beginning with the siting of Nationals Park in 2004 and continuing ongoing construction in 2013. The redevelopment plans circulating at the time of this writing show an increased interest in environmental sensitivity; however, the plans ultimately threaten the resiliency of Near Southeast, as they envision the presence of a much wealthier community than currently resides there.

Redevelopment is in no way a new phenomenon for this neighborhood, and since the close of World War II, the city has undertaken several efforts to redevelop Near Southeast. During the 1950s, these efforts were focused on highway construction as a development tool that would increase access to the neighborhood by linking it to the suburbs and the rest of the city. However, as Chapter Three discussed, highway construction proved to be an ineffective redevelopment measure, and the highways that cut through minority neighborhoods furthered social and environmental inequalities by restricting neighborhood access and increasing the presence of pollutants in both the air and storm water runoff. The completion of the South Capitol and 11th Street Bridges and the Southeast Freeway's slice through Near Southeast demonstrated that the modern infrastructure, marketed as a connecting tool to the broader city and suburbs, actually did the opposite. Instead it carved up the neighborhood and left it broken and isolated. After the new bridges and highways failed to increase investment in Near Southeast, redevelopers turned their focus to recreation as another revitalization tool.

The National Capitol Planning Commission (NCPC), established in its current capacity by an act of Congress in 1952, was responsible for designing and enacting many of the recreation-based redevelopment plans that followed failed attempts of highway-focused redevelopment. The NCPC was a federal agency with virtually complete control

over the District's planning, so that new plans came out of a federal—not community—vision for the city. Congress didn't grant the District home-rule until 1973, and, until that year, city governance and planning was entirely overseen by federal agencies like the NCPC. Additionally, huge tracts of federal land further complicated city planning in Washington by limiting residential expansion and focusing planning efforts around the city's monuments and tourist attractions. Williams writes, "Washington is somewhat unique in the United States as a place where the state lies massively on the land. Its citizens experience state formation keenly in their everyday lives, their access to natural resources, and their claims to citizenship."²³⁷ For much of the twentieth century, the NCPC, as an arm of the state, sought to shape the way citizens interacted with the Near Southeast waterfront.

The NCPC's first major plan was released in 1961 and, in a shift away from the region's history of industrialization, re-imagined the Southeast waterfront as a recreational space. By that time, the Anacostia's Near Southeast waterfront was a messy tangle of industrial facilities and abandoned factories. Wennersten writes, "Neither the federal government nor the District had ever established zoning controls over the waterfront, which had become a *mélange* of piers, channel markers, semi-discarded industrial sites, and sewage outlets."²³⁸ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s and into the 1990s, the National Capital Planning Commission released a series of unrealized redevelopment plans for the Near Southeast waterfront that centered on the creation of large public parks. In a 1997 report, the NCPC wrote that their new plans for the

²³⁷ Brett Williams, "Gentrifying Water and Selling Jim Crow," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 31 (2002): 95, accessed March 13, 2013, doi:10.2307/40553558.

²³⁸ Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 230.

waterfront sought to “recapture [Pierre L’Enfant’s] earlier vision and...offer Washington residents the same intimate connection to their rivers as Londoners and Parisians enjoy.”²³⁹ However, the Anacostia’s serious pollution, left over from years of unmitigated waterfront industrialization, made the river and its waterfront an extremely unappealing site for recreation. The NCPC was never able to convince developers and the federal government to support its plans to create recreational space along a river the city had left for dead long before the 1960s, and none of these recreation-based redevelopment plans were ever enacted. As scholar Paul L. Knox writes of the NCPC, “[I]t proved extremely insensitive to the needs of the District’s residents and almost totally incapable of any kind of strategic approach to urban development.”²⁴⁰ When the Anacostia’s pollution soured interest in river recreation, city officials finally turned to professional athletic stadiums as the key to the river’s redevelopment.

Baseball Politics in the Nation’s Capital

After decades of neglect, developers and city planners once again turned their attention to the Southeast waterfront’s large tracts of vacant land in the early 2000s. The new plans for Near Southeast centered on the construction of a state-of-the-art baseball stadium for the city’s new team, the Washington Nationals. The District began a bid to

²³⁹ National Capitol Planning Commission, *Extending the Legacy: Planning America’s Capital for the 21st Century*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), 34, accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.ncpc.gov/DocumentDepot/Publications/Legacy/Legacy_Waterfronts_and_Open_Spaces.pdf.

²⁴⁰ Paul L. Knox, “The Washington Metropolitan Area,” *Cities* 4 (1987): 297, accessed May 1, 2013, http://ac.els-cdn.com/0264275187900904/1-s2.0-0264275187900904-main.pdf?_tid=c055ad62-b2e8-11e2-a1d6-00000aab0f6b&acdnat=1367472530_e7daf8ab7058afac3bcec0ca445fd029.

bring Major League Baseball back to Washington in 2004 under Mayor Anthony Williams, and in 2005 the Montreal Expos moved to the District to become the Washington Nationals. From the start, financial consideration drove the decision to bring baseball back to Washington. The stadium construction plans sparked a debate on effective redevelopment when a group of city council members came out against William's vision of Washington baseball. Throughout the debate on city council, environmental concerns about the dangers of building on the Anacostia's ecologically fragile waterfront were markedly absent, and economic worries over the use of public funds consistently trumped environmental issues.

To developers and city officials, the Near Southeast waterfront was an appealing location for a new stadium as the neighborhood's legacy of industrial activity had left unusually large tracts of vacated land that were ripe for redevelopment. Although there was more vacant land along the Southeast waterfront than in other parts of the District, in 2004 Near Southeast also supported a community of minority and low-income residents as well as businesses ranging from industry, art, and entertainment. In 2000, census data reported that residents in Near Southeast were 89% African American and earned a median household income of \$15,071.²⁴¹ Most of these residents lived west of the river, while industry remained congregated along the waterfront. When the city selected Near Southeast as the site for the new baseball stadium in 2004, the waterfront was home to several industrial complexes including an asphalt plant and the Eastern Trans-Waste trash transfer station, as well as a number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer

²⁴¹ Government of the District of Columbia Office of Planning, *District of Columbia Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan: Neighborhood Cluster 27*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2002), 11.

(LGBTQ) bars and nightclubs. For over ten years, LGBTQ nightlife in the District had found a home in this small pocket of waterfront land in a forgotten neighborhood. According to the *Washington City Paper*, drag queen bars like Ziegfeld's and gay strip clubs like Secrets made up "a thriving gay nightlife scene in what was then a distant corner of the city where club owners could do their business blissfully free of the usual quarrels with neighbors who might protest booze and debauchery."²⁴² With land seizures and increased property values, redevelopment of Near Southeast threatened to displace a marginalized and diverse community that had found a home there. City officials sought to redefine Near Southeast's community identity when stadium construction inspired a new neighborhood vision that centered on waterfront access and livability.

Site selection for the stadium, however, was only first step in a long process of neighborhood redevelopment, and progress proceeded haltingly. By far the biggest roadblock in the way of stadium construction was Washington's City Council. Major League Baseball (MLB) would not approve the Montreal Expos' move to the District as the Washington Nationals unless the city could prove that it would provide a stadium for the team. The *Washington Post* reported, "The stadium would be funded through a gross receipts tax on large businesses, a tax on concessions and an annual rent payment by the team."²⁴³ The Williams administration designed the plan for the new stadium so that it would be publicly funded without directly affecting taxpaying citizens, hoping that this

²⁴² Kim Chi Ha, "Is a Gay Strip Club Too Close to Nationals Park for D.C.'s Comfort?" *Washington City Paper*, July 2, 2010, accessed April 16, 2013 <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/39369/is-a-gay-strip-club-too-close-to-nationals-park>.

²⁴³ David Nakamura, "Council Backs Waterfront Stadium," *Washington Post*, December 1, 2004, accessed April 16, 2013 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A21977-2004Nov30.html>.

would smooth its approval process through City Council. Under the Williams plan, private businesses would bear the brunt of the burden to raise funds for the stadium. MLB is traditionally friendlier to publicly funded stadium plans, as their construction tends to be less volatile than privately funded plans that rely heavily on investor commitment and economic stability.²⁴⁴ However, a vocal contingent of council members objected to the idea of spending public funds on a baseball stadium at the expense of social services.

Although the Williams plan called for an increased tax on big business, not citizens, council members such as future mayor Adrian Fenty (Democrat, Ward 4) objected to the use of tax money for a project that he did not see as providing a direct community benefit. Council Chairman Linda Cropp (Democrat, At-large) and David Catania (Independent, At-large) were two of the most active council members to join Fenty in opposition to public funding. Mayor Williams anticipated opposition to a publicly funded stadium, and included efforts to provide economic support for social services in his plan. According to the *Washington Post*, the Mayor's plan "would establish a special district in neighborhoods around the stadium in which taxes from businesses would be designated to pay for bonds that could bring as much as \$450 million for community programs."²⁴⁵ Despite the creation of community investment funds, some council members continued to question the necessity of using tax money for

²⁴⁴ Lori Montgomery and David Nakamura, "Cropp Blocks Council Vote On Stadium: Chairman Says She Has Private Financing Plan," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2004, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A36487-2004Nov9.html>.

²⁴⁵ Nakamura, "Waterfront Stadium."

stadium construction. In an online discussion hosted by the *Washington Post*, Fenty explained the dissenters' position,

The consistency among those who opposed the proposal was that we did not think that the Council should float a \$550 million bond, paid for with increased taxes, to build a stadium which would directly enrich owners of the Montreal Expos (the 29 owners of MLB), who could very clearly afford to pay for this themselves.²⁴⁶

While Mayor Williams argued that the new stadium would provide concrete benefits through job creation and neighborhood revitalization, a vocal contingent on the City Council continued to argue that the stadium's benefits were too indirect to merit the use of public funds. Council Chairman Linda Cropp made the search for private funding a priority, and at one point she delayed a vote so that she could solidify a plan with a private investor that was ultimately unsuccessful.

Throughout the approval process, Fenty consistently expressed his view that the use of public funds for stadium construction set a dangerous precedent in which the city gambled public money on a risky redevelopment project, rather than spending it on concrete social services, such as schools and libraries. As Fenty said in the *Washington Post* online discussion, "[I]n my opinion, new tax dollars should go to higher priorities" than baseball stadiums.²⁴⁷ Throughout the debate, Fenty emphasized the fact that Washington already had a standing stadium for the team to use: the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium (RFK), that was built further upriver along the Anacostia's Southeast waterfront for the Washington Redskins football team and the District's previous baseball team, the Washington Senators, in 1961. Summarizing his position on Washington

²⁴⁶ "Baseball Vote," *Washington Post*, December 22, 2004, accessed April 17, 2013 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17271-2004Dec21.html>.

²⁴⁷ "Baseball Vote."

baseball, Fenty wrote, “I support 1) renovating RFK and having the team play there or 2) a deal similar to the MCI [Center] deal where the owner of the team paid for the stadium and we [the city] paid for the infrastructure around the stadium.”²⁴⁸ The MCI Center (now Verizon Center) in the Penn Quarter neighborhood of Northwest Washington provided an excellent example of a privately funded stadium that set off the significant redevelopment of an urban neighborhood. Fenty was vocal in his support of a private funding plan, like the MCI Center, that would prevent the city from selling bonds and raising taxes to finance a new stadium. If the District raised taxes on large businesses, Fenty believed this money should fund direct community investment projects, not stadium construction.

The debate over stadium funding within City Council set off a contentious, District-wide discussion over stadium construction and redevelopment. *Washington Post* Sports writer Thomas Boswell used his platform as a columnist to advocate for a publicly funded stadium, using language that was echoed by many baseball supporters across the city, including Mayor Williams and City Council member Jack Evans (Democrat, Ward 2). In December 2004, Boswell wrote, “The Council claims to be fighting for the poor of the District when it is far more likely that it is in the process of killing a development deal, with baseball as its centerpiece, that would bring significant benefits, not costs, to those very constituents.”²⁴⁹ Where Fenty saw urban stadium construction as a risky redevelopment tool, Boswell saw it as unfailing. Noting that both Cropp and Fenty were anticipating mayoral campaigns, Boswell interpreted their opposition as nothing more

²⁴⁸ “Baseball Vote.”

²⁴⁹ Thomas Boswell, “Nationals Face an Unhappy Year,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 2004, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3228-2004Dec15.html>.

than political posturing. “They prefer to round up cheap votes for themselves by bashing baseball rather than bringing a team back to Washington, bringing urban development to a blighted area and adding millions of dollars to the city’s tax base,” Boswell wrote.²⁵⁰ A common refrain among baseball supporters was the notion that Nationals fans would travel into the District and spend their money at the stadium and other District businesses, rather than keeping their money in the suburbs.²⁵¹ Boswell argued, “more than 80 percent of Nationals fans, about two million a year, would come from the suburbs and spend tens of millions of discretionary entertainment dollars in the District.”²⁵² For the new stadium’s supporters, this increased visitation by suburbanites represented the most significant economic argument for building a new ballpark in the District, yet this focus had important environmental implications. By grounding redevelopment in a project that explicitly catered to suburban residents, the District not only encouraged increased automobile traffic and a subsequent rise in toxic vehicle emissions, but also constructed more impervious surfaces, such as parking lots, to accommodate suburban consumers.

After months of intense debate, a close seven to six vote in City Council finally approved a revised version of the Mayor’s plan that included compromises that somewhat lessened the amount of public funding needed to build Nationals Park. Cropp, an opponent of Williams’ initial plan, eventually voted to approve public funding after several attempts to redesign the plan and a series of closed-door meetings with the mayor. Fenty and Catania voted in opposition of every version of the public funding plan set before the City Council. According to the *Washington Post*, the revised bill that

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

eventually passed through City Council authorized the use of public funds for stadium construction and included “changes [that] could reduce the District’s potential costs for the stadium by up to \$193.5 million when compared with the deal Williams struck with baseball officials in September [2004].”²⁵³ However, Cropp’s negotiation to reduce stadium costs sacrificed the community investment mechanisms that Williams had included in his initial plan.²⁵⁴ In early December 2004, the *Washington Post* reported that funds for District services, including \$45 million for libraries, \$30 million for community investment projects, and the possibility of \$450 in bonds for “neighborhood needs,” had been taken out of the deal in order to lessen economic pressure on the businesses paying higher gross receipt taxes to finance stadium construction.²⁵⁵ With fewer opportunities for community investment, the new plan was hardly encouraging for opponents like Fenty. Nevertheless, the plan made it through City Council by one vote, and the city faced the second hurdle of clearing the way for stadium construction.



Figure 12: A view of the completed Nationals Park from the Anacostia River, n.d. Source: <http://www.baseballpilgrimages.com/national/anacostiaview.jpg>.

The city used eminent domain laws to consolidate land for the Nationals Park, but it faced considerable opposition from the landowners it tried to buy out. Twenty-three

²⁵³ Thomas Heath and David Nakamura, “Accord Reached On D.C. Stadium: Williams and Cropp Negotiate Financing,” *Washington Post*, December 21, 2004, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A13700-2004Dec20.html>.

²⁵⁴ Nakamura, “Waterfront Stadium.”

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

separate landowners occupied the twenty-one-acre waterfront stadium site between South Capitol Street and First Street. Just as the federal government's expansion of the Navy Yard through eminent domain caused controversy in Near Southeast during the 1940s, the District government's use of eminent domain to build Nationals Park set off a series of lawsuits from neighborhood businesses. Beginning in April 2005, the city used a \$97-million-dollar fund to make offers to the landowners for over twice the land's 2004 tax value.²⁵⁶ ²⁵⁷ While some owners accepted the District's offers, the *Washington Times* reported, "Many property owners on the site said the city's offers are inadequate. Others are suing the city on the grounds that it has no right to use eminent domain to acquire land at the site, despite a Supreme Court ruling affirming the right of municipal governments to take private property for the purpose of economic development."²⁵⁸ The city believed that the stadium would begin a process of redevelopment in the area, and therefore warranted the use of eminent domain laws to seize land for its construction. However, the plaintiffs in these eminent domain cases against the District questioned the legitimacy of stadium building as a redevelopment tool by arguing that a stadium would serve to enrich private owners, not the community.

²⁵⁶ "Landowners Must Yield to Ballpark," *Washington Times*, October 6, 2005, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/oct/6/20051006-120902-5838r/?page=all>.

²⁵⁷ David Nakamura, "D.C. Seizes 16 Owners' Property for Stadium," *Washington Post*, October 26, 2005, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/25/AR2005102501354.html>.

²⁵⁸ "Landowners."



Figure 13: An aerial picture of Nationals Park, with the Anacostia River and South Capitol Street Bridge in the background, 2009. Source: <http://www.mnn.com/money/green-workplace/stories/fields-of-green>.

Particularly affected by the District's use of eminent domain were the many bars, nightclubs, and other businesses oriented towards Washington's LGBTQ community that had established a niche along the Near Southeast waterfront. The *Washington City Paper* wrote that stadium land pushed out many of these establishments, including an arcade and theater, dubbed "The Glory Hole," that had been in the neighborhood since 1980.²⁵⁹ While a few of these nightclubs managed to stay in the area, most were closed and displaced by the stadium's construction. City Council made some effort to help these businesses reopen in a new location, however, most were unable to meet the new standards and regulations included in the legislation, and they remained closed despite the city's help.²⁶⁰

The District also seized industrial facilities to make way for the new stadium. While most of the LGBTQ establishments accepted the city's offers without a fight in court, several of the industries operating on the stadium site chose to sue the District for higher compensation and better relocation assistance. Eastern Trans-Waste was one of the companies that sued the District after it offered \$8.7 million for the land occupied by

²⁵⁹ Ha, "Gay Strip Club."

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the company's trash transfer facility.²⁶¹ The *Washington Post* reported, "Company officials have said in a letter to the District that they expect a sale price of \$14.3 million for the property, plus \$18 million if the firm is forced out of business."²⁶² Southeast Land Development Associates also sued the District for "improperly taking the land" it rented to the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority as a bus parking lot.²⁶³ In their suit, the company argued, "The city 'has failed to determine and pay just compensation for the Property,' and thus has no legal right to take the land under terms of the council's financing legislation."²⁶⁴ Although companies like Eastern Trans-Waste and Southeast Land Development Associates challenged the legality of the District's use of eminent domain, the courts upheld the city's belief that the baseball stadium was a legitimate form of economic development, and the cases were settled by 2009.²⁶⁵

Sport Stadiums and Environmental Justice

In the District, Boswell and Fenty were the archetype of each side of the tired debate over publicly funded stadiums that engulfed cities from Phoenix to Brooklyn as they attempted to revive their downtowns by building professional sporting arenas. The use of stadiums as a redevelopment tool had risen to prominence through the end of the 20th century and by the 1990s scholars were very critical of its effectiveness. Just as

²⁶¹ David Nakamura, "Stadium Property Takeover Delayed," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2005, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/22/AR2005112201892.html>.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Michael Neibauer, "D.C. Economic Development," *Washington Business Journal*, May 23, 2011, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://www.bizjournals.com/washington/blog/2011/05/talking-delays-skyland-no-nats-park.html>.

residents and City Council members debated the siting and funding of Nationals Park in Near Southeast, constituents and local politicians in Brooklyn, New York, participated in a similar debate over the construction of a new stadium for the New Jersey Nets, who moved to Brooklyn to become the Brooklyn Nets in 2012. Like Nationals Park, the Barclays Center, which was completed in 2012, was intended to jumpstart development of commercial and real estate venues in the surrounding areas on Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues. The Barclays Center represents yet another attempt to reclaim industrial space through redevelopment, as it was built overlooking one of Brooklyn's rail yards.

Scholar Julie Sze has exposed environmental justice dimensions of the redevelopment plans that piggybacked off of the Barclays Center's construction. Sze notes that, in Brooklyn, the opportunities for jobs, recreation, and better housing were continually touted as social benefits for stadium-driven redevelopment.²⁶⁶ In cities like Brooklyn or Washington, D.C., local politicians and developers often present stadium construction as a way out from the history of industrialization that resulted in the decline of urban waterfront neighborhoods.²⁶⁷ However, Sze argues that the economic and political role of urban stadiums is actually much more complex. She writes,

in one sense, stadiums, recreational facilities, and open space represent the seeming "reflection" or opposite to the polluting facilities that have been the focus of the vast majority of environmental justice research that addresses harms, specifically racial disparities in exposure to noxious facilities...[T]he development and siting of so-called positive amenities follows a similar cultural and political trajectory as that of noxious facilities.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Julie Sze, "Sports and Environmental Justice: 'Games' of Race, Place, Nostalgia, and Power in Neoliberal New York City," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33 (2009): 113, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://jss.sagepub.com/content/33/2/111.refs.html>.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Today stadiums are sited in the same low-income and minority neighborhoods where factories and industrial facilities historically operated. Stadium siting in downtowns offers as a useful tool for cities hoping to jumpstart the area's redevelopment, however studies like Sze's have shown that stadium construction transforms a neighborhood from a place where people live, work, and play into a tourist destination.

Describing the dependence on stadium construction for redevelopment, scholar Kent A. Robertson applies the notion of a “special activity generator” (SAG) where prospects for economic revitalization are completely dependent on one initial investment.²⁶⁹ In this model, developments such as stadiums or convention centers are expected to “anchor redevelopment within that district by drawing visitors and suburbanites to downtown for events.”²⁷⁰ New, often single-use, facilities attract consumers to formerly isolated regions, bringing new consumer dollars to existing establishments and inspiring the opening of new ones as well.²⁷¹ “In addition,” urban planner Timothy S. Chapin adds, “these projects often galvanize other investments in the district by the public sector, perhaps in the form of new infrastructure or urban design improvements, all of which help to establish and sustain a revitalized district.”²⁷² This last step is the most important part of the SAG model. If the initial investment in a new large facility fails to inspire further investment in the surrounding area, the SAG model will not lead to redevelopment.

²⁶⁹ Timothy S. Chapin, “Sports Facilities as Urban Redevelopment Catalysts: Baltimore’s Camden Yards and Cleveland’s Gateway,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70 (2004): 194, accessed April 17, 2013, [http://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/48fc5ad035ef5f7b882578e7005f7d66/e9e4f2ed094eee898825793600641064/\\$FILE/SportsFacilities1.pdf](http://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/48fc5ad035ef5f7b882578e7005f7d66/e9e4f2ed094eee898825793600641064/$FILE/SportsFacilities1.pdf).

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

As a redevelopment tool, construction of stadiums under the SAG model is not only risky but also problematic in that it recreates neighborhoods as tourist destinations, rather than financially and socially stable communities. Dependent on sports seasons, the popularity of sports teams, and overall consumer choices, sports stadiums hardly provide a stable economic grounding for a community. As scholars Robert F. Baade and Richard F. Dye argue, “Professional sports are just one kind of entertainment activity and as such compete for the local consumer’s scarce disposable income and leisure time.”²⁷³ The sports industry is similar to the tourist industry in that it depends heavily on consumer spending. In regards to sports marketing and development, Sze summarizes, “the politics of development pivot around this question: ‘Is the city a product to be sold on the tour. . . or as a location in which to invest money? Or, is it a community where people—including those without much disposable income—can *live, work, play and belong?*’ [italics added].”²⁷⁴ The definition of the city as a product, rather than an ecological body, results in weak redevelopment that does little to improve community resiliency.

The Camden Yards stadium for MLB baseball’s Baltimore Orioles in downtown Baltimore followed the SAG model and inspired the development of a booming tourist industry in the nearby Inner Harbor. Because of its links to a new tourist industry, Camden Yards has been promoted as the poster child for successful SAG redevelopment. Chapin studies the validity of these claims by using a ““but for”” test in which he examines the dependence of new developments on publicly funded stadium

²⁷³ Robert F. Baade and Richard F. Dye, “The Impact of Stadiums and Professional Sports on Metropolitan Development,” *Journal of Growth and Change* 21 (1990): 6, accessed April 17, 2013, *Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost*.

²⁷⁴ Sze, “Sports and Environmental Justice,” 121.

construction.²⁷⁵ Although Camden Yards has widely been touted as a success, Chapin determined that the redevelopment it inspired is actually quite limited. Downtown Baltimore's western adjacent edge to the stadium has seen little new development since Camden Yards was completed in 1992. What development that has occurred has mostly taken form as additions or renovations to existing complexes, such as the University of Maryland at Baltimore or the Baltimore Convention Center.²⁷⁶ Housing development has been almost nonexistent, and Chapin notes, "the area did not experience an influx of housing in new or renovated spaces in the area, despite the trend towards downtown housing in the United States throughout the 1990s."²⁷⁷ East of the stadium, Baltimore's downtown has seen the construction of new office buildings and a major entertainment development, with some support from public funds.²⁷⁸ However, Chapin writes, "Somewhat perversely, instead of new development being catalyzed in the immediate district, areas surrounding Camden Yards have seen the opposite: clearing of land for surface parking lots."²⁷⁹ The baseball games at Camden Yards certainly succeeded in attracting suburbanites back to downtown Baltimore, however, accommodation for these visitors came at the expense of meaningful redevelopment for urban residents. Moreover, the construction of parking lots and other impervious surfaces exacerbated the environmental problem of storm water runoff into the nearby Inner Harbor. Chapin determined that the overall lack of direct stadium-driven redevelopment around Camden Yards is the result of the conflicting needs of the city and the professional sports teams.

²⁷⁵ Chapin, "Sports Facilities," 195.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

While city planners hope to develop the current parking lots into an entertainment district, the Orioles need the parking lots to accommodate their fan base during home games.²⁸⁰ Because Baltimore's downtown redevelopment hinges on the success of Camden Yards, further redevelopment plans have been sacrificed for the benefit of the stadium and its franchise. Camden Yards exemplifies the inequalities implicit within stadium-driven redevelopment plans, which place community benefits second to commercial success.

Stadiums not only provide unreliable redevelopment plans, but they also are a weak community resource. As they are usually built in low-income communities, stadiums are generally inaccessible to the surrounding community members who lack the disposable income to spend on tickets for games and events. Nevertheless, cities like Baltimore and Brooklyn justified public funding for professional sports arenas the presumed benefits of redevelopment and the temporary and permanent jobs provided by the stadiums' construction and operation.²⁸¹ Besides temporary construction positions, stadiums mostly offer "dead-end" jobs for janitors, parking attendants, and concessions or food service workers.²⁸² These jobs were not much better than those at the industrial plants that formerly occupied Camden Yards and the Navy Yard. With few opportunities for upward mobility, and seasonal bouts of unemployment, stadium jobs provide only a partial respite from economic burdens. Stadium construction in low-income and minority communities often furthers inequalities by catering to suburban economic elites at the expense of economically disadvantaged urban residents.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁸² Wennersten, *Anacostia*, 240.

‘Green’ Redevelopment and Community Resiliency

The District also pursued the ambitious achievement of building the nation’s first LEED certified baseball stadium. The city pursued LEED certification not only to help reframe Washington as a leader of sustainability in the built environment but also to respond to environmental concerns about waterfront development. Throughout the construction process, the District struggled to balance environmental sensitivity with economic feasibility, however the stadium eventually earned a Silver rating. The stadium includes sustainable design features such as a green roof, recycled building materials, storm water filtration systems, and low-use light lighting.^{283 284} While the U.S. Green Building Council awarded the ballpark LEED points for building on a brownfield, the city spent considerably more on environmental remediation than it had anticipated. According to the *Washington Times*, the city paid \$1.012 million for LEED certification alone, and spent much more on expensive brownfield remediation procedures.²⁸⁵ Although the city ended up paying more for land costs and clean up than it expected, its LEED certification gave the stadium significant media attention that applauded the District’s achievement and pressured other cities to follow Washington’s lead in future developments.

²⁸³ U.S. Green Building Council, *Project Profile: Nationals Park, Washington, D.C.*, U.S. Green Building Council, 2, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.usgbc.org/Docs/Archive/General/Docs5108.pdf>.

²⁸⁴ Michael Prage, “Fields of Green.” *E: The Environmental Magazine* 20 (2009): 27, accessed April 16, 2013, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

²⁸⁵ Tim Lemke, “Ballpark’s Final Tag: \$693 Million,” *Washington Times*, January 7, 2009, accessed April 22, 2013 <http://www.washingtontimes.com/weblogs/sportsbiz/2009/Jan/07/ballparks-final-tag-693-million/>.

Nationals Park's achievement of becoming the nation's first LEED certified ballpark also inspired a trend of 'green' redevelopment around the stadium that focused on creating modern urban waterfront communities. Many District government and private companies favor mixed-use complexes to facilitate the creation of livable communities in which residents can walk or take public transportation to access their work as well as recreation, entertainment, and commercial venues. As they did in Nationals Park, developers reclaimed brownfields throughout the neighborhood, building on formerly industrial sites that were reappropriated to make way for waterfront apartments and commercial establishments. The largest of these land parcels is The Yards, a high-end, mixed-use development just one block east of Nationals Park. In total, the development stretches through four city blocks, and occupies forty-two acres of waterfront land that once hosted the Naval Gun Factory and later the GSA's Southeast Federal Center complex. The project represents an ambitious effort at redevelopment, incorporating commercial, real estate, and business ventures to create a new kind of livable and sustainable urban community.



Figure 14: An architect's rendering of the plan for The Yards development, 2013. Source: <http://www.dcyards.com/gallery/photos/>.

At the time of this writing, The Yards is expected to cost \$1.5 billion financed by a public-private partnership between the District Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, the federal government's General Services Administration, and a private real estate firm, Forest City Enterprises.²⁸⁶ Forest City, notably, is the same real estate firm responsible for designing and executing a similar public-private redevelopment project, the Atlantic Yards, adjacent to Brooklyn's new Barclays Center. As was the case in the Atlantic Yards project, the District's partnership with Forest City attempts to merge community and commercial investment. Collaborating with the local and federal government, Forest City Washington has committed to a number of community investment initiatives. First, they have fronted \$1 million for pre-apprenticeship initiatives that would train District residents in construction jobs. (Forest City promised a similar program to Brooklyn residents, however they failed to come through with the initiative and are now being sued by a local non-profit, Brooklyn United for Innovative Local Development.)²⁸⁷ Secondly, although The Yards are aimed at a higher income bracket than that which currently resides in Near Southeast, Forest City has agreed to keep twenty percent of the residential rental units in The Yards development "affordable to families earning up to 50 percent of Area Median Income."²⁸⁸ Lastly, Forest City has made a commitment to integrate public space into the

²⁸⁶ "The Yards," Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://www.dc.gov/DC/DMPED/Projects/Anacostia+Waterfront+Initiative/Anacostia+Waterfront+Neighborhood+Projects/The+Yards>.

²⁸⁷ "Judge Says Lawsuit Filed Over 'Sham' Training Can Proceed, With Key Claims Remaining Against Forest City and BUILD; Other Claims Dismissed," Atlantic Yards Report, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://atlanticyardsreport.blogspot.com/2012/06/judge-says-lawsuit-filed-over-sham.html>.

²⁸⁸ "The Yards."

Yards complex. According to the District's Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, the firm has promised to build the city a 5.5 acre "[w]orld-class" park and marina along the Anacostia waterfront.²⁸⁹ With these investments, the District hopes the Yards will catalyze a major redevelopment trend within the Near Southeast community. Indeed, the city government anticipates that the project will more than pay back its development costs by generating \$1.6 billion of private reinvestment money in Southeast Washington.²⁹⁰

The District touts The Yards development as a kind of model for its new vision of the nation's capital as a leader in urban sustainability. According to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development's webpage, The Yards "is [the] key piece of the city's 30-year effort to reclaim and rebuild the Anacostia Waterfront."²⁹¹ In July 2011, Mayor Vincent C. Grey released his initial *Sustainable DC* plan in which he outlined a list of achievements he plans for the city to accomplish by 2032. Central to these achievements was the restoration of the Anacostia River. By February 2013, the Mayor released a final version of the plan, *Sustainability DC*, that focused on the concrete actions the city would take to "make the District the healthiest, greenest, and most livable city in the nation."²⁹² Mayor Grey's plan is divided into "Challenges" (Jobs and the Economy, Health and Wellness, Equity and Diversity, and Climate and the Environment) and "Solutions" (Built Environment, Energy, Food, Nature, Transportation, Waste, and Water). These chapters put ecological restoration and

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² District of Columbia Office of Planning and the District Department of the Environment, *Sustainability DC*, Washington, D.C., February 2013, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://sustainable.dc.gov/finalplan>, 3.

environmental sensitivity at the forefront of the District's future planning.

Besides the community investment measures incorporated into the development plan, the design of The Yards complex is also significant. The Mayor's *Sustainability DC* plan suggests that the District should "[r]equire new waterfront developments and renovations to incorporate Low Impact Development strategies."²⁹³ These strategies are to be determined through new legislation that would link zoning approvals with the provision of "green infrastructure and stormwater management that protect and enhance river ecosystems by using native plant species to regenerate habitats for local wildlife, fish, and birds."²⁹⁴ Through new legislation, the District hopes to encourage the rise of sustainable waterfront communities that focus on environmental sensitivity in both their construction and operation.

The Yards provide an excellent example of the District's recent approach to sustainable development, as many of its new environmentally sensitive strategies are incorporated into its design. The completed projects in the development have already showcased a commitment to sustainable design, and include features such as bioretention planters inset into the sidewalks that divert runoff into rain gardens, rather than storm drains, as well as native plant landscaping in the Yards Park.²⁹⁵ Additionally, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development states that The Yards "will be built to the highest green design standards," however, neither the District nor Forest City elaborate in their publications on what those standards actually entail.²⁹⁶ The

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁹⁵ "The Yards."

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

projects completed at the time of this writing are residential, commercial, and recreational, and include the Yards Park, Foundry Lofts, the Boilmaker Shop, and the Park Pavilions, and several of these have won awards for their adaptive reuse designs of the Navy Yard's historic buildings, as well as the modern interpretation and incorporation of historical architectural details. However, there is a significant lack of information about the concrete sustainable design features of both the completed and future projects at The Yards. While the District and Forest City have yet to publicize their concrete plans for The Yards' sustainable design, it is nevertheless significant that both entities have made a commitment to creating development as an ecologically sensitive built environment.



Figure 15: The completed Yards Park, 2013. Photo by author.



Figure 16: A bioretention planter and bike racks outside Yards Park on Water Street, SE, 2013. Photo by author.

In The Yards project, the District government, the federal government, and Forest City are concerned with economic profitability, but the District in particular also views the projects as the cornerstone of its contemporary effort to redevelop Near Southeast. The development represents a contemporary rethinking of the waterfront region that links modern living to a historical past. The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development writes, “[T]he Yards will offer Washingtonians an eclectic and authentic urban waterfront neighborhood.”²⁹⁷ However, urban studies scholars have repeatedly questioned this notion of authenticity in publicly funded redevelopment projects. As Hagerman writes of redevelopment in Portland, Oregon, “New visions incorporate particular memories and not others, articulate social exclusions, and recast places within new forms of cultural capital.”²⁹⁸ The federal and local governments’ involvement in selecting certain historical narratives to include in redevelopment

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Hagerman, “Shaping Neighborhoods and Nature,” 286.

projects, such as The Yards, represents a problematic government action through which community narratives are subverted in exchange for state-sponsored memories.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

While the District emphasizes The Yards' commitment to community history, the public and private entities framing Near Southeast's redevelopment have consciously chosen a specific historical moment in the neighborhood's timeline with which to connect its redevelopment. This selective decision has placed certain historical narratives above others, so that The Yards emphasizes the Navy Yard's patriotic production but ignores the social and environmental justice issues of land displacement, poor wage payment, and environmental contamination. As historian Andrew Hurley writes in his discussion of the St. Louis waterfront's redevelopment, "[T]he danger of reducing history to uncritical celebration lurks wherever manufacturing local pride constitutes a project goal."²⁹⁹ Promoting The Yards as the centerpiece of its vision for a new Washington where once derelict waterfronts are redeveloped into livable communities along a restored river, the District government certainly seeks to instill local pride through redevelopment.

However, the history with which The Yards espouses itself is an incredibly thorny period of time when capitalism and military industrialism dominated the waterfront. The project's website features an interactive timeline that promotes future developments while offering "a historical look at how The Yards came to be."³⁰⁰ The timeline references the early commodores at the Navy Yard and its expansion with the annex where The Yards is located today. Connecting the project to the U.S. Navy's heyday as a

²⁹⁹ Andrew Hurley, "Narrating the Urban Waterfront: The Role of Public History in Community Revitalization," *The Public Historian* 28:4 (2006), 20, accessed November 2, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2006.28.4.19>.

³⁰⁰ "History," The Yards, Washington, D.C., accessed April 22, 2013 http://www.dcyards.com/about_the_yards/history.

power “‘Second to None’ in the world,” the developers glorify this period of military industrialism. On the project’s webpage, the developers describe The Yard’s location in Near Southeast as “a place of proud industrial and nautical heritage,” thereby obscuring the negative social and environmental impact that waterfront military and industrial operations had on the neighborhood.³⁰¹ Redesigning “noble industrial building[s]” into high-end residential lofts and machinery shops into trendy restaurants and breweries, the Forest City architects reappropriate this complicated period of history as golden age.³⁰² This project is, in a sense, rewriting history more than it is reclaiming it by telling only one side of the historical narrative.

The Near Southeast waterfront has been continually shaped and reshaped by dominant forces of power such as the U.S. Navy, the federal government, and capitalism. Through The Yards development, the public and private economic interests are working together to once again repurpose the waterfront. Although the developers are in no means incorporating a holistic public history into their redevelopment plan, it is notable that they are incorporating any public history at all. The project’s historical timeline does, for example, make references to Near Southeast’s legacy of diversity as “a neighborhood of hard-working skilled African-American and Eastern European families,” and hints at their complex relationship with local industry by mentioning the Navy Yard’s expansion during the 1940s that seized “some of the homes formerly occupied by Navy Yard laborers.”³⁰³ Though veiled, these references to the

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

neighborhood's historical depth leave some room for a more critical reclamation of history on the part of the developers. As Hurley writes,

Even when executed imperfectly, aligning narratives with the experiences of ordinary urban inhabitants and their specific community agendas holds tremendous promise for...connecting people of diverse backgrounds more firmly to the urban landscape, bringing a greater sense of social unity to a fragmented metropolis, and restoring the vitality of America's metropolitan cores.³⁰⁴

The Yards' incorporation of history into its promotional material and actual design plans represents a small step towards a more just community narrative. The developers, nevertheless, must take a more inclusive approach to the neighborhood's public history if they wish to create a more equitable development. As Hurley writes, "A messier past may turn out to be a more usable one if it provides more residents of the multicultural metropolis with an understanding of how they arrived at their present situation and where they might choose to go in the future."³⁰⁵ In their online description of the project, the developers limit the accessibility of The Yards by grounding their historical frame of reference in a narrow selection of the many social and ecological processes that created Near Southeast.

The Yards' plans only capture a small slice of the neighborhood's long history of industrialization, militarization, social inequality, and ecological destruction. In order to equitably represent the neighborhood's history and future in its re-envisioning of Near Southeast, the District government, the federal government, and Forest City must include a more holistic public narrative that recognizes the military and industry's positive and negative impacts on the neighborhood, as well as the community histories of the Eastern

³⁰⁴ Hurley, "Narrating the Urban Waterfront," 21.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

European and African American populations who have called Near Southeast home. With its recent redevelopment, the neighborhood has the opportunity to be at the forefront of redefining the significance of modern urban waterfronts, however the success of this process depends on the amount of community input. Whereas previous top-down redevelopment plans failed to create equitable communities in Near Southeast, the public and private partnership behind The Yards has the potential to rebuild a marginalized landscape into a model of urban livability as long as it includes a meaningful community discussion of place. Although the developers of The Yards have made efforts to express redevelopment in the language of the neighborhood's past, their selective historical narrative is potentially exclusionary to contemporary residents with little connection to the neighborhood's naval history. The District must be careful to include the pasts and present narratives of both the neighborhood's environment and residents in its redevelopment of Near Southeast.

Continually flowing through Washington's inner city, the Anacostia River offers an entry point into these narratives. On its currents, the river has carried the stories of colonial explorers, tobacco farmers, captains of industry, and military powers. It has also carried the experiences of slaves, immigrants, factory workers, and fishermen. Despite its long history of exploitation and environmental degradation, the Anacostia has persisted as a defining feature of many of the District's waterfront communities. Years of heavy industry and federal water management weakened the river's ecosystem, but recent efforts at environmental remediation have helped it move towards ecological integrity. In the river's ongoing restoration is an example of the resiliency of urban environments. Near Southeast has provided the landscape for social goals such as

military industrialism, postwar modernism, urban renewal, and sustainable redevelopment. The Anacostia has remained a touchstone throughout Near Southeast's changing identities as an urban space. By linking new goals with the historical narratives that flow through the river's waters, contemporary redevelopers can find authenticity in the story of the Anacostia River.

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